

Frieda Braksmajer from Brooklyn, New York. You want to give your address?

2676 East 11th street, 11235.

Fine. OK. And you wanted to talk today about the time right before the war started in the beginning. OK. Go ahead. Where were you at the beginning?

In beginning was in Poland.

I'm sorry, in the beginning you were in Poland.

Poland, the town Rava-Rus'ka. And I was Rava-Rus'ka, [POLISH].

And that was-- did you grow up there? Were you born there?

No, I was born WoÅ,odÅ° by BrzozÅ³w, near BrzozÅ³w.

And what was your name before?

Frieda Sprung. And after this Frieda Braksmajer, finally.

And your mother's maiden name?

Rosa Hammer. And the father, Mayer Chiam Sprung. And we lived near Rava-Rus'ka. After this when the war started, they took us, all the family, in ghetto Rava-Rus'ka.

And after this, we children was eight years in [INAUDIBLE]. After this was very bad. And I went-- I was working by Christians between the time I went to village. And I knew Christian girls. And I made paper as I am also a Christian. So the priest makes me the papers and the burgermeister. And after this, I made different clothes, like the Christians wear in with the hat. They not recognized as a Jew. And I went to Germany, like I went to the Arbeitsamt place.

And they took us with other girls to Germany. In Germany, I come in Metz. After this, [NON-ENGLISH] and in Schuhfabrik. And over there was 30 Christian girls they were working. And again, I was one Jew girl. But nobody knew about this.

And after this, American was bombing very, very bad, like Ludwigshafen, Mannheim, because over there was Fabrik, [NON-ENGLISH] for the war what they needed. They switch the Christian girls in the Fabrik. And I was between.

And they took Germans people to Pirmasens. Pirmasens was a little bit better. They was not bombing because over there it was [NON-ENGLISH] for the war, for the war [NON-ENGLISH], for the war material. And over there, was very, very bad.

In Ludwigshafen, we live in small barracks. And American come and bombed the barracks. And they call everybody from in the girls to go in office and tell what they got in barracks. And so bombed, they needed clothes. I went also.

And the man what he was working in office, he said-- he looking at me. I said what I need, what is bombed, I not have the clothes. And he said, you are a Jewish girl. And I got a Christian friend what she do know about me nothing. But she said, that's my cousin. How you-- that's my cousin. And she was blonde. I was darker hair.

And he stopped talking about me. And she said what she needed, what she lose in barrack. And after this, we went out.

But I was happy. She don't know also if I am a Jew. She don't know. I give nobody my secret.

And after this, we are close, more close friends because we are from the Schuhfabrik 30 girls. And I don't know what happened, the girls. The Germans, they send us [INAUDIBLE] and from the good place, to the Ludwigshafen.

But anyway, after this in Ludwigshafen, the barrack was destroyed. They took us in a school for the people, but they gone there to sleep. Only there was a lot of girls in there.

And the bombs come anyway. And they bombed. It was terrible. In the night, we went to the bunkers. The bunkers was like this.

But then everything is over, after this when the Fabrik was bombed, they give me a place when a man when he got a grant all the thing. And he was from the Americans. They sent us to make the holes to hide the soldiers.

But in this time after this was very bad. They sent us to Heidelberg, all the people, the girls. But this between the girls, I don't know how much was Jewish girls. I don't know. I only know about me.

We come to Heidelberg. And some German woman she said to me she will try to give me some place to work. She was a good German woman. And we sleep her one night. And after she went in the hospital ask if I can. And they said they don't need it.

We went farther. After this, we went day and night with my friends kept together. What she give us, she-- as I am her cousin, she was very close to me. And within a few days, we went to Lohrbach, Mosbach in Germany.

And they give us a smaller room. But we got nothing to eat, not to drink, only to sleep. And one morning, I went out from the room. And the sun is shining. But for us it was very bad because we got nothing to eat.

I was with a girl, she was close to me. She was in the room. And I went out. And I going and looking. And a man come to me over-- a German-- and he asked me about what are you looking. I said we come from this and this place, from Mannheim, Ludwigshafen Mannheim. After this we went to Heidelberg. And we not got place. Nobody took us for work. We went over there.

He said, don't worry, I take you to me. You will work for me. I said, OK. Very nice. Thank you. But I have now a friend what she need also. He said, we will take in. And he took us over to his house. And he gave us breakfast. And he went my friend also to look. He find her. She was working about, how you say, but he got grant--

Apartment.

Apartment. And she was working very hard, my friend. But for me, it was also hard. But I was satisfied. I got a place where to be. Of course, there nothing to eat. And over there, we are a few months.

And after this come the Americans. The Americans bombed. And he took-- and the American took over. And after this they took us from Lohrbach, Mosbach. This is a town. We are in a camp. This was for girls. This was a big a big place.

And we are over there in the place a few months till some-- I got one sister. She was also like me, hiding in other places, with other names. This was everything, it's how.

And after this, she found us. We got some family, cousins, and an aunt and uncle. And they live in Eschwege. And come the cousin to my place. And he took me over to the Eschwege. And over there was a Jewish camp, from all over they come. And this was the story.

But we had a lot of suffering. But I not want about this talk because this is not healthy for me. You know this. If I not talk, I feel better. If I started from beginning what happened and how and my family is for me very hard.

You certainly don't have to talk about anything you don't want to, just what you want people to have on the tape and for the future.

I not want over because this is a very depressing.

What was in Eschwege?

In Eschwege, I find the family Strauss, what they are hiding in a forest. They make a big hole. And over there in the hole was 12 people. And they put in the forest, you know the wood. And they was living there in the forest four years, the parents with the children and all the cousins.

And after this, everything was over, they lost also two sons. One son went looking the place where they live, how is looked and what he can get from the neighbors. And they shot him. And the other went, making a living after the war. And some guards would give him the directions took his life too and took him away the money.

And it was only the uncle with the aunt and two daughters and a son. And after the war too, they lost two sons. And after this, we are in Eschwege. I find a family where they come from Russia. The family are aunt and uncle and other children.

And today is one for the children [NON-ENGLISH] fight. She isn't his son with the daughter. And she's looking for her family more. But still now they not find nobody. And that's the history that was done.

And when did you decide to come to the United States?

I was in Israel.

You went from Eschwege to Israel?

To Israel because--

Let's go back a little bit then and tell me when did you go to Israel? And how did you get--

1948, I went to Israel because my husband got brothers in Israel and sisters. They come to Israel before the war, 1934.

Were you married before the war?

No.

When did you get married?

In the war--

During the war?

After the war.

After the war. In Eschwege?

In Eschwege.

OK.

And I have two children. Yeah, older son and the younger.

Why don't you put their names on the tape.

And they are also married. He got two nice--

Say their names so that you have it for the record.

Amy Shoshana Braksmajer.

[INAUDIBLE]

He is my Michael Braksmajer. And he got two children, a girl, Amy Shoshana Braksmajer, and Schol after my husband, Braksmajer. But he got two names-- Schol and Yosef, after my brother.

And two next--

And the older son, that is Max Braksmajer. And he got two children, Tav Braksmajer, David Tavi Yosef Braksmajer, and Jill Braksmajer. And this is--

Now tell me how you got to Israel.

To Israel, I find my husband in Eschwege. And I married him. And after the war we went to Israel because my husband got two brothers and two sisters from before, 1933, '34, they went to Israel. And we are in Israel 10 years in Israel. 1958, we came to United States.

And what made you decide to do that?

Because I got here one sister. She was also like I have Christian papers. And I got more than one sister. And my husband got also here another brother. And this life in Israel, he started was very, very hard because this a smaller countries. They need money. And they make high tech. And after this we decided to go here.

And we started here also very, very hard, a grocery and delicatessen, and two small children. And money was also very short. But thank God, everything was good. We are happy. The children are grown. My husband was working very hard with me. And we, what we want to do, everything we make. That's the--

Good for you. And your children were born in Israel or here?

Max Braksmajer in Germany, Eschwege, in the camp, in the UNRRA camp. And Michael Braksmajer in Haifa, in Rothschild hospital. In 1958, we come here to this country and till now. And thank God for everything. But I no like to remember all the things that happened.

You can talk more about what's happened now. Do your family live near you now? Do you get to see your grandchildren?

Yes, my son, the younger one lived in the same house where I live. And I see the children every day. That's my pleasure.

And the other son is also not far from me. He lived in Manhattan Beach. That's also not far from us. And we are very close with the children. That's a very important. And this is the situation.

And your friends in New York, are they mostly survivors? Or are they people that you met in the neighborhood or--

Yes, there's a lot of survivors from Auschwitz and other places. But they are not here today. I knew this will be a gathering in our shul in Avenue Jewish Center. They will come all over near this to hear and to do something.

And you feel more comfortable when you live near the survivors or not?

It's a good feeling because if you see each other, you have a good feeling inside us. You know how you say-- as I can know-- because Hitler was so bad, I was only thank to God we can survive. And we put him down. Because we hear in Germany, every day the Russian come from this side. American this side. And he get his point too. And God will take the Russia. You understand Jewish too?

A little bit.

A little bit. OK. OK.

You can say whatever you want.

I know. I know. For me English is a little bit because I know only what I studied with the children. But I no go to school. But what I need, I make it true.

So that you learned English after you came to the United States?

That's right. And here, but not in school, only what I hear from people. And I read books some.

And when you worked, was that hard for you? Or most of the people that came to your store spoke Yiddish?

They spoke Yiddish. They spoke English. They spoke English. Little by little, we kept up not in one day, but it's going.

And your husband, is he still alive? Not alive? You said one of your grandchildren was named after him.

The name, the youngest was 18 months this after my husband. was on the same day happened.

My father died in the same day that my son was born.

And he got the name.

My father saw my son on a Sunday. And he died on a Wednesday. And the bris was the following Saturday.

Just enough time.

Yeah.

But everything was so quick and excited, such a thing.

Can I-- my name is Michael Braksmajer. I'm the son of Schol and Frieda Braksmajer. And I want this tape to be a testimonial so that everyone will always remember what happened during the Second World War.

My father, who I love very much, died last-- well, died in August of 1981. Since he's not here, I'd just like to say a few words about him.

He was born in Sanok, Poland, in 1902. And he and his family moved to Berlin about 1912 or '13. He missed serving in the Austro-Hungarian army by one year. After the war, he was married. And he had a daughter by the name of Hella. Both his wife and his daughter were killed by the Nazis. That was his first wife and his daughter.

He lived in Berlin when Hitler started having the anti-Jewish edicts being promulgated. He ran to Poland. And he left his wife and his daughter behind because he wanted them to take care of whatever business they had there. He never thought that it would ever come to the point that civilized German people would ever kill innocent women and children, or even put them in prison. So he ran to Poland.

Then the Germans attacked Poland. So he was separated from them. And then he finally kept going further east and east.

And the Russians caught him. And they asked him where he was running from, where he came from. He said he came from Berlin and he was Jewish. And they said, well, you must be a German spy because anyone who comes from Berlin has to be a German spy.

And he kept saying, well, I'm Jewish, how can I be a German spy? They told him that he has to sign a confession or he'll get 20 years in Siberia. He refused to sign. So they gave him five years in Siberia for refusing to sign the paper. And he spent a couple of years in Siberia.

And then the Russians lost 20 million men in the Second World War. And they needed volunteers. So they drafted him into the Russian army. And he served in the Russian army. He got wounded in Czechoslovakia. He spent the rest of the war in a hospital in Czechoslovakia.

And after the war, he found his way to Eschwege, which is the displaced persons camp that my mother mentioned. And he married my mother. And he later emigrated to Israel. And besides the high tax, one of the reasons my mother gave me for leaving Israel, the other reason was that in '56, there was a war between the Arabs and the Israelis. And there was a blackout of Haifa. And my mother was terrified of the possibility of what she went through in the Second World War happening again.

And she decided that for that reason and for just the reason that it was very, very hard to make a living, because of the needs of the Israeli economy, that she wanted to go to the United States. And she came to the United States. And I came along with her.

And we're now here at the American Gathering. And I just want this tape to be placed into the museum so that my children and my grandchildren and people 500 years from now will know this really happened. Thank you.

Before the war I got two sisters and one brother. And they are married.

Which one were you?

I'm the fourth.

The fourth.

Fourth one. And the older one was married. And also from each other we don't know nothing because it's very hard. The communication was not so easy. The German was far. After this, the Russian after they break the German, and it was very, very bad. And after this I went away.

But my family they are in ghetto. In ghetto Rava-Rus'ka, my parents, young children. And my sister was married. And she was pregnant. She was also in ghetto Rava-Rus'ka.

And the other one, I don't know exactly. And my brother-- I got one brother. And his wife, the Germans took her away. But near Rava-Rus'ka was concentration place.

Belzec.

Belzec. Belzec. And the people, the Christians had something wrong, they smelled the air and they do with the Jewish people. The hair and everything smelled very bad. And one Ukrainian Christian, he said to me, I hear a lot of girls, they make the papers. They pay money. They go to the [NON-ENGLISH]. And after this, they go away someplace. And he not say where, it's Germans.

And he said, you sisters, you can do the same thing because-- I don't know, we are not the faces like really Jewish. Some Jewish, they got the face and everything. But in us, two only sisters, I and a sister 10 years younger from me, she was doing the same thing, but not together. Because we are afraid.

She went one week before me to Germany of Christian paper. And she was also in a place, in a special Fabrik where they was a lot of girls was Christians. And after this-- and she was a blonde girl, nice, not looking like Jewish. And they started to talk about her as she must be a Jewish girl because she's very smart, as the Germans make her the top between the Christians, like she was in the top in the girls.

After she listened. And she knew they were talking about her. And soon will be very bad. She took her baggage. And she sent to me what of my name, what I am Christian. And . she bought baggage. She went away to-- I forgot the name-- in Germany. And she went away. And the baggage come to me.

And like in Russia, the NKVD, the Germans too come, the police and ask if some people not come here, if some baggage not come here. But I was so cute and quiet, as nobody got at me to say something. And she said from the LagerfÄ¼hrer, the woman from the kitchen, said, no, here come nothing like this.

But I listen. I hear. But I don't know-- I not spoke not German. I just try-- only I understand what they want my work. But I cannot spoke. Jewish and German is similarly. But I not give orders I understand something. I hear, but I was quiet.

And after this I was afraid because I knew what is happening. She sent to me her baggage. And she went very far away. And she was working also on a farmer, very hard. The cows she must-- and the milk taken in the small town to sell. It was very hard picture. But she saved her anyway this life.

She went away from the Fabrik. Kaiserslautern was the Fabrik she was before with the girls. And after this, she found out on this same place was two other girls, two sisters, two sisters Jewish. But after the war, they started to talk to each other. Now, they live in Canada they two sisters. And they are very close to her.

And your sister lives in Canada?

No, she lives in Kings Island, Brooklyn.

This near--

Yeah. She's working. But she not the same because she got so hard and so many things over. She was sick after this.

And her name?

And his name is Blanche, Blanche Sprung. And she was married Frumak. And she's still working. She's not young. But thank God for this. This is within ours was eight girls and one brother with the parents.

The parents, and what kind of work did your parents do?

They got a farm. And they got like a grocery, grocery delicatessen, and also in where they live.

And you worked with them on the farm and in the store or not?

I was in the store mostly. And the farm we got people. They are working Christian people. We paid a lot of money. But I was only looking how they work and give advice. This was very hard. And this is now what the Russian people, you know, they have nothing in the farm and other things. Everything was over.

You didn't try to go back there after the war?

No. I'm not interested. And I know it's dangerous. Because over there is Ukrainian and Russian. Russian take over the whole thing. You got family, my first cousin, they got big, how you say, factories in RzeszÅ³w.

[AUDIO OUT]

The got in Rzeszów big factory. And they got people what they work for these people. And these people in the war, the cousin didn't-- after this, we got a farmer, from village. They come to us only, the husband and the son, and in the wife with the two girls, the oldest are in Rzeszów in town. And they are for us, the cousin and the son.

And after this when the war started, Russian and German, he get a bullet. And he passed away. And the son went back to Rzeszów. But in Rzeszów was the German. It was very bad. We not hear nothing from this cousin.

And Plaszców we got also a cousin. Is only one son with the Jugend Aliyah. They come to America, very young. And from all the families from which are he is here in America. He married. He is very, very good. His name is Atlas, Yosef Atlas. And he is very good, often happy. But this is the story for this family.

A lot of family with [INAUDIBLE] like in Sadowa Wisznia, Bernard Martov, and Pepe Martov. I no hear nothing. I do not if somebody safe. Somebody told me the son was in Russia. And he is one time with one cousin from Wertheim in kibbutz in Israel. They are communicate. And after this is not more because he is afraid as the Russian-- as he got somebody here, the Russians can do something for him bad. Probably he must be married over there. This is the thing.

Do you remember your grandparents?

Yes. They live near Dynów. And the grandfather was Mendel Hammer. And the grandma was Chaya, Chaya Hamer.

These were your mother's parents?

Those were my mother's, yes. They are wealthy and good. And they help a lot of people other what they can do. And the children, they are very good, married. But from this children is only one. He got one son, my grandpa, in Argentina. But he the uncle. He passed away.

And he left two daughters. They are married. And they got grandchildren, two and two. They got children. My son, he make some communication with these people. He find out. And I'm very happy as he find out about this.

I was hoping that there would be-- I was hoping there would be a picture of my mother's mother and father in Argentina because all the pictures were destroyed in the war. And since they went to Argentina before, in the 1920s, that maybe they took a picture of my grandmother. They haven't answered that specific letter yet. I hope the answer--

That would be nice for you.

Yeah. Because in my family I never get pictures, not from my parents. And from the sisters and brother, some I find a little bit.

OK. And did you go often to visit your grandparents? Or--

My grandparents?

Yeah. Did you see them very often, the way you see your grandchildren? Or before--

No. No. One time my aunt from [NON-ENGLISH], Pepe Martov, she said, by us was lot of girls. And they got people what they working, but like a woman in house and outside on the ground but to watch. And they got business too, like groceries and other things. And how you say, schnapps, they got.

And she called me-- she write me I supposed to go to their grandparents and watching the whole thing because the grandma was very sick one time. I was over there over a year. And the grandma passed away. And after this the uncle married. He was a young man. I went home. And this is the thing.

But the grandpa, I lost him in the war, because I hear from other people. And the uncles and the aunts all the same thing.



I hear not nothing of this.

And your father's parents, did you know him too?

Sure. Father's family, they live in Lezajsk. And she, the grandma, was very good nature and very educated, as the people love her from the whole town. If they need something, advice, somebody got something to marry a son or daughter, they come to her every time for advice. She was so good and so nice to the people.

So you saw them more often than your other grandparents?

Not so often, but from time to time. And that's--

Mostly your family life was your parents and your sisters and brother?

Mm, hmm.

Do you want to talk a little bit about your daily life then what you sort of did as a child? Did you go to school ever?

Yeah. I went. I got five years school.

And you went to school right in the town that you were living?

Yeah.

How did you get-- you walked to school?

Sure.

And how long was the school day?

A few hours.

Just a few--

Not as long as children go now?

No.

And then, you came home and worked with your parents?

Sure.

Yeah.

So smaller children, you're supposed to help out. like in Europe, they got a lot of children. And each other was taken care because the mother, she not kid. She was also very, very delicate. And the father was every time in business. He no got time to see how-- Europe was different like here.

And when it came to holidays, then what happened?

Hmm?

When it came to holidays, did you celebrate with other parts of your family?

Yes. They come to each other, the parents and the children. They come to the synagogue. My father was like a cantor. He was very educated.

And my mother till 17 years, till she married, she went to school, education, Yiddish and all kinds things. She was very educated. My grandpa, he was very wealthy man. He liked all his children was educated.

And this was important to you as well then?

Sure. After this, we got the children. They went to college. They went to the yeshivas. And that cost a lot of money. But I was happy and satisfied as we can do this for children. Now is very important they educated. They knew what to do.

Education and learning is very, very important I'm teaching my daughter Amy. She's now four years old. And she's known how to read since she was three. She can read books that-- it amazes me myself that I think it's second and third grade books. And she's able to read it. And she's learning Hebrew and Yiddish and English and--

Arabic.

Arabic. Arabic. Well, Arabic too because my wife my wife is Sephardic. Her parents come from Syria. So I have this whole history from Europe and Poland and Russia. And then there's a whole different culture that I'm learning from my wife because her parents are from Syria. And it's quite interesting to exchange histories and cultures. And it's very good for my daughter and my son to know both parts of the Jewish experience, the Sephardic and the Ashkenazi.

How many languages do you speak?

Hmm?

How many languages do you speak?

German, Poland, a little bit Russian, Ukrainian. But I a long time I not-- and Hebrew I understand.

And English.

And English, a broken English.

It's not broken. It does very well. OK. Do you want to talk a little bit yourself about being the child of a survivor and what this has meant for you and how it has set you apart from anybody else?

Well, I think it has set me apart and concerns all the children of survivors to a certain extent. Ever since I was very small, my parents told me the stories. And every time, they told it to me it would be a little bit different. It would be-- I would learn a little bit more. I would forget a little bit that I've learned before. But it's very important.

I have a question in my own mind of-- not if, because I will do it, but when I should start telling any of these stories to my own children because I don't want to do anything which could hurt them. But I still want them to know about what happened in the war.

How old were you when you were first learning? Did you always tell your children or--

Not when little.

My mother and my father were quite different in what they told. My mother was always very holding back and not wanting to tell too much because it was very painful for her. I think in the last couple of years she's told more than she's ever told in her whole life. And she keeps telling me new things every day, which I've always-- I've asked, you know, why didn't you ever say that before? And she insists that she had.

And she shows me pictures that I kept looking for. And I said, how come you didn't show me that? And she said, well, I thought you knew about this already.

My father was always more eager to talk about his experiences, felt more at ease, I think, about his experiences. He felt that it was very painful, but still something that he survived and that he was able to overcome. It must have been very difficult to leave a whole family behind in Europe, you know, being killed by the Nazis, and starting a whole new family, which I understand a lot of survivors had done. But still it was very, very difficult.

So I just-- as I've said before, I want my children to know. I know there's a second generation group in New York. I've attended some of the meetings. I think that more important than us knowing, because we have always heard these stories and we always we knew about them, there's people in the United States who say that the Holocaust never happened. And there are people who may say that it happened, but it wasn't quite as bad as they say. It's exaggeration.

It's important to know that it's not exaggeration, that it really happened. And it's important for the people who are Jewish, who were perhaps born in America, and even people who are not Jewish, to realize that this kind of thing can happen very easily. It can happen all over the world and has happened and is still happening. And unless Jews remind the rest of the world about it again and again and again, there's a danger that it can continue.

Thank you.

She was to me so close. She said, where I will go, she is going too. And she said, I am half Jewish. But I not believe. But she was very-- to me, she was so close, like her mother. She was much younger than me. But she loved me so much.

I was doing something, and I protect her. And she loved me very, very much. And she went to Israel, to Haganah, to fight with Arabs. And she find this young man. And he was in love with her. And he married him. And after that, she got two children. That's one and her younger one. And she lived in Holon, in Israel. And she is very, very happy.

And her name is Lucia?

Lucia Siegelman.

And you say she became Jewish after the war.

Jewish, yes.

And when did you first tell her that you were Jewish?

The first time, this was 1945. The Christian girls go in May praying to Jesus outside singing. And she said, Toni, come with me. The only girls going singing. And I was not afraid because, it's not more-- was after the war.

I said, you know, Lucia, first, I will tell you, I am Jewish. I am not interested to go singing. She started to cry, and she kissed me. I told her before. If I tell her before, she will take me in the hand up.

But in a social situation, I can trust nobody. I don't know what she is. Today, she told me fine. Tomorrow is bad. Who knows?

And after this, I told her. And she said-- this was in Germany after the war. Where are you going, I'm going to. We decide to go to America inside to Israel where the paper will be before we go. And after this, and she are not-- she not was my daughter. She not going with us together.

And after this, they call out us. They need help to go to fight the Arabs. The Haganah need people. And she was young. She said, if you want to go with us, go before.

She went six months, eight months before us. And she went fight. And she find a gentleman. And she married him. And

he is such a nice good man.

And they're still in Israel?

In Holon, in Israel. Sure. [CROSS TALK].

Does he know if she is Jewish? If she was a Christian and converted to Judaism?

He don't know.

She never told him?

No. And she something's inside, she so afraid. But nobody knows. And we are the same as we knew the girl. And when she come in the Jewish place in Germany, as we knew her, and we find--

That she is Jewish.

That she--

Is Jewish.

Yes. The war come everything through what we can do. And this time the war was-- everything was alive.