

FAYE PORTER

7/26/89

#83

Page 1

WH: "You came in 1946 to America on the Marine Perch...when you came to America, you sailed into New York Harbor. What was it like there?"

FP: "No one came to pick us up. We have relatives in Chicago. My husband's brother. He was sick. He couldn't come to pick us up. And we were there, waiting for someone! And waiting for the HIAS or - I think that time it was not the Federation for the HIAS so we are waiting, and crying, and the baby was crying. I said, 'What for we came to America!' We were planning to go to Israel, all the time. Coming up from Russia, our plans were to go to Eretz Israel."

WH: "How come you didn't go?"

FP: "Because, that time was hard to travel with a child. With a baby. We have to go underground. If you know the story."

WH: "B'rikha.(?) Aliyah Bet(?)."

FP: "And there they kept you and send you to Cyprus...so it was impossible, and they didn't want to give us certificate, you know, to go straight. So, (needs translation) we came to America. Our brother-in-law send us affidavit. We should come to America. And from America, you can go to Eretz Yisrael. So, and that's how I - .
...the forest and have a baby, I was very sick. So, some people suggest, 'Go better, go to America. Because in Israel is too hard, and the climate, sometimes too hard for you. So, go to America.' "

"So, we listened to people and we came to America. So, after a while, waiting for HIAS, they came and they picked us up and they took us to a hotel, and we have the dinner. They ask us to stay in New York, the HIAS. After all, our brother-in-law and sister-in-law were waiting for us in Chicago...so, we came to Chicago. The HIAS put us on a train."

WH: "You went right away to Chicago?"

FP: "The next day they put us on the train...so they have one bedroom only, and they give it to us. And they are sleeping in the living room. And my husband start looking for a job...and looking for an apartment. At that time, there was no apartments, not even a room...so one day we visit Milwaukee...and I fell in love with Milwaukee. It was so quiet. And, and we were so frustrated from being - tired, and, and still, the bombs was in our heads, you know. What we went through. So we find in Milwaukee, on 10th Street, more shvartze was there already, we find two bedroom apartment. Very poor. Roaches, mice. And in the rear was a barn with 10 horses...so when the family came to visit us, they ask, 'Faigy, you like it?' I said, 'Yes! I like it!' They didn't like it, in this apartment, in this condition...So, my husband start looking for a job and he find a job...in a glove factory..."

WH: "What did he do in Europe?"

father was a shoemaker."

WH: "Where were you born?"

FP: "In Grodoh...in 1913...in Ukrainain...close to Kiev..."

FP: "Yes...we were eight children. I am the only one survivor. Four sisters, and four brothers."

WH: "Your parents didn't make it either?"

FP: "No. I am the only one survivor."

WH: "Where were you during the war?"

FP: "In the woods. It is a miracle, you know, to be alive...and on Friday, they took us out from a ghetto...and they lay us out on the middle of the street and we knew that we are going to die. And, to cry, Shema Yisrael. And, Saturday night, Saturday morning, they took everybody."

WH: "The Germans?"

FP: "The Ukrainians and Germans...in 1942."

WH: "How did you get away?"

FP: "It's a miracle. That night, when they put all in one street, altogether in the houses, packed. Women and children. Very few men, because the men, they killed in 1941."

WH: "What about your husband?"

FP: "My husband, Wednesday, when they start surrounding the city, (?), he said, when they said it's going to be a ghetto, so he said to me, 'I'm not going to stay. I'll try to go out...' And he took off his patches, the yellow patches...and he looked like an Ukrainian. And he... a priest said to him, in Polish, says, (needs translation) 'You running away, or the devil? The devil will find you.' "

"So he runs away, and he runs back to Oradok. And, from there, he was hiding in the cemetery...then he find another survivor...and both together, they start looking...and find a group. The Jewish partisans...and with them was a Ukrainain later..."

WH: "What about you?"

FP: "...so, the last night so, I said to my sister, I'll go to see Veivel. My cousin was in the same street. And (to see) what they are doing. I said to the people, 'Let's make a fire and escape.' You know, in a fire, you can run. So, nobody wants to, nobody was brave. We were women and children. That's all...so my sister was afraid to go, so she went back. So, I went into the house, no one was there already. They hiding. Where they hiding? I don't know. So, I don't know what to do. I went into an open bottom, where the horses were there. And I, under the, when they give the horses food, and I sit in a corner. And then next day, morning, the Ukrainain police, they started looking, and chasing out all the people and I saw and I hear and, and, after a while...and right early in the morning, Sunday, I saw my cousin, she came out into the house to take water. And I came up and said, 'Pessel. Where are you?' 'I am here.' So, she took me and they stay on the attic...and after a while, we crawl on our hands and feet and we have to crawl over the railroad, and we went into a forest. Every Jew who escaped from the dead, he took us to his forest, and he took care of them. Slovak was his name."

WH: "Is he still alive today?"

"...and he is still alive today. He was very old, but he was still alive. He must be in Israel in a year, he's a popular man."

WH: "He saved a lot of people."

FP: "He saved a lot of Jews."

WH: "Even though they say that Pollacks were the worse people, and everything else."

FP: "This Pollack was exceptional. He used to go out to (?Manjaneck) every day, and to find out what they planning to do. So one day he came and said they planning to make a (needs translation: a blooder?). You know, to surround. They know that we are in this forest. And he took us, like a good father, he took us out from his forest, and he took us to a different area. And after a while they came, and - all that."

WH: "Did any Ukrainians help you during the war?"

FP: "Very, very few. Just one helped my husband. He gave him a rifle, two grenades, and bullets."

WH: "When you came here to America, what was your first impression of Chicago?"

FP: "Big city. Busy city."

WH: "Were you happy to be in America?"

FP: "From the beginning, no."

WH: "Why?"

FP: "No, no. Because we didn't have where to live. No apartment. To know, it was hard to find a job."

WH: "How long were you in Chicago?"

FP: "All summer."

WH: "You were religious then?"

FP: "Yes. Strict."

WH: "When you went to shul on Shabbas, when you first came to Chicago, did the people there know what you had been through? Did they have any understanding at that time?"

FP: "At that time, very little. They were surprised at how we looked."

WH: "In what way?"

FP: "They surprised, they knew that...we were in the forest, and living such a, under this conditions, and they surprised that we looked okay. They were surprised, really. And they said, 'You have to kiss the ground.' And I, we told them, we plan to go to Eretz Yisrael. We didn't want to come to America. And they said, 'Oh, you have to kiss the ground.'"

WH: "That you're in America."

FP: "That you're in America."

WH: "And you told them, 'What for?'"

FP: "And I said, 'What for. We cannot find a place, an apartment, it's hard to find a job, my husband start working, and he came home with blisters.' And when we came to Milwaukee, he start...this job because I want him not to work on Shabbas. So, he started to be a peddler...with a partner. (A German Jew). So, they bought a little truck, and they went without language, they went on the southside, there's more Poles...and they started from the beginning, it was him three meals a day...in Milwaukee. I gave him three meals a day, with two children already. Jack was born in 1944. During the war...and Shlomo was born in 1947 in Milwaukee."

WH: "Were you in the woods with Jack?"

FP: "No, that time we were out of the woods...in (Rovna?) and the Russians came, and liberated us..."

WH: "And you went to a D.P. camp...to come to America?"

FP: "Before, when we came out from Russia, we were in Austria in a D.P. camp...? Beintermittle? ?Linz?..."

WH: "You were under a quota?"

FP: "...they allowed us to go because we were Polish citizens...out of Russia."

WH: "But to come into America, how did they let you?"

FP: "Yes, there was a quota on Polish people..."

WH: "So, how did you get on this quota?"

FP: "I don't know, we came very easy. Didn't took too long. We went to the Joint...(his brother in America) send us the affadavit..."

WH: "...was this boarder a refugee?"

FP: "Yes...a 'greener' from Hungary..."

WH: "...how long was your husband a peddler?"

FP: "My husband worked on this until he died."

WH: "...how many years ago did he pass away?"

FP: "Ten years ago..."

WH: "What kind of peddling?"

FP: "...iron, metal, scrap. Buying and selling. They didn't have a

WH: "...what happened to your dream about going to Israel?"

FP: "Because we had enough in Europe, and we had enough during the war, and anti-Semitism..."

WH: "All in the war? ...you came a country, you were ... you think then you should go?"

FP: "Well, I'll tell you. My husband was already in business, we had small children in school, so it was very hard...so Jack start belonging to (Habonim) Zionist...and he was very active. President. He was very active in (Habonim?). After high school he went to Israel to work for one year on a kibbutz...then my daughter was in high school in Chicago and she was active in Mizrachi organization...so after high school, she wants to go to Israel...so she went...(and came back) and lives now in Minneapolis..."

WH: "What does her husband do?"

FP: "He's an English teacher and a Hebrew teacher...at a day school...they have four boys.

WH: "Where did Jack go to school?"

FP: "Public school...Hebrew School...and University of Illinois...and then got his master's and his Ph.D..."

WH: "He's in Sociology...and has written books."

FP: "He's looking for work now...as a Sociology teacher...he was in real estate...but it didn't work out...his wife is a Social Worker, part-time. He has two children..."

WH: "How come your other son, Shlomo went to Israel and Jack didn't?"

FP: "...after he went to school...a friend...Ben, wants to go to a yeshiva in Skokie, and I said to Shlomo, go with Ben to yeshiva...so, we went...and he came back...and he was a baal teshuvah..."

WH: "What was the attitude of people here, in Milwaukee towards you?"

FP: "The relatives was a big help...we were the only family, survivors here...and the beginning that they were..."

WH: "Later on, many more survivors came in '49, '48."

FP: "Some of them they arrived they gave them little apartment, yeah."

WH: "They did help later."

FP: "They did, later."

WH: "Maybe they weren't ready for you."

FP: "Not for us."

WH: "You came too early, probably."

FP: "That's true. Now, they didn't help us. Nothing. Nothing."

WH: "Later on, did you become friendly with the survivors who came later?"

FP: "Oh, yeah! We had a club. New American Club and we went together...and after a while, we worked for Israel."

WH: "The New American Club, you were active?"

FP: "Yes, member...go to meetings..."

WH: "Did the fact that you were religious and that most of them were not, make a difference?"

FP: "No difference. I ate what I can eat. And, that's all. I'll tell you, from my home, we were strict religious."

WH: "Hasidische?"

FP: "No, just strictly religious. My father belonged to Stollen...and the forest, we could not afford to keep kosher, and during travelling, we couldn't keep kosher. To tell you the the truth, when we came to America, I said, 'Here is a country, a free country. We can find a place where we can be like my parents were. So, we started to (inaudible) be strict."

WH: "Your husband, he came from a religious family too?"

FP: "Yeah."

WH: "Hasidische?"

FP: "No..."

WH: "And he was willing to be religious when he came here? He wanted to be religious?"

FP: "Oh, yeah. Oh, sure! Oh, sure. Oh, yes."

WH: "Since you suffered a lot, you lost your whole family during the war. And most of the survivors who came here, they don't believe in anything. How come you believe and they don't?"

FP: "Because I - first of all, my parents were strict religious."

WH: "So were theirs."

FP: "And, another one, I saw miracles in the forest. I saw miracles...do you want me to tell you a miracle?"

WH: "Yeah, sure."

FP: "We were together with Russian partisans. You know, when Hitler was in Blitzcnet(?) and he cut the borders, and some of the Russians, they couldn't go through the line and they have to stay behind. So, all of them went to the forest. And...we met the Russians in the forest. So, one day there was a commander, and he was a Nationalist. And the front was going farther and farther, and he saw that, and said, 'What we gonna do with this bissel yidden?' So... our Commander Kuck... there were about 100 Jews. And in the same evening...the assistant...came over and he says, 'Watch yourself because he wants to come and undermine this camp, your camp in Zimblanka(?) in Iarger, and ... day, it happened in this camp - ."

END OF SIDE ONE.

SIDE TWO.

FP: "They want to kill us, this group, partisans, and Commander Kuck took all this group and brought us to his camp. This is a miracle."

WH: "A miracle of life."

FP: "...yes, that this man warned us to be aware of that."

WH: "What about the fact that your brothers, sisters, that they didn't have such miracles. That they didn't make it. Don't you question sometimes why God took them away?"

FP: "I question. I'll tell you. They were afraid. (inaudible) And some of them, they didn't want to leave the family. Example, my brother's son-in-law. Didn't want to leave the family. There was opportunity to go. Was opportunity to go. They are afraid. Jews are not used to live in the forest, such a life. And, they were afraid."

WH: "But, if God performs miracles, I have to ask, didn't it make you ask the question sometimes, why didn't God save them?"

FP: "Yeah, I ask that. That's true. A lot of people ask, 'Why.'"

WH: "That's right."

FP: "Why have miracles when the Jews came out from Egypt, and...there was other miracles..."

WH: "Right...so, tell me. So people ask, 'Why were there miracles then, but not now, right?' But not during the war."

FP: "That's a good question. I don't know."

WH: "So, now can you still believe?"

FP: "I believe. I believe now. Maybe I'm questioning, I believe in God."

WH: "And that's all. I believe."

WH: "Even though you know that 6 million -."

FP: "Yes. Even so, I believe in God, and that's all. Nobody can - can brainwash me."

WH: "Well, nobody should, but the only thing I ask is, do you ever have any doubts?"

FP: "I have doubts. And I have God, and I still believe (inaudible). I'll tell you. We, Jews, we promised to keep the Torah. And when Yitchak, gave the blessing to Yaacov, so when Esau came, after...and he says, 'Daddy stop crying, don't you have a bracha for me?' He says, (needs translation)...that means, we should learn more Torah. We should learn our children...(inaudible) I'm talking to Jack, 'Jack learn the children. I'll pay for everything. Just send your children to a Hebrew School.'..."

WH: "So, they don't go?... He's Orthodox, Jack?"

FP: "He is Traditional. That's all. He's a Sociologist..."

WH: "Tell me, isn't it interesting, though, if you ask it from this point of view, you know that most of the Jews who came to this country, before the war, Before WW2, they were not frum...the ones that stayed in Europe were more religious, right? And yet, if there is a God, the ones that daven, that put on tefillin, and everything else, they got killed. And the ones that came here, that were not frum, they lived. How is there an explanation for that?"

FP: "Yes, it's a hard question."

WH: "Don't you ask it?"

FP: "Hard question to answer. That question is very hard."

WH: "And doesn't it make you wonder, sometimes, how this could be?"

FP: "Makes me wonder. There's no answer. It's no answer. And that's - ."

WH: "And yet, you still believe, even though you have all these questions."

FP: "Yes."

WH: "You still believe."

FP: "Yes. I believe."

WH: "I met people who said, 'When I saw in the concentration camps, how rabbis were killed and tortured, I lost my belief. Because, how could God allow that to happen.'"

FP: "I understand that. I understand how you believe in God. I believe in God all. Because, we know the history. Our history from the ancient history, you know. What's happening in Egypt...and what's happening when they came out, and what's happening - this, this give us our belief in a life."

WH: "Do you think that the creation of the State of Israel, that that is a miracle?"

FP: "Yes, it's a miracle."

WH: "Do you think that it's connected in some way with what happened during the war?"

FP: 'Yeh, it's a miracle. Such a small, you know. Small nation, without preparing the doubt, it was a miracle to, to fight with so many nations. You know. Egypt, and Syria, and all - and they are the winners. I think it's a miracle. Yes."

WH: "Do you think that it's related to what happened during the Holocaust? That the State of Israel came into being after the war?"

FP: "I think so. Even the prophet said...(needs translation)."

WH: "So, tell me, in America, when you were living in Milwaukee, it's hard to be Orthodox here, right? What's it's like to be Orthodox here?"

FP: "No, no. It's not hard."

WH: "You didn't think of going to New York or Chicago?"

FP: "No. It's not hard. If you want, there is a, a will there is a way. Oh, yes."

WH: "Are you happy that you came to Milwaukee?"

FP: "Yes, yes. Very happy. Because it is a quiet city."

WH: "What accomplishment in life are you most proud of?"

Shlolim is to go to a Hebrew school, to a yeshiva, (inaudible) and this is an accomplishment, and this makes us happy. This makes me happy. This is why all desire for yiddiskeit, this is the most important for yiddish, for Yidden. Now. Right now. To work.

"The rabbonim should work more for yiddishkeit. Like my son, Shlomo. And, this is most important. Otherwise, you see intermarriages. A lot."

WH: "A lot."

FP: "A lot!"

WH: "Well, your children didn't."

FP: "Thank God. It's a miracle, too. With Jack, Jack was going (needs translation: ...(?)..shiksas) He came once and he said, 'Momma, there is a beautiful girl, and she wants to convert.' I says, 'You know what, Jack, stay single. You better stay single.' (inaudible)."

WH: "Do you think that what happened in Europe could happen here in America?"

FP: "You never know."

WH: "Do you think that there could be a Holocaust?"

FP: "You never know, because we have to be prepared. Because, we have a lot of enemies in America."

WH: "Who are our biggest enemies here?"

FP: "The Ku Klux Klan, the Nazi's, and all kind of - there's another, the Skinheads."

WH: "What about the shvartzes?"

FP: "The shvartzes and needs translation: ...and the ... like them. The Nazi's doesn't like them. (inaudible) Nothing is our friend. No. Let's hope for the best. (inaudible) And to be aware."

WH: "You have to be aware."

FP: "You have to be."

WH: "And in Israel also."

FP: "In Israel, also. (inaudible) It's a miracle! You know, such a small Israel, country, which surrounds with so many wolves around, and that's why they are jealous. Because a little Israel and so successful."

WH: "Do you think that we should give back...the territories to make peace?"

FP: "They want a country in a country. It's impossible. It's impossible. If they'll give one piece, after a while they'll want more and more."

WH: "What are they going to do?"

FP: "Some people, they say, better give land for peace, and some people says 'no'."

WH: "Do you think there could be land for peace? Do you think it could work?"

FP: "I'm not a politician. I'm a plain Yiddishe momma. Right?"

WH: "But you made it here, you made it in America, you have three children, and everything else."

FP: "It was a miracle."

WH: "Are your friends, your close friends, all survivors?"

FP: "Yes."

WH: "Do you think sometimes that the American Jews that they look down a little bit on the greener?"

FP: "American Jews, there are some of them, they're jealous of the greener. They says, 'They came, they run business, they are successful.' And some of them are very happy with - you know, people with sense. They are happy for us."

"And some of them, you know, they say, 'Look at the greener. They came with nothing.' And some of them, they say, 'Oh, they brought a lot of money.' "

WH: "Yeah."

FP: "Yeah! The greener (needs translation: brought gelt). Yeah.

We came with nothing. We came with nothing! And my husband worked very, very hard. To be a peddler, to take out furnaces from the basement, and carry on the truck, and - ."

WH: "...how come you don't belong to...Rabbi Feldman's shul...because a lot of survivors they went there."

FP: "We are, we are not Polish. We are more Russian."

WH: "Does it matter?"

FP: "Yeah.(inaudible). No matter."

WH: "No."

FP: "No matter."

WH: "But it's a Polish shul."

FP: "Yeah, but a frumer shul is a, a Polisher rebbe, and it's nice temple."

END OF SIDE TWO.

INTERVIEWER NOTES:

It was necessary to terminate the interview because Mrs. Porter had to go to an interview. Not an interview, but a meeting of Israel Pioneer Women. It turns out that she is very involved, she's very involved with Israel. In that sense, she's a typical survivor. Mention should also be

made, of the fact that Mrs. Porter is a woman who, she also lost two children of her own, during the war. Children she had had before the war. And it certainly is a feeling of guilt, or whatever that she didn't save them. Also, the rest of her family, although she has commented on that. Here is a woman who lost everything, but she still stayed whole because she did not suffer the humiliation that those who were in a camp suffered. She was in the woods in the partisans, her husband was a man who attacked the Russians, who fought against the Ukrainians and who was a fighter. And that partisan experience is a different experience than that in the camps. Many of the survivors feel a certain amount of guilt. If you talk to them, they always will tell you, privately, that they had to make certain compromises. Compromises, things against their will that they wanted to do in order to survive. And many times they didn't even tell their children. Mrs. Porter's children know what happened during the war. They can know. But not everyone can feel that way. According to one person who has observed the survivors, one person always (inaudible) used to see her parents crying at holidays when she made gefilte fish for holidays and everything, she would cry. And she didn't know why she cried. Because her parents didn't discuss the Holocaust with them. Some of the marriages that the survivors contracted, were terrible marriages. This will of course not necessarily come out in a two hour interview. Especially with both parties unclear. Many of these marriages were contracted in the camps. They lasted, but they weren't necessarily good marriages. Some of the partisans, some of the survivors exaggerate their accounts. To hear them tell it, they beat up half the Ukrainians in the Ukraine. And that also is to be expected. These are just some random notes.

END OF SIDE TWO.