

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

William Helmreich Oral History Collection

Interview with Leah Henson

March 23, 1989

RG-50.165*0045

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Leah Henson, conducted by William Helmreich on March 23, 1989 as research for his book *Against all odds: Holocaust survivors and the successful lives they made in America*. The interview was given to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on Oct. 30, 1992 and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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LEAH HENSON
March 23, 1989

WH: Tell me a little about your parents.

LH: They were religious people.

WH: Hassidim?

LH: Well, I wouldn't call them Hassidic because my mother didn't wear a sheitel and my father had a beard but it was trimmed...(about like David's wearing now)...

WH: But he went to shul on Shabbas and wore a yarmulke all the time?

LH: Oh, yeh! Oh, Yeh! He got up at 6 o'clock in the morning and said tefilim for two hours before he could daven to eat breakfast,

WH: Pretty frum.

LH: But, I mean, not fanatically frum...in Poland you would call him a modern Jew.

WH: And what did he do? What kind of work did he do?

LH: We had a small shoe factory...(Rachmiel told me he also worked in the shoe business)...

WH: You were born in 1918. Were you able to go to school?

LH: Oh, I finished school. I finished- in Poland you finished school when you were 14. Then you through with public school. That's all the public education you get. And if you can afford to, you go to gymnasium.

WH: You went to gymnasium?

LH: Nope. Couldn't afford to go. I went to evening courses. (She gives the name of the school in Polish) You would call it finishing school. I went to school from 7-9. I worked all day...for a couple of years. This was my education.

WH: Where were you during the war? Were you in a concentration camp?

LH: Oh, yeh! Oh, yeh.

WH: Where?

LH: I was in two or three in Poland, and I was in Auschwitz. Then I was in Ravensbrueck. Then I was in Maystock Glavy. This is about 90 kilometers from Berlin. That's where I got released.

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WH: But you started off, you were in the Ghetto?

LH: Oh, I started out...in (Beingkasheria??) that since closed up, by Kumalofsky(?). And that's a place where we made saddles for the horses.

WH: What year was that?

LH: 41.

WH: You were in the camps for four years.

LH: Oh, I was in the camps off and on from the very beginning...in 1939...young people had to go to work as soon as the Germans came in.

WH: Were you a good student in school?

LH: Yes.

WH: You did well?

LH: Yes, I did very well. As a matter of fact, I went to a Polish school, there were very few Jewish people in that school. And I had to prove myself more than anybody. And I had an "A" from language, Polish...

WH: Did you also go to Hebrew school?

LH: We had a rabbi come to the house.

WH: He taught you?

LH: Yes.

WH: Was your family involved in communal life?

LH: Oh, yes, very much so. B'nai Brith, Chevra Kadisha, and you know, in just- Zion organization.

WH: You too, today, you do the same? Are you involved?

LH: As much as I can. Not as much as I would like to. I have been sick quite a bit.

WH: You were involved?

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LH: Ya! Ya!.

WH: If you could, you would be involved?

LH: Yes. I'm off and on, I'm constantly involved. Even now. As much as I can, and whenever they have, like they have a festival or a sale. I'm a lifetime member from the Hadassah. And, I would say that the times when we were very comfortable, we make very nice donations (inaudible) matter of fact we had plaque in the hospital...in Israel...(parts inaudible)...

WH: When you were released, when did you come to America?

LH: Oh, we came in '49.

WH: Were you in the D.P. camps between '45 and '49?

LH: Yes. I was in Stupptgart.

WH: Did you at all consider going to Israel after the war?

LH: Yes, we did. As a matter of fact we were enrolled to go. But my first husband, bless his memory, they wouldn't accept him because he was too sick. He got out of the camp sick.

WH: Did he have T.B.?

LH: No, he didn't have T.B. but had what you call in Polish, and in Yiddish, 'eesiashe'? in his back. He got beaten so badly. When he came back I didn't know whether to cry or laugh. I hugged and kissed the hand and cried. Because I did not recognize the man I married...

WH: You were separated during the whole war?

LH: Oh, yeh. He was in different camps from 1941...

WH: You weren't able to go to Israel, so then you got an affidavit. To come-.

LH: So, we waited in Stuttgart until some offer will come to take us some place because I had a baby already. You see, my daughter was born in 1946. One year after I was released. That was the first menstruation that that I (voice drops to a whisper and then trails inaudibly, followed by a very heavy sigh)...

WH: So then you came to America, did you leave from Bremerhaven?

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LH: Yes, yes we did.

WH: ...are you the only one who made it through the war?

LH: From my family, everybody killed. Everybody. The only survivor I have, is a cousin, a first cousin, one first cousin who lives in Canada...this is the only- and my grandmother had 63 children and grandchildren. This is the- midt son-in-laws and brother-in-laws.

WH: What was the name of the boat you came on?

LH: It was a French boat, Merci.

WH: I wasn't an American boat?

LH: No. No.

WH: And it left from Bremerhaven?

LH: Uh- uh (yes).

WH: Was it sponsored by HIAS- did they pay for the trip?

LH: The HIAS. Yeh. Yeh. They gave me ten dollars when I came here.

WH: What was it like on the boat? I want you to think back.

LH: Oh, honey, I can't tell you, I was so sick, I was so badly sick. Oye, I was so sick I don't want- I haven't been on a ship, since! For fear that I'll get sick again- oh I was so sick. And my baby, she was three years old. I was sick and she was sick laying on top of me. The only (inaudible) who was brave is my sick husband (laughs)!

WH: Why?

LH: Didn't affect him.

WH: Did you sleep in the same place? Did you have a room with your husband- ?.

LH: Well there were several people in that room. I don't know- this was- would you believe this, I can't remember?.. I don't know if men were separated from women- I think there must have been because there were a bunch of women in the room I was.

WH: Were all the people Jewish on the boat?

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LH: Ya. Most of. Ya. As far as I knew, yes...

WH: When you came to America, you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

LH: Yes. Yes.

WH: When you landed in New York, what do you remember about- .

LH: Ya. Never got out of the train station. Waited there until I got a train to come to Oklahoma.

WH: When you first came in, by boat, when you first saw the Statue of Liberty- .

LH: Ya. We CRIED and SCREAMED! And CRIED and SCREAMED! You know How-(panicked?).

WH: Why?

LH: Well we were so happy. An, an a lot of people, when they happy, they cry. So we cried and screamed and laughed and we didn't know what we act like a bunch of nuts! If you look back on it now.

WH: You had been told about this, right?

LH: Oh, ya, we'd been told, we read a little about it, and we saw pictures and all that. But, still, nothing is like seeing the real thing.

WH: Then, when you got off the boat, you went through customs, right, didn't take long, right?

LH: Ummm, well, we had a little belongings accumulated so they had to go through all that and see what we have-.

WH: Were they nice to you?

LH: Very nice. Very nice.

WH: Was HIAS there to greet you?

LH: Yes. There was some women-.

WH: Did they take you by the arm and show you?

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LH: Somebody took us by the arm and told us where to sit down and wait for our train.

WH: To get to the train, the train left from Grand Central, right?

LH: The train left from Grand Central to come to Oklahoma.

WH: So how did you get to Grand Central- they walk you there?

LH: I can't remember where it was, but somebody was with us, and they took us to the train. (heavy sigh) And they stayed with us until we got on the train to go to Oklahoma,

WH: What was the ride like to Oklahoma?

LH: I can't remember.

WH: Why did you come to Oklahoma?

LH: Because every city in the United States sponsored- a community, a Jewish community-sponsored a certain amount of refugees. It so happened that my name was given from Oklahoma.

WH: At that time your name was Kurlander. Who sponsored you?

LH: The Jewish community. We had a Jewish community council here in the city.

WH: When you went there, were you going by yourself, or were there other people who were also going to Oklahoma from your boat?

LH: From our boat, I was by myself.

WH: You mean by yourself, with your husband and your baby?

LH: Yes.

WH: You weren't able to sleep on the train, right?

LH: Well how much can you sleep on a train sitting down.

WH: And you probably were very excited, too.

LH: Well we didn't know where we going. It's a whole new li-ah, world! You know this...

WH: What was your impression of America?

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LH: When I came to Oklahoma City and they put us up in a hotel downtown.

WH: What kind of a hotel was it?

LH: Don't ask! Terrible. A dump (inaudible) like you never see in the world. Gestined. Terrible. Stinked. But looking back on it now. The window from the hotel looked out the, over the roof. And all I could see is little white houses. Not those big buildings like we saw in Poland and in Germany. But little shacks.

WH: One story houses?

LH: Ya!

WH: And this was downtown?

LH: Close to downtown.

WH: And what were those shacks?

LH: Homes!

WH: You weren't impressed?

LH: No! No! (short laugh) Not at that neighborhood where we stayed. Where the hotel was so it must have been a very poor part of town.

WH: How long were you in the hotel?

LH: Three days. Then they, you see, they had rent an apartment for us but it was not available yet. We had to stay, we came the 24th- must have stayed longer than that, must have stayed about 5 days because the apartment got available by the end of the month so we moved into that apartment, in we was really lucky about that because, uhm, this was an apartment belong to a retired school teacher. When we came,- I have some pictures from that apartment where we first came...I have even a picture in the paper...this was in the paper when we first came here.

WH: An article?

LH: Yes.

WH: Will you please send it to me?

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- LH: Yes...I won't forget...there's a beautiful little girl in that picture! (her daughter).
- WH: So, when you came there, you stayed in this hotel for 2-3 days, and then they found you an apartment.
- LH: The apartment was already rented.
- WH: And it was a nice apartment?
- LH: Yes. A nice apartment and they paid the first month's rent.
- WH: Which was?
- LH: \$45.00. I remember to this day. Very clearly.
- WH: Were you waiting all those four years for a visa?
- LH: Uh-uh (yes).
- WH: You mean, if you could have gotten a visa in '46 or '47 you would have come here?
- LH: Oh, sure! We were ready to come.
- WH: You were on a waiting list.
- LH: Uh-uh (yes). For three years.
- WH: During that time you were in D.P. camps?
- LH: Yes, in Stuppgart.
- WH: Did you go to classes there? Did you work?
- LH: Well we worked. He worked. I had a baby.
- WH: Were you able to save any money?
- LH: A little bit.
- WH: Not much. So, when you came here, first of all, you were trying to get here, what happened when the news came in Europe that you were going to Oklahoma City?-

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LH: We were frustrated- Where is Oklahoma City? And we tried to find some literature. And all we could find is Cowboys and Indians, in the sticks some place. And, we- oh, the nice big community, and the nice town and we wondered where are we gonna land up and what's gonna happen to us!...and when we came here, we sure-!

WH: You found out.

LH: Ohhh. We suffered so much when we first came here.

WH: Tell me a little about that.

LH: Well, my husband was a sick man, and he got a job in a factory, in a steel factory where you make those shopping carts when you go to the grocery...that what he worked. And, being an intelligent person they taught him how to weld. You know, steel together. And he learned that. And he start making a nice living. But you see, I was a tailor from home. I had a profession. The first week I start working at home doing some alteration for women from the city, from the Jewish community. I start doing that alteration and somebody had an old sewing machine and gave it to me. A petal machine. This was just like something fall down from heaven for me because I could already make a nice living with that sewing machine.

WH: And what did you do- you advertised?

LH: I did alterations- No, I didn't have to advertise. From word of mouth. From one mouth to the other. People told each other. This I did that job, and I did a good job, and I didn't charge much. You know how that goes. And that spread up, and I had all the work I can do- pretty quick. And he worked at the steel factory and I worked at home because I had a little girl three years old.

WH: What was it like at the steel factory?

LH: Bad. He came home, he was not used to that kind of work. He was always working with his head, you know.

WH: So how long did he do that?

LH: Oh, he did that until the day he died because he couldn't hold a job. He was sick. He was sick off and on. Off and on. So this was all he did.

WH: So what about Wasserman. Wasserman hired people to work in his belt factory.

LH: Well the belt factory then wasn't so well established- now Wasserman, come in, in the picture in '54. When Mandel had that one brother, Rachmiel, he lived in Paris with his

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family. But he got Wasserman.. Was it she, I did sewing for Mrs. Wasserman and I kept complaining that he has the only brother survived and we would like for him to come to the United States but we cannot bring him here because we didn't have enough finances to show this we can support him. We had to be a sponsor.

WH: To be a sponsor-.

LH: You have a certain amount of wealth.

WH: But you didn't have to be a citizen.

LH: Not so much a citizen.

WH: Just have money...and at that time you didn't have any money.

LH: No. Not. I accumulated a little.

WH: ...and I was told this morning that Wasserman employed some people who were refugees.

LH: That's right. No- not all refugees...they knew me and when found out that they can depend on my word, what I say, this I'll good for it, and I convinced her, that he will not fall on their shoulders, this (inaudible) will take care of them, they agreed to sign for me. The store will be responsible for that.

WH: So Wasserman signed it.

LH: So they signed it for me because she (Mrs. Wasserman) knew that I would not-.

WH: You wouldn't do it otherwise.

LH: No. If he wouldn't be convinced, and he was (inaudible) but she (Mrs. Wasserman) knew me by then, very well. And she convinced him to sign it. And they signed for him, and we brought them to the States, to Oklahoma City, and they stayed with us for a month. They had a little money saved up...and then they bought a home...and Wasserman gave (the wife) a job...

WH: What were the people like to you, the American Jews. Did they look upon you as, like, 'greener'?

LH: Like we would have horns coming out of our head.

WH: Like what happened. Do you remember what was some of your experience?

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LH: Yes, I do remember. They used to come into the apartment. They always says, 'Oh, how nice and clean, and oye, it smells so good!' I was cooking something. They thought, I can't cook, I can't do nothing. Who am I, a 'greener!' And when they admired from my (inaudible), when I start speaking English, which I did not too long after because the lady upstairs helped me a lot. And I was speaking to people who came for the alteration, and so, I learned.

WH: You didn't go to night school?

LH: Nothing. Didn't have the time.

WH: Didn't have it (night school)?

LH: Oh yeh, there was a night school. I could have gone. But I didn't have the time. You see, I worked during the day. And then I had to cook supper and then I had to wash and clean and do all the other things. And so, when-

WH: What happened, they came in, they said the apartment is so nice?

LH: Is so clean! Is so nice! And small so good! I cook something.

WH: They said you spoke English?

LH: Well, very little at that time. It was in 1950, '51.

WH: What did they think of the refugees?

LH: Well their opinion was, that we don't know much. A bunch of dummies, I guess. But they learn soon enough to know this was not a bunch- we just people, we don't know English, but we know to get along in life. Matter of fact, in later years, there were a lot of people with a lot of admiration for us.

WH: In what way did they show it?

LH: Well we was invited just any place. Where there were any activities. We used to go and we used to pay our dues, and we was members of the synagogue from the very beginning. And of the Hadassah, and of the Sisterhood and all that. I belonged to all those organizations. And he did too.

WH: When you said before that 'we suffered a lot,' what was some of the problems that you had?

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LH: Well the biggest when we first came here, we suffered an awful lot because he couldn't do that kind of work that was given to him. But he was very determined, and very stubborn, and he was not going to give it up. When he came home from work, he barely walked in that door. Dirty. Smelly. The first thing he could do is just crawl into the bathroom. Before he said 'hello' just falling into the bath tub. He soaked, and cleaned and scrubbed. He was a very clean person. He was, bless his memory, very clean. And good looking. Abby's good looking, (her second husband) but he was a pretty –I have pictures. Good looking man...(her voice drops).

WH: So you're saying the biggest suffering was the work.

LH: His work. He couldn't take it. He was very dirty and it was really degrading to him. Let's put it this way

WH: And hard work.

LH: Very hard work. He got used to it later and it didn't come so hard to him, cause you know you get used to tzores. And he got used to it eventually. But he was not well.

WH: Did the Jewish Community Agency here help you at all?

LH: No. I told you they gave me ten dollars.

WH: But HIAS gave you one month's rent and then-.

LH: That was it! And I didn't need any more because you see he went to work.

WH: Sometimes they had psychological services, counseling, and-.

LH: No. That was, no such animal in Oklahoma.

WH: Helping like that.

LH: No. No. No. Oklahoma didn't have it.

WH: Were you sorry you came here at any point? Did you wish you had stayed in New York?

LH: Well, (sighs) I don't- I couldn't, they wouldn't let us at that time.

WH: But it's a free country.

LH: Yeh, but you see-No, not at that time. I didn't know if there's a free country or not a free country when I first came here. What did I know. What DID I know.

WH: This is true. A lot of people said that when they came to Pennsylvania, they thought you needed a visa to go to New York.

LH: We didn't know anything! We came, they send us to Oklahoma. We stayed in Oklahoma, and we got there an apartment and he start working. The first six months wh- the first thing is we came in June. The hottest month of the year. No air- conditioning. Hot as hell...and he's not used to the hard work. And, so, when the summer months went by, in the meantime he got a little bit adjusted to the situation, I start making some money and he learned that welding business, and he got a promotion, so he was making pretty good already, so when it came to the holiday season, the first season we didn't pay a due. The next year we paid our dues at the synagogue. And from then on.

WH: About how many of the survivors came here?

LH: To Oklahoma? I think about twenty or twenty something.

WH: What happened to all of them?

LH: Left.

WH: Left right away?

LH: Some right away, some a year later. Some a year and a half later. But eventually, they all left.

WH: Where did they go?

LH: Different cities. I don't even know now any-.

WH: Was Oklahoma disappointed, the Jews here that they left?

LH: Yes. Yes. Yes.

WH: Did they say anything?

LH: Well yes they did.

WH: They criticized you.

LH: Yes. It wasn't worth spending money on them.

WH: And why do you think you stayed and they left?

LH: Because he was sick. And I didn't want to shlep. I just was glad to be a situated.

WH: But if he was healthy, you might have gone?

LH: Oh, probably. Probably. Yeh. But you see, under those conditions, once we got here, and he got a job, and I start working, we made a living, we made a good living. We saved a little.

WH: And you feel grateful to the people here that they sponsored you?

LH: Yes. Yes. In a way, yes. Because we stayed here, and we made some money, and we kept saving, and we bought a home, and I did sewing. I took in a boarder and she paid me forty dollars a week. That was good money. For a woman board in nursing. You see, I worked in the hospital during the war. In a hospital in Poland. So I- I'm not a nurse, and I'm not anything close, but I had a little idea of how to take care of an older person. So, I took care of her and walked with her a little bit. She was sort of crippled. And he worked, and I did that, and in the meantime, when she went to bed, I did some sewing too. So I made some money. We saved up some and bought a duplex. So we sold the home, we moved into the duplex and then we bought four apartments. And that we accumulated down payment. You know, once you make a down payment, that will pay itself. And that's how we accumulated some apartments.

WH: So you wound up owning some apartments?

LH: Wound up owning apartments. Yeh. Quite a few.

WH: How were you able to own (inaudible)-.

LH: Well I own sixty units in one project we bought. We bought 36 and we built 24, so we'll end up with 60 units.

WH: Was there a reason why you went to put the money there, into the real estate? Did you have a feeling that-?

LH: Well, it was the easiest way for me. I didn't know anything else. And my English wasn't still good. Well, we start off having a little grocery...and he was still working. He was working.

WH: Who ran the grocery then?

LH: Me!

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WH: You were doing tailoring, alterations?

LH: In the evening, you know, in the grocery. In the grocery, behind the door. I did a little of everything.

WH: Work hard.

LH: I worked as much as 18 and sometimes more hours a day. If I got six hours of sleep, that was a GOOD rest.

WH: Today, your main language you speak is Yiddish?

LH: Between us, we speak Yiddish. Speak Yiddish, speak Polish. Not between us because she doesn't speak Polish, speaks Russian.

WH: Who was the most helpful, who were the people who made the biggest impression?

LH: The Wassermans were really a big help to us for the simple reason, they helped us to bring his brother which it was the only relative we both have. We didn't have any, and this was all I had. And I knew that before the war. You see, I was engaged to be married before the war. With Mandel. And we got married in 1940, when the war broke out.

WH: In those years, I don't know if there were any survivors left, but were there any group of people, like survivors that got together?

LH: Well we had for a little while, here, in Oklahoma those few families who came, and gradually they left.

WH: Do you still have contact with them?

LH: No.

WH: Did they leave because they said there was no Yiddishkeit here?

LH: No. No. No. No. No. They couldn't find satisfactory jobs, they wasn't happy with the community. With the way people treated them.

WH: What didn't they like, if you know.

LH: As far as I know, they couldn't find a good paying job. They wouldn't go work in the steel factory like my husband did.

WH: They didn't want to work that hard?

LH: No. They didn't. And, uh, they wasn't happy about it, and they had a way out and they took it.

WH: Did you talk about the Holocaust in the early years?

LH: Yes. Yes. More than I should.

WH: In the beginning?

LH: Yes.

WH: To whom?

LH: between us, and whoever would listen.

WH: And what was the reaction?

LH: Some listened. Very intensely. And some didn't care. But we always talked among us. You know, the survivors come together, this was just one subject on the table most of the time.

WH: And today, too, right? If you come together with survivors.

LH: Well, not as much. Not as much. Like, when I was in Florida we have a lot of friends there from the survivors. And you talk, not as much about- oh, once in a while you just, to come in and once you get started you don't know how to stop yourself. But other than that, we'll try not to. We try to talk more, what's going on, what's current.

WH: Did you ever have nightmares about what happened?

LH: I haven't quit having them.

WH: You still have them?

LH: Oh! To this day.

WH: How often?

LH: Uhm. As often as you can tell. Sometimes every night. Sometimes not every night. But I dream a lot. He will tell you how many times he wakes me up, he yells, scream.

WH: Did you ever talk to anybody about it?

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LH: Psychiatrist? NO! I don't really care to.

WH: You don't believe in-.

LH: I don't. Very honest with you. My daughter is- and I don't believe in all that.

WH: Did she ever tell you to talk to anyone because it's her profession?

LH: UHH! She knew- she would let me talk to her if I would. But she had an earful of that. She grew up with it.

WH: Did you talk to her a lot about the war?

LH: Yeh, she heard it. You see Ruth speaks very well Yiddish. We spoke Yiddish. She didn't for a while. Because when we first came here, she sort of blocked it out. But she spoke German. She didn't speak much Yiddish. And when we came here, she went out to play, and those children when they were talking among them, she didn't understand them. What does a three year old know. They picked up a handful of dirt and threw it in her face. She came in crying and those tears washed down the, the, the sand from her face- and there was lady who spoke German, she's born and raised in Germany, she was one of my clients.

WH: Jewish?

LH: Yeh! And, she came in and she said to, to me, 'whooter dis a dumbkoff!'...(they feshstace der garnished!-Yiddish_ They don't understand it! Not that she doesn't understand it. THEY don't understand it.

WH: Well, did your daughter ever feel in any way special, that she was the child of survivors?

LH: No! She felt reject.

WH: Rejected by whom? By the other people because she wasn't born here and she didn't have much of an accent, right?

LH: No. She doesn't have any accent. No.

WH: But, because they knew that she was a survivor, you feel they looked down on her?

LH: Yes. The Jewish people, in the Jewish community, would you believe that?

WH: How do you know that?

LH: I know that.

WH: In what way did you see it?

LH: The way they treated her. She came home many times crying.

WH: Crying? Why? What did they say to her? Did they call her names?

LH: (sighs) Well,, (short sigh) not so much names, not so much names. It's ah, the treatment- the cold shoulder.

WH: You mean they didn't invite her to their home, or something like that?

LH: (inaudible).

WH: When you said you had nightmares, do you have it more now than you did twenty years ago?

LH: Not more. Just a, a, a broader variety. But I always have from this. All, all through the years.

WH: You know you're not alone. You know that most survivors do.

LH: Oh, of course. Of course. But some people don't- I'm just a dreamer, it appears to be, because at night I don't sleep a night through like most people.

WH: You wake up in the middle of the night?

LH: Oh, many times. Sometimes I'll wake and come in here and sit in the chair just to get away from the dreams.

WH: But when you lived in Poland before the war, this didn't happen, right?

LH: No.

WH: You slept through the night.- You suffered a tremendous amount during the war. You were in a number of camps- You were in Auschwitz- what were you doing there? In what part of the camp were you?

LH: Well we went to work, we passed the crematoriums, there was the railroad coming through. On one side was the crematorium. And when we passed to work in the

morning, we cut those long, thin (she tries to recall the name of the plant that they had to cut). She says in Polish, 'kinyas?')...

WH: This was work you did in the field?

LH: Ya, ya. And we saw the transport what where they came from Hungary, from, they are there from Poland, probably, no, from Poland and there was nothing left then. Had to be from Hungary, and Belgium and those kind of places. You saw little shoes, and toys scattered across the railroad. Used to brought in the people straight from the, ah, from the train. The cattle trains...

WH: It was called the 'umphshlackpatz (German?)' where they met, where they gathered them.

LH: Ya. Killed them. They killed them. They gassed them.

WH: How come they gassed them rather than-

LH: You could smell the flesh burning. I worked on the crematoriums later when they start bur- when they stop burning them. We took them apart.

WH: Took what apart?

LH: They crematoriums. As many as they could, ehrrr-.

WH: To erase the evidence, you mean. How come when they came-.

LH: Because I was the last one- we were the last party to leave. The last party to leave Auschwitz.

WH: A lot of the people who went to Auschwitz didn't make it, right?

LH: Oh! My brother! I had one of my brothers. One of my twin brothers was in Auschwitz. He got there earlier than I did.

WH: If you had to explain why you were able to make it through, what would you say?

LH: They just didn't get to me.

WH: You were lucky?

LH: Ya. Just as simple. They didn't- they didn't get to kill them all!

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WH: You were there for how long? A year?

LH: More than a year?

WH: And yet, some people didn't last a week.

LH: Oh, no! Some people just didn't even go to the barracks. They, they, just killed them where they stay.

WH: Did you see a difference between the people who came from Hungary and the ones who came from Poland?

LH: Not from the survivors, I didn't. The ones who didn't survive, I didn't get to see because they go straight in the-and we was in a big, big room. Mengele came in that room. We were naked. Stark naked.. And he just parade around. Back and forth (inaudible word) and he passed my side, you know, and you know, you are naked. You're not used to it. And I sort of tried to hide myself a little bit or something. He took that whip and- switch! All through my back I had a 'sweep' from his whip. You know, I tried just to cover up myself because my hands, or something. And I guess I was as always outstanding to the Germans because I had a flaming red head of hair. Anyway,-.

WH: In some way you would say that you were lucky, but-.

LH: In some way I was lucky, because I had several incidence which I begged, even in the small ghetto... and the Germans came in they said they picked out the, uhh, higher educated people, like the doctors and all those people and took them supposedly, they was gonna give them a chance to go to Israel. But they couldn't take anything with them but just like they are. And, the truck was full, and I pushed myself on the truck, and a German pulled me down.

WH: And that truck didn't go to Israel?

LH: No. They- in two hours later they took them out in a little wooded area and killed them all.

WH: Was that because they felt the highly educated people wouldn't be able to work?

LH: Well, they felt like they would be dangerous to them all- I don't know. Really and truly, I-.

End of Tape #1, Side A

Tape #1, Side B

Interviewer Notes:

Ended the interview with Mrs. Henson after about 45 minutes so I could go back to the hotel, and I just want to comment editorially, that after the tape was turned off, Mrs. Henson told me, 'You see, my daughter, the great psychologist that she is, but her children don't live with her anymore cause she's very smart, she got divorced. She got divorced. She got divorced and now she's married to a Christian. And, in five, six years, I never accepted him. Five, six years, he's never been in this house. They live in San Jose, but her first husband's a religious fellow, I know him well, and he is a person that I respect, and that I love him, and he has the grandchildren, of course, and he lives in Chicago and he's doing well.'

Later on in the car, her second husband volunteered the following information: The second husband is a person who came from Russia in 1958 to Israel, then came here. He said that, 'listen, everybody likes to talk about the success stories of the Holocaust survivors, and their children and everything, but it's not always so successful. It may not be for a book to say this, but the fact is that sometimes- look,' he says, 'my daughter, she's like a daughter to me, but,' he says, 'she had a breakdown. She had a nervous breakdown after she was married to the first husband, seven. Eight years. And they were married for ten years, rather, and then she married this Christian fellow. He goes to church, and who knows where she goes, and she doesn't do anything now. Maybe she does a little part-time counseling, and everything. But why did she have this breakdown? She had this nervous breakdown. Why? Because her husband also- not her husband, but her father, who's my wife's first husband, HE had a breakdown. Why? Because of the war. Cause after the war, he was never the same. That's what she said. So he also had a breakdown, so I think that this comes from her. This is also part of the Holocaust story. That these things happen to people. And that the children sometimes have problems. I'm not sure, but this could be the answer. She- we gave her money, and bought her house twice. The mother's not at fault. It's the daughter that's at fault. That this happened. But, that's the way it is. And, you should know that.' (Later on in the evening I will go back to Mrs. Henson and continue the interview)

Continuation of Interview:

WH: You didn't feel anti-Semitism?

LH: No. Not really. (She asks her husband, 'Did you ever?' and he says. 'No').

WH: When you think back on your life here, after everything else, what do you feel most proud about?

LH: My independence and hard work (She looks for an article).

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WH: What you're most proud of is that you achieved independence here, right, being your own boss.

LH: Being self-sufficient.

WH: Anything else?

LH: Nothing, really, especially. I'm proud of my daughter, my grandchildren.

WH: This counts too.

LH: It does. To me, this is my biggest accomplishment, is those grandchildren.

WH: Is there anything that you regret, since you came here, that if you could have done it another way, you would have done it another way.

LH: (heavy sigh) Ya, there are things, but I'm not gonna get into it. There are things, yes.

WH: Are you sorry that you came to Oklahoma City?

LH: I don't know. I'm sorry that I missed a lot of friendship from people I grew up with. Which I grew apart.

WH: Do you think that coming here-.

LH: It had certain advantages.

WH: Did it force you to become an American more- more quickly?

LH: In a way, in a way, yes.

WH: More than if you had stayed in New York?

LH: Yes, yes, probably.

WH: I mean, if you had stayed in New York, then your friends would have been mostly other survivors?

LH: Yes.

WH: And here, you didn't have that opportunity.

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LH: No, I just had all kinds of fr- you know, from every walk of life I would say, because when we first start out with the apartment and I was sort of good with people, willing to listen, and so we made a lot of friends.

WH: Have you been healthy, in good health your whole life?

LH: Yes, up to the last few years. The last few years give us both a little trouble. But, up to then, I was in pretty good health.

WH: Have you lived in this house all-?

LH: No, no, no, no. We lived in the apartment. We lived in this house eleven years...we lived in the apartments- I had sixty units before Abby (her second husband?) came to the States and then we bought sixty more after he came. So-.

WH: But he's also in the oil business.

LH: Ya, but then he wasn't. This was before he got into the oil business. We bought the sixty when we already had the means. In one year...he bought one (oil) company before the apartments. And, then we had the chance to buy those sixty units, I knew the man who, he was in his late 80's, and we bought it with very little money.

WH: Do you feel that lucky people make their own luck?

LH: Not completely. (inaudible).

WH: I mean, you couldn't have survived through the war without sometimes using your head, taking advantage of the-.

LH: You had to. You sometimes- I did some blunders, like walking up to a German officer, begging him to send me, because they said this transport goes where my husband goes-.

WH: (Where did you go? Inaudible) Right.

LH: Statachovitza (?)...

WH: You explained to me, but-.

LH: No, I explained to you something else.

WH: About the truck. That you got pushed off the truck.

LH: Yes. That was a different story.

WH: This was another mistake.

LH: Ya. But this was when I was in Statachovitza. After this truck came there, when they send us to Statachovitza (?) and they send my husband to a different city. And I was in Statachovitza (?) and there was a same thing, a 'select' what we call. They picked out some people, and ah, I was told, through somebody that those people are going to the same fac-an ammunition factory, where I knew my husband is. And there was a Jewish man, a large fuhrer around there and I ask him to be friends there and he said, 'don't you make you dead!' and he got mad at me. 'Who am I? I don't I don't, I don't listen very good.' And when they, when they, the German officer came on the grounds, and picked out the people, I walked up to him, and said it German, (needs translation) from German to English). (She apparently wanted to go on the transport and she was refused).

WH: And you were lucky!

LH: An hour later they brought their clothes!! (needs translation).

WH: And when did you do something where you did have to use your head?

LH: Shoving from one line to the other. And that was- I couldn't know where they gonna send somebody else.

WH: Did you feel that in many cases, only people who were tough were able to survive?

LH: To a certain extent only. Because I was in a, in, in a Statachovitza(?) and my first husband, bless his memory, was already in, in another place, he was working there, it was a shoe factory. (inaudible) Poles, but the German took care of it. And there was rumors that they gonna turn away the people from Statachovitza(?) to Auschwitz. THEN, we get in the war. In work that I send word to my husband, this-that's what they gonna do. So what he says, he made arrangement for me to get out and come to the factory, tied up my hairs and all that. Where he worked, for me to get back into the ghetto, you couldn't get in, you had no way. So they dressed me up as a man, and there was a hundred people working at that place, and they would count every day when they went to work, and when they got back in. And they dressed me up as a man, the co-workers, one man, who, his clothes fit on me, that was prepared, and brought me into the ghetto. And I- they came in in four of their line. And I was in the third fourth to get in. When he counted, he had one too many. You can imagine what a ('gurrugcha'?) started out at the gate. 'You didn't count good! You kept count!' The Jewish policeman, and some German officer. It was (the end of gurrugcha?) but I already disappeared. I was gone...(inaudible)...but they did, take the rest of the people from Kummuloffski and send them away. We don't know to this day where they send them. And wouldn't I get back to this town. I would have gone with the others. You see. It wasn't just one time. So I really can't tell you, if it's luck

(needs translation)- there wasn't any particular. Because I know some knowledgeable people. My father was a VERY smart man. (needs translation). And he wasn't smart because he could have gone together with a lot of people deep into Russia. We were packed to go and he wouldn't let us go. And he wouldn't go, because he used to say, 'when you leave the house (needs translation bsheshona schnorer?)' Because we couldn't take anything with us. Nothing of any value...

WH: How did you find the strength to go on when you came here?

LH: Hope! Hope.

WH: But after everything you had been through, how could you have hope?

LH: How could you have hope. If you don't have hope, you haven't got anything left. If you lose hope, you haven't got anything left. If you lose hope...(inaudible).

WH: You had seen how bad people can be. How could you have trust and comfort in some people after everything?

LH: I had trust in myself. I knew if they gonna let me live, I'll survive. If they not gonna kill me-.

WH: But when you came to America, didn't you have to?

LH: Oh, it was very tough at the beginning. But, I knew, I could see, if we keep- I had a man I worked for at one time..he said, 'Lola, stay in the back and keep pitching'...he had an expression like that...now HE was an anti-Semite.

WH: How do you know?

LH: Because I overheard expressions. He was an anti-Semite. (Bill Hill) the tailor. I don't think he's alive anymore. But, he, he, he told me then, 'You're gonna make something out of yourself!'

WH: Why did he say that?

LH: Because he thought I was ambitious enough. And capable.

WH: Well, maybe that is why you survived.

LH: Could be a reason. But I survived in, in-.

WH: We're not saying that luck didn't play a role-.

LH: No, but some of it- like my brother came to Auschwitz. He was there several months. He walked to work. He must have had uncomfortable shoes or his feet was from perspiration, and he rubbed his heel, bad enough where they got infected, and they took him to the hospital- in Auschwitz you went to the hospital, you never came out. I found that out when I came to Auschwitz, I saw his friends we went to school with. And I talk to them, and they turned away from me. They wouldn't talk to me. Then I knew something is wrong. So, I got mad at one of the- I could get a hold of him, and I say 'You open your mouth and tell me what happened to him!' He turned his head and he told me. In, I-that's why I said, with those shoes, is because I washed somebody's shoes, in Statachovitz(?) in a camp. Men's shoes. So they would make me a pair comfortable shoes so I can go to work- in comfortable shoes. It stuck in my head, that my brother, who lost his life. Maybe he would be alive today when I was in Auschwitz, in Statachovitza(?)...but I had to go to work, and I knew that if I don't have comfortable shoes, where I can walk, then I won't survive. So, the first thing I looked for is to have some good shoes. And that helped me, in Auschwitz. When I came to Auschwitz. You see, they took everything away from you. But they didn't take your shoes...

WH: Somebody wrote a book in which he said that, 'You may think that it's those people who grab things for themselves, who survived.' But he said it's the 'opposite'. He said, 'those people who helped other people, they had people who helped them when they needed it'. What is your opinion?

LH: It's true. It's true...a girl...I had helped in a small ghetto- when I came to Auschwitz...she was in the kitchen...once in a while she hid a potato in the peelings and she gave it to me. That potato helped me to survive...

WH: You met kappos- Jewish kappos in the camps?

LH: Yes...

WH: I wonder myself sometimes on how those people, they came to America, how they spent the next 40 years.

LH: Well, if they were bad, people discovered them and they got out of the town or got out of the state...

WH: Did you ever of a story like that?

LH: I heard of one. They said he went to Africa or someplace.

WH: What was that about?

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LH: Well he was in the camps. I didn't know him. Somebody was talking about...how...(he told on someone- (needs translation)...and somebody else who survived, knew about it. And when they saw he called him by name, he turned his head, and when he saw who it is, he disappeared.

WH: He disappeared?

LH: Because he knew what was waiting him. They would have killed him.

WH: Was he living here in New York?

LH: I don't remember...I didn't really know anybody (i.e. a kappo)...

WH: Are you a person, in general, you like being in charge of things, or are you more comfortable when someone else is in charge?

LH: I don't even like being in charge.

WH: You'd rather wait and see.

LH: Yes...I used to like to organize things. But I didn't like to be in front. Like to this day, if I have to get up and speak, or get on the bema at shul, I tremble. My legs bend. I can't. I won't.

WH: Why is that?

LH: I don't know.

WH: Were you like that as a child?

LH: I don't remember liking it. But I was a good organizer, but I never liked to be in front...long, long time ago...I was in Sisterhood...

WH: When you make a decision...do you make a decision quickly, or do you think things over very carefully?

LH: No. Once I decide, I have decided...

WH: But do you decide quickly?

LH: Yeh. I get mad...

WH: This is a stereotype. You know that redheads have short tempers.

LH: Yes.

WH: When you think of American Jews, you met them here, in ways of thinking, maybe this has something to do with the war,- in what way, if any, do you think that you think differently than say, the average American Jew? How are they different?

LH: I don't know. I really couldn't tell. Would you believe that I really, really, didn't get that close. I didn't open as much to them- and I don't believe that they opened up that much to me. All through the years, it's a superficial friendship. You understand what I'm saying. It's a superficial friendship in my opinion. 'How do you do?' Smile, and the face cracks. And with the people, you see, like in Florida, the people I survived with. People I know. People who went through the same thing I did. You can speak differently. YOU CAN OPEN UP! YOU RIGHT!

WH: My parents- understandable.

LH: You see, I have here, I would say, everybody's a friend. It's an acquaintance. It's not a friend. I can't call them really, really friends.

WH: Can they really understand what you went through?

LH: No! How could they? To understand me, they had to go through that. People who didn't go through, what my own daughter can't understand me. I bet you, you can't understand your parents a lot of times. Sometimes you can, but a lot of times you can't.

WH: You understand a little more if you're a child of survivors, but not the same.

LH: Well,- and another thing is, if you want to understand. You got to want to.

WH: Do you feel that after everything you went through, we talked about luck before, that maybe, like you led a charmed life? That nothing will happen to you? That if you were able to survive Auschwitz, you could survive anything?

LH: No. No. You can't fight Fate. I believe in a lot of fate.

WH: Just because fate was good to you once, it doesn't mean it could happen again. Right?

LH: Yeh. What's besheret.- This is the one thing that's left. When I got out of the concentration camp, I didn't- G-d forgive me- I didn't believe there's a G-d. I said, if there's a G-d, why did I survive and my parents are gone? My father was such a good person! My mother, such a purity! And I was a tomboy(?) when I was young. Full of mischief. How comes I survived and not them?

WH: what answer did you give yourself, then?

LH: I couldn't understand it.

WH: What do you say now?

LH: Besheret.

WH: But can you just dismiss it with 'besheret'? That's not the answer.

LH: I have no place I can put it. Do you understand?

WH: Yes, there's no logical answer.

LH: There is no place I can (inaudible). Can't put my finger on it.

WH: I once read a book...on the ghetto (in LaVoff?)...

LH: I once lived in (LaVoff?)...my father's brother...had a shoe factory and he talked him (my father) into a partnership...they opened both (two) together...

WH: They have these survivor gatherings- did you ever go?

LH: Yeh. I showed you pictures...we went to Israel.

WH: They had the world gathering in 1981-.

LH: It was in Washington?

WH: You were there?

LH: This is from Washington, the picture here (shows WH pictures)...

WH: The Radom survivors went to Washington as a group?

LH: Yeh...we took a bus from New York. And we went from NY to Washington.

WH: Why didn't you fly?

LH: Because from New York they had a rent- they was prepared this...

WH: Who is that? (LH is showing family pictures to WH)

LH: My grandson.

WH: Strong guy (WH observes after viewing a picture).

LH: He pretends (laughs) like he is.

WH: How old is he?

LH: Sixteen. He is my PRECIOUS. Tall (grusta farmagen- she says in Yiddish- translation might be 'my greatest possession') I don't have ANYTHING more valuable besides this guy here!.

WH: Lives in Chicago?

LH: Yes.

WH: So, you went to the world gathering in Washington, and you went to the one in Israel?

LH: I was sick (she really doesn't answer).

WH: What do you think of all these gatherings?

LH: It's just- it's more for the living than for the dead. Because, really- it's nice at the gathering. You meet people. People you haven't seen.

WH: You meet all these public people, like Ben Mead. Do you know the name?

LH: Ben Mead? I don't- (her husband says, 'he's the president' and she says:) yes. Yes.

WH: Ben and Blocha Mead. Sporoffsky (?spelling).

LH: I don't even remember them...

WH: These people that you met from Radom, right, most of these people, they did well in life?

LH: Yes.

WH: Do you think that the ones that didn't do so well maybe didn't come?

LH: Well everybody made a nice living. Some have accumulated a little more wealth, and some have accumulated a little less wealth. But very few of them don't have-no, they all have their home, and a little stashed away, so I really-.

WH: (Interviewer looks at a book written by a family friend and gently asks if he could put it aside to read later.) You sent your daughter- she went to college?

LH: Oh, yeh!

WH: She got a PHD?

LH: She has a master's degree. She didn't get her doctor degree.

WH: Do you think that education is important?

LH: To us? Very important! We wanted her to go ahead and get her doctor's degree. But she didn't want to write the p-the-resume

WH: The PHD- the dissertation is hard.

LH: That's the only reason why she didn't finish.

WH: Where did she go to school- here?

LH: Ya. She went to (inaudible? O.U.) and she went to University of Houston...then she came back, and she met her husband and she married him and she finished school after she married him.

WH: Did she go to a Hebrew school?

LH: Oh, ya! Ya. Ya. We had...a reverand (Reverend Harding)...she speaks- she can read and write Hebrew very well...she hasn't missed- I have pictures here, she hasn't missed a convention from the USY's and the BBG and every convention there was in Chicago and in Houston and in Dallas and everywhere there was one, we sent her.

WH: She may become interested again, you never know.

LH: She was so religious, you see, she went to mikvah and Oklahoma didn't have, any- we had to drive 100 miles one way and 100 miles back to Tulsa to take her to mikvah. I couldn't go, Abby (her husband) took her.

WH: When- when she lived here?

LH: When she lived here.

WH: When her husband-.

LH: When she was married to Ralph(?). Strictly kosher home...do you think (David) would eat in my house if it wouldn't be strictly kosher? He wouldn't. And other people eat- and my children- my grandchildren, but they eat- and so I running- they so strictly kosher when they home or at bubbe's house- and they go to mommy's house, and it's not kosher. Not any more. It used to be...but they are smart, and their father is smart. You have to know, when you are at mommy's house it's alright- but not otherwise. And to this day- now they can call each other (inaudible-'hon'?) over the phone and talk. And they discuss everything pertaining to children...but they couldn't live together. He was too strict. Too rigid...she couldn't take it. She had a nervous breakdown. After that he was (broke?inaudible).

WH: Sad...

LH: Very sad. Very. Beautiful children...(inaudible)...he read the Torah every Saturday morning in shul. She was there every Saturday morning...

WH: And she felt that who was too rigid?

LH: AL!

WH: 'cause he was too religious?

LH: Not so much religious, as rigid. Personality. It's a personality. If she says, 'mother, I'm going back to school, I'm gonna get my master's degree and I'm gonna divorce-' (LH drops to a bare whisper:) I wouldn't believe it! (her voice raises slightly:) And, she did it exactly the way she said. (her voice is regular now:) He wouldn't leave the house, she got a court order. He's a very intelligent person. He is in the top 2% of the nation, his I.Q.

WH: Did you think he was rigid?

LH: Oh, yeh! And everybody who was around him will tell you that. His wife, now- but she can take it. She was prepared for it...

WH: Was your first husband rigid?

LH: I don't remember (whispers). (Voice is regular:) But European women are used to it. You know, your husband is working, and you tolerate it.

WH: It's a new world.

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LH: Not any more. She thought she'll change it when she got married, she says. I say, 'Ruthie, so much like your father,' and she didn't even get along too well, I say, 'It's not gonna work.' And she says, 'mother, he'll change.' And I says, 'Well, I hope you're right.'

WH: Sometimes they say a daughter marries a father.

LH: And she did. She did.

WH: It doesn't always work.

LH: No, it didn't for her- the children, to this day, they say, they don't blame 'mommy.' 'Mommy couldn't take it.'

WH: But they can?

LH: Not always, but he loosened up a little bit (inaudible)...I told him, 'If you hurt those children, you know I'll never forgive you. You hurt one person, that's enough.'

WH: But you say, he has a good relationship with you.

LH: Oh, ya!

WH: For you, it's the grandchildren, it's important to have a, a-.

LH: I send the- the- step- his wife, I send her more things than I send my own daughter. Because she is so good to the children. And he, he keeps pushing. Everything he see- send- buy something send for (inaudible name) Because she is so good to our grandchildren. You see, he raised those children (inaudible who grew up?) sick. (inaudible) Walked at night when I couldn't walk any more. And to him, those are his children. Not (a name-inaudible) his children, HIS children.

WH: How often do you see them?

LH: As often as we can. And if we don't see them any length of time, we go to Chicago.

WH: What about your daughter? If she lives in California, and you are here, and she married the other guy, you can't have contact with her?

LH: Oh, we talk on the phone. Oh, ya. But I haven't been to California yet. But it's getting to the point where I'm gonna have to get it.

WH: Did you go to the wedding?

LH: NO! We left town. –For fear. His family came here. His mother, his grandmother, his brother and who else.

WH: Why did they come here?

LH: TO THE WEDDING!

WH: His family. The wedding was held here?

LH: In Oklahoma! In the- Rabbi Pachtman from the Temple.

WH: Did he convert?

LH: Ya!

WH: Oh, he did convert.

LH: Ya. Supposedly. –For whatever it's worth it.

WH: To make her happy? Well, it can be a quickly conversion-.

LH: (her second husband laughs cynically in the background) I don't know how quickly or how slow because when I saw-.

WH: So you left town because you didn't want to go to the wedding.

LH: That's right. (Husband says, 'She forced me to go to Las Vegas.') I said, 'Let's get out of here!' He said 'where you going, already?' I said, 'Let's go to Las Vegas.' He said, 'Come!'

WH: You mean you told her, 'if you marry someone who's not Jewish, I'm not coming to the wedding?'

LH: And I made a will and left her (without anything? Inaudible).

WH: You leave it to the grandchildren?

LH: Uh, uh.

WH: Well maybe someday you'll forgive her.

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LH: I'm gonna have to, or else my ulcer will never heal. My ulcer will never heal if I don't get to make peace with her.

WH: You'll see, you'll see.

LH: I'm gonna have to.

WH: You'll see what the future is.

LH: She says, 'Ma-' she keeps saying, she says, 'Mommy, you got to love me the way I am. This is my life and I have to live it.'

WH: Do you ever talk to him?

LH: Never.

WH: Maybe he's a nice guy.

LH: He is! The children say he is. He's nice to her-.

WH: Listen, I can understand how you feel. If it happened to my children. I would feel the same way you would.

LH: You wouldn't, because, you see you born here, and you weren't in Germany. (inaudible 'but today's here'??)

WH: Yes, it's true.

LH: But, you see, after the Jewish life she has, and she has children in a Hebrew school, when she married somebody non-Jewish, she cut me so deep, it just can't heal.

WH: But, sometimes people don't do things to punish other people. They do it for their own reasons.

LH: That's what she says.

(the daughter died about three months after interview with Leah Henson.)

WH: In America today, maybe almost half the Jews marry people who are not Jewish. It's true in America.

LH: And the children keep saying, 'Mommy, he's a good person. He's, he's TRYING to be Jewish.' That's what I tell you.

WH: It's hard to try.

LH: That's what I try and tell him...(inaudible)...he's such a smart little boy. He's so smart. That kid-.

WH: How old is your grandchild, six and a half? Does he go to the Hebrew school?

LH: He goes to the Hebrew Academy.

WH: Crown School? Yeshiva in Chicago?

LH: Ya. And he tells me last time, he says, 'He-he makes kiddish, mommy lights the candles,' but, and I say, 'Well, can he read Hebrew?' And he says, 'No, but I betcha when I go there this summer when I leave he'll be reading Hebrew.'

WH: Well there are ways you can read it by looking at English letters.

LH: That's what he learned. That's what he learned.

WH: Well let me go on to another topic. I'm not going to give you no more pain.

LH: Oh, ya, I'll-I'll tell you, if you take to me, you can sit here until midnight...You can't do it...You have other things to do.

WH: Do you feel- you feel now you accept it, right? You belong to a synagogue, right?

LH: Sort of. A meshugganer synagogue. A (gemester?)

WH: This is a meshugganer synagogue.

LH: No! No! Not here...we belong to the synagogue from day one. But I'm talking about my daughter. They have a (tz drey de?) Jewish synagogue there.

WH: In San Jose?

LH: In San Jose.

WH: I've been there.

LH: How Yiddish, how (inaudible Yiddish, 'brusht.')

WH: The shul here-.

- LH: Oh, that's a good shul!...(her second husband says he 'goes to the minyan every day.')
- He never miss a day. To say kaddish...
- WH: Is your house kosher?
- LH: Ya.
- WH: Rachmiel said to me...I only go to shul because that's where Jewish people are.
- LH: Exactly. Exactly.
- WH: Is that true for you, you only go there for chevra?
- LH: Not (really? inaudible).
- WH: So you also have some feelings for this, right? – Not for Judaism, but for shul...
- WH: Absolutely!
- WH: ...did you feel that the religious Jews in the war, that they acted any differently when you saw them in Auschwitz?
- LH: There weren't any!
- WH: What do you mean?
- LH: Where I was, there was no man. There was just women.
- WH: How about the religious women?
- LH: There was lots of young women. The older ones didn't make it. They didn't- where I was. In the last two years in Auschwitz, there was no older women. And the younger generation was not religious. Even if they was in the Zionist organization or whatever they were, they were not religious, what you call- (inaudible 'pearl work'?).
- WH: But now you believe in G-d, right?
- LH: I always believed in G-d! That's what I said when I got out. I questioned, but I still got back- I still...(inaudible) Because it's built in. You can't tear it out. It's built in. A certain amount.

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WH: Some people say...that if NOT for what happened to the Jews in WW2, the world might not have felt enough sympathy to create the state of Israel.

LH: That's true. That's true. I agree with them.

WH: And the state of Israel is very important to you-.

LH: And the state of Israel got, in May, how would you say it? The 'grindet(?)' You know (translated: 'was based on')...on the ashes of six million European Jews.

WH: No way was it worth it.

LH: I don't know. Maybe G-d wanted it that way. Maybe G-d want it. We couldn't it before, could we? They wouldn't let a Jew in.

WH: No, we couldn't.

LH: So, on the six million, on account of the ashes from the six million Jews, they make Israel.

WH: No one can ever say was it worth the sacrifice of so many lives?

LH: Up to me it wouldn't be worth it, because I lost my whole family. And to all the survivors it wouldn't probably be worth it. But to the people who didn't lost what we lost, it would be worth it. (inaudible Yiddish-sha doma carnaheden?) didn't help them.

WH: No, it didn't.

LH: They didn't help us. So.

WH: The American Jews now, they don't understand what they went through. They say, 'We also suffered! It was here a depression!'

LH: Yes, they suffered. They scratched, they bleed...(inaudible)... they hurt, they bleed. They bleed. You know when they scratch? They get a scratch, they bleed. But not like our heart bleeds.

WH: You talk to them, right?

LH: I don't want to get into them with that thing because they too ignorant.

WH: They don't understand.

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LH: No-o-o-o! How could they? Did they suffer? To understand, you must suffer. My daughter, she said, 'You cannot be a psychiatrist, a psychologist, unless you had a nervous breakdown, and went through it yourself.

WH: You know what I say to that? The price is too high.

LH: You don't want it.

End of Tape #1, Side B

Tape #2, Side A

LH: And I couldn't speak any English-.

WH: Why do you think that was?

LH: Because no ambition.

WH: And did they have European values? Is that important?

LH: Well to a certain extent. I said, 'You have to have some guts, and some get up from you- excuse my expression- pick up your behind!...and take it with you.'

WH: (inaudible-Yiddish?)

LH: (inaudible-Yiddish?) We gonna go on welfare. Why work?

WH: It's true. It's true.

LH: Uh-uh. Damn it. I get so mad at those welfare people. If I came here with, with a sick person, and a baby, and couldn't speak a word of English, and could make something out of myself. I'm not saying I'm a big-shot. Just-something. (Gedzadanken- Thank G-d?) I don't need anything from nobody. And never did. I got ten dollars when I came here.

WH: In Auschwitz you barely had a bed-.

LH: That's right.

WH: And here you had a hundred and twenty apartments. Not so bad.

LH: Not so bad.

WH: Not bad at all.

LH: (Gedzadanken Yiddish? Thank G-d) a good business, it was a bad period of time for us. It was a very bad period. When the oil business went bust. If (Connolly?) could go bankruptcy-?

WH: Why should they expect more from you? This is true.

LH: But thank G-d we survived, we didn't go bankruptcy. We came pretty close. But we didn't.

WH: Did you ever meet survivors in Oklahoma, elsewhere, in other parts of Oklahoma; did you ever meet any survivors?

LH: Yeh, there is one in Duncan.

WH: This woman in Duncan...do you know her? Are you friendly with her?

LH: Yeh. I'm, I'm not friendly with her. She lives there, and I live here.

WH: I would think, that so few people are survivors, that you would have a close contact with her.

LH: No, very little contact with her. She lives in Duncan...(inaudible) I see her when I see her. We are very friendly.

WH: Because you have to (inaudible-'stop'?) this connection?

LH: Yes.

WH: What's her name?

LH: It's on the tip of my tongue, and I can't (remember?).

WH: It's interesting to know why a person would go to a small town like that.

LH: Oh, I'll tell you...she had an uncle here...we were very good acquaintance with him. And this uncle...had...family...who lived in Duncan...

WH: They were Jewish?

LH: Sure. She goes to our shul. She belongs to the same shul we do.

WH: when you relax here, on a Saturday night, a Friday night, do you go out, do you go places?

LH: Very few. Lately, no. I didn't feel good. I was sick for a while, and he was sick for a while. We both have some health problems the last few years.

WH: But, before that?

LH: Before that, we used to go.

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WH: What did you used to do?

LH: We went to people, people came here, they was two, three people already gone.

WH: Mostly you socialized?

LH: Yeh, yeh.

WH: Do you read- books?

LH: Books? No. Short stories, magazines. I can't concentrate. He (her second husband) can read the whole day through. But I can't. I can't concentrate. My, m-my mind is wandering. Even when he talks to me, he says, 'Are you listening? Do you hear what I said?'

WH: ...a lot of people are like that. Lot of people. Not Jewish people. Lot of people.

LH: No. No. I wasn't that way.

WH: You weren't that way, when?

LH: A few years ago. A few years ago, I still could concentrate more than I do now. My span of concentration doesn't last. My mind wanders about something- you can talk to me, and unless I get into it.

WH: So far, you are doing well tonight. If I ask you a question, you concentrate.

LH: Yeh. Yeh. But sometimes I wander.

WH: ...this dog you have. I saw him outside before. How long you have this kelev? Is that his name, 'Kelev?'

LH: Kelev? That's why I ask the children, they were little, (laughing) only a Jewish dog can be 'Kelev' What to name the dog. And he (grandchild) looked up at me and he says, 'Bubbe, don't you know what a dog's name is? Kelev!' So I said, 'Kelev' it is.

WH: And, how long do you have him?

LH: About seven years.

WH: Did you have a dog before that?

- LH: I had a dog, yes. He (her husband) didn't. He never had a dog. And he never tolerated a dog. But the kinder- the children wanted a dog. On account of that- and you know what? Now, every morning, before he goes to shul, he goes out and feed him and plays with him. Every morning. He hates cold weather. No matter how cold it is outside, he goes out and plays with the dog.
- WH: I can understand this. If a person asks somebody else, they might not understand it. But what you're saying to me, is, in all the years you were married, the only person you were really, really close with as an adult, is your husband...but you didn't have close friends...in the European way, it is not necessary to have the whole group of-.
- LH: a lot of people ask me, 'What do you do?' And I said, 'Nothing.' We don't have to do a whole lot. And we don't have to talk all the time. Just as long as we are here. One or the other is here. One or the other is here for him. Or for her.
- WH: It's not like Americans. It's a different value system.
- LH: We can sit and drink a cup of tea and talk about nothing.
- WH: Tell me, when you think about Israel, and, I suppose you wouldn't want to live in Israel, right?
- LH: I almost did. When I married him (Her second husband). We was planning, we was debating-planning to leave. But (inaudible)...
- WH: So why didn't you go?
- LH: Because Ruth got sick! She was in the hospital!
- WH: Here?
- LH: Ya! She was married, she was in the hospital, she lost her baby. The first baby. They took her- one of the ovaries out, and they discovered she had a tumor on the uterus. And she was in the hospital, and she wouldn't call me until she was able to talk to me because she knew, if Al calls me, and tells me that Ruth is sick, I'll go meshuggah. And she said, 'Mommy, I waited until I'm able to talk to you! And I'm okay. I'm okay. And a few days I'll go home.' And I told-after then we discussed it, and I say, 'I can't stay here. It's too far. The plane goes too slow.' We was already married then. Because you see, Ruth and Al came to Israel for our wedding. Brought the necessary papers we needed from the rabbi here, and all whatever needs to be done. And, we got married, and then he couldn't come right away because he had some business to finish up. See, he has a textile factory, and he was finishing up unfinished business, and I wasn't gonna wait until he gets it done, and then we'll go back and see how he likes here, and then we'll decide

where we want to live. Because, it was to me, immaterial. I might as well live there as well as here, right?

WH: She didn't want to go to Israel to live? If they were healthy?

LH: Well, we didn't got to that. And then I found out that I couldn't live in Israel if she lives here. And G-d forbid if anything happen, which it did, she got- she was sick the whole time. With the children. Because she had a lot of female trouble. After that, what I told you, that's when she got the children. After that. The first, she lost.

WH: Sounds like she had it tough.

LH: Oh, she had it very tough- time. And she was determined to have a child. When she had one, she says, 'I'm not gonna raise one. My mother raised one. I'm not gonna do that mistake.' And, the doctor didn't WANT Her to have another one. She was determined.

WH: And you wanted more children or you were happy?

LH: I couldn't have (her voice drops to a whisper) anymore.

WH: You couldn't?

LH: (LH asks WH about his family).

WH: Politically, you're Conservative or Liberal, would you say?

LH: Conservative.

WH: More Republican- you don't like welfare, you don't like too Liberal.

LH: No, I don't like welfare, but I'm still a Democrat.

WH: You're still a Democrat.

LH: I'm still a Democrat.

WH: Why?

LH: Well I'm more for the underdog. For the working people.

WH: The working underdog. When you think of blacks, for example-.

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LH: Oh, there are some good blacks. There are some very hard-working people, and there are some bums, and I had some white bums, like you've never seen before.

WH: Did you vote for Dukakis?

LH: I did.

WH: Even though Jackson was there?

LH: Even though Jackson was there because I knew they wouldn't win anyhow. He (her husband) didn't vote for Dukakis-.

WH: But if you thought that he'd win, you wouldn't vote for-.

LH: Anyhow, I know. I couldn't make myself vote for Republican. Let's put it this way. And not for Bush. Not for Bush. In my opinion, Bush is such a wishy-washy (inaudible).

WH: And Reagan? Reagan you like?

LH: No, I didn't like Reagan either. I just couldn't make myself vote for Republican.

WH: But is that, when you think of Republicans, more like right-winger?

LH: Ya! Exactly! They more right-winger.

WH: What did you think of Kissinger?

LH: Well same thing. If he, he wouldn't be a Jew I wouldn't like him at all. And he had some ideas, and when he was, ehr, he wasn't as good for Israel as, um...Schultz...

WH: Good man. Nobody thought he'd be good in the beginning.

LH: That's right. I didn't either- really and truly, I didn't either, because I thought, 'he's an anti-Semite!'

WH: Like Weinberger?

LH: Oh, I hate Weinberger! I hate his guts!

WH: I think he was once Jewish?

LH: Ya! The name tells you. A (schmadnick?)

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WH: What happened when you saw Watergate on television? What did you think?

LH: Hey, hey! I never like him to begin with.

WH: You mean Nixon?

LH: Nixon. I never liked Nixon to begin with. To me, he looked like-.

WH: A crook?

LH: (inaudible) It was my opinion, but listen, who am I to say anything.

WH: You have to say something. I think that you lived through enough that you have a right to say something.

LH: Ya, but will listen to it.

WH: Right now, I'm listening to it.

LH: Oh, so okay.

WH: I wouldn't even use your name except for your permission, so you don't have to worry.

LH: I don't care if you use my name, what do I care?

WH: It's always better-.

LH: Maybe it would be nice for the children to know this bubbe said something.

WH: It would be nice.

LH: Ya, why not?

WH: It would be nice (inaudible). The truth is, that it'll come, thirty, forty years from now, and I'm telling you right now, and I said to you, people will (inaudible: walk on?) they'll say, 'Why didn't we write more about the survivors after the war?'

LH: Ya!

WH: In fact, the one question that I still want to ask a little bit, is, you had to overcome a lot of tragedy.

LH: Oh, yeh.

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WH: And a lot of problems.

LH: Yes.

WH: You see that people in this world-.

LH: They have a nervous breakdown- stretch the heel and they get a nervous breakdown!

WH: What advice would you give them?

LH: They're not strong enough, they're weak.

WH: But how do you cope with tragedy?

LH: That build up, honey. If you live through things like we did, and get out, my daughter couldn't survive. His nephew couldn't survive. They had it too cushioned all their life.

WH: And those who couldn't get hardened, they didn't live. They didn't make it.

LH: Exactly. They lay down and died. In the morning, they took them out.

WH: But after you get hard, how do you get soft again?

LH: Well, time softens you. Time softens you. You know for years, I couldn't cry after the large. Oh, I couldn't cry. Uh, uh! Now, I cry too much when my daughter got divorced, and the children went to Al. Oye, did I cry. But this came with time. I couldn't cry for years and years. I couldn't cry. I choked inside, but I couldn't cry out like people do.

WH: If somebody said to you, when you grew up as a child, would somebody have said, you're the kind of person, that if you had a big, big problem, you went through tremendous tragedy, you would make it?

LH: Would you believe Mrs. Pagano who told me that?

WH: Who?

LH: Gypsy. The gypsies

WH: The gypsies told you? What gypsy?

LH: I was about 16, not older, oh, he (her husband) doesn't like it because he knows the story. We was in a park in Poland, and there was a gypsy camp. You know how they live in

those- uh- a tent. In a tent!. There was a gypsy tent, and that was a park, and I was there cutting up with my cousins. Girls, boys, a bunch. And, I was a little bit on the wild side. (Needs translation) What she had to say?

WH: To read the cards. The tarot cards.

LH: They read the palm of your hands. And they laughed at me. They laughed in my face. And I said, 'Okay, just keep laughing, I'm gonna do it! Just to show you' And I went in there, they take 50 cents or a dollar (inaudible) I don't remember how much. In those boys, I had cousins, they were tall...my father was a tall man. And they stood in the doorway, they was afraid they gonna do something to me because they didn't trust (inaudible). I say I didn't have anything they wanted. All I took was the dollar...and she told me. She say, 'You gonna go through a lot of prejudice in your life. You gonna go far, far away.' I laughed. We all laughed at that when I came out and told them all that because who believed that-.

WH: This is 1934?

LH: Ya. Ya...I told them that storey. They wouldn't believe it. They wouldn't. And that's what she said. 'Very far away' I'm gonna go. And a lot of prejudice. But I will survive! And some day I will be 'very well off. I'll have three children,' she told me.

WH: She was off by a little bit.

LH: No, she wasn't off any. I had a child in '41, she died after three weeks. I had an infection...then I had Ruth on '46, then I had a miscarriage. It was four months along.

WH: So, she was right?

LH: She was right! True to a 'T'!

WH: She said you'll survive?

LH: I didn't think of it until later, later after the war. Didn't think of it at all during the war. (inaudible) But I- it's unbelievable.

WH: Unbelievable in a way, is that most people, if you tell it, that they'll come back after the war and every member of their family died, they wouldn't be able to go on living. Didn't a lot of people commit suicide after the war? And yet, you lost your whole family?

LH: Not too many people of my bunch did commit suicide. I am lost a couple of friends, who jumped from the windows when the Russians came in after the, the- you see, our camp believed the Russians. They came in a very wild bunch. At night we were afraid. The

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girls were afraid of this. In Koboff(?) I lost two good friends. They jumped from the window when they are breaked in the door. And I lost about three girl friends the day they released the camp because we didn't have any bread for two, three days...

WH: They jumped because they were afraid. How come you didn't jump?

LH: I-

(Interview abruptly ends; tape goes blank for a short time before interview notes)

Conclusion of Interview