

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

William Helmreich Oral History Collection

**Interview with Solomon and Lucy Yehaskel
May 29, 1989
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Solomon and Lucy Yehaskel, conducted by William Helmreich on May 29, 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.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

Solomon and Lucy Yehaskel

May 29, 1989

WH: ...until then it was not Greek? What was it?

SY: Salonika...Thessloiki...

WH: What was it before 1935?

SY: Salonika...it is Spanish...

WH: ...what year were you born?

SY: 1912...1912, Salonika - was in Turkey. In 1912, Salonika became Greek.

WH: Did you have brothers? Did you have sisters?

SY: ...no brothers, two sisters.

WH: Did they survive the war...did your parents survive?

SY: No...no.

WH: So you are the only one from your family.

SY: The only one.

WH: ...when you reached the age when you started working, what did you do?

SY: I...was a bookkeeper in department store.

WH: ...in 1492...right after the inquisition your family went from Spain - to Salonika...when the war started and the Germans came into Salonika, where did you go?

SY: For two years...everything was free except food. There was a scarcity. But you were free to run business, to buy and sell gold...from 1941 to March, 1943...

WH: You were not deported?

SY: No...

WH: Where did you go?

SY: Athens.

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

2

WH: You went from Salonika to Athens. Was it dangerous?

SY: I went with an Italian passport. My name was Pasquale.

WH: That became your name, Pasquale, and you spoke Italian.

SY: Definitely Italian.

WH: I heard that the Italians were much better than the Germans to the Jews in Greece.

SY: It was not bad. They were good. They were good!...I myself is an example. She will tell story - .

WH: I'll come to you too!

SY: Yes, that I - I want to give you all the time you need. Because I don't do this job every day.

WH: You came to Athens. Did you spend the rest of the war there?

SY: I would say yes. But going to the mountains, hiding...

WH: Why did you have to hide if your name was Pasquale?

SY: I was just for the day...just for the trip.

WH: When you came to Athens?

SY: I again had my name.

WH: You were again 'Yehaskel'?

SY: No. I had a Greek name...Nicholos (SY can't remember).

WHJ: It doesn't matter, but you had a Greek name. When you came to Athens, did you have to go into hiding there?

SY: No. I went in the house of a friend of Pasquale...I stayed there 6 months...

WH: Were they afraid to let you stay there?

SY; No. The Italians were in Athens. From March, 1943...in September, 1943 the Germans came in Athens...I changed house, I went far from Athens, suburb...I stayed there all

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

3

winter, and by spring...I have to change, with the help of an officer from the (inaudible) Captain. I knew him from Salonika...he knew me very good, and when he heard, I went to meet him- 'Solomon, don't worry. I have a room for you here,' near his house...he went to the Polish (?) Police and recommended that, 'a friend of mine lives over here, try, - do not touch him. And do not be afraid of him. He's my man.' I spent the rest of this...until the Liberation...after the Liberation we were married...we decided to go to Palestine...took a train...to the mountains...to meet a boat (going to Palestine)...but it was overcrowded...so we went back...

WH: ...so that's why you didn't go to Palestine. Just for that, because you missed the boat.

SY: Yah...

WH: When you think back on this story, do you regret, are you sorry that you didn't go to Palestine?

SY: Yes...

WH: ...what year were you born?

LY: 1921...

WH: ...did you feel loyal to the country? Salonika was once Turkey, then it became part of Greece. Did you feel a very strong attachment to the culture of the Jewish community in Salonika?

SY: Yes, yes...we had 52 synagogues...

WH: ...when you sit here, and you think about that this whole community was gone forever.

SY: - very depressed. Very depressed. Now we are feeling it, much more than before.

WH: Now you have more time to think about it.

SY: Yah.

WH: ...is there a synagogue for Jews from Salonika in New York?

SY: Ah, not really. Not really. There are Sephardic shuls...

WH: ...when the war started, where did you go?

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

4

LY: ...when the Germans came...one day they took my father,,,and they took everything from the shop...all the gold...and they closed. That's it. This was the end. My brother...left...and the younger one, they took him for nothing...

WH: You survived by hiding. Right?

LY: By hiding.

WH: And after the war, you met your husband...after the war was over, where did you go then? You didn't come to America right away, did you?

SY: I first came here...Salonika.

WH: And after Salonika, where did you go then?

SY: ...from March, 1945, we were married, until September, 1951 we were in Salonika. We had the two children.

WH: When was Sammy born?

SY: Albert was born in 1946, and Sam, '47.

WH: ...you could have stayed in Salonika, you could have gone to Israel, and you could have gone to America. So, how come you went to America?

LY: ...the Jewish agency start to say, whatever they want to go in America, we take you, it be okay.

SY: We came with the Joint Distribution Committee.

WH: But why did you want to go to America?

LY: Because my brother says, 'I'm going in America, it's an opportunity.'

WH: ...you had two brothers, one died, the other made it...and what about your three sisters?

LY: They didn't come back. The three married, everybody with the two children, two boys, and the other one, girls.

WH: How did your brother make it?

LY: He was hiding with me...

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

5

WH: And he is alive today?

LY: No. He died here in - 1976. He was very depressed, he didn't married, 'cause he lost the girl...so, he was very, very depressed, he didn't married, he was very sick here...all his life was dedicated to the family. For me, for my children. All the life. Nothing else. For him, nothing...

WH: So your brother came to America first?

LY: He came here first...he came because he had business with America, with his stamps. He says, 'I'm going.'

WH: So once he was here, you thought you would join him.

LY: Right. Because we didn't have nobody. First of all, the Jewish community was no more religious. I have two boys. I said, 'How we growing up these two boys?' I says to my husband.

WH: In other words, it was very important to you that you have religion...religious education.

SY: Everything was lost, in terms of religion, everything was lost in Salonika...

WH: I see that for...the both of you religion was very important, right?

SY: Yah. Yah.

WH: If you think about it, why do you think that religion was more important for you, than for so many other Jews from Salonika?

SY: Because there was no religion, that's all.

LY: ...because we were used to it already, in this life...

WH: But the other Jews in Salonika were also brought up religiously.

SY: No...everybody was not religious. There were 60,000 Jews.

WH: I mean, before the war.

LY: Before the war, 60,000. Maybe (inaudible) was religious. And they died. They didn't come back...

WH: So you decided to come to America, and you got the visa from the Joint because - .

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

6

SY: They brought us here, yeh, they brought us in New York, then from New York, we stayed here one day, they took us to Indianapolis...the Joint, they didn't send all the Jews from Salonika in one place, in New York, Indianapolis, St. Louis...

WH: Did they send you with other people?

SY: Yes...there were 2, 3 couples...and one room they give with the two children, and - .

WH: you must have thought, what is this crazy business.

LY: I was crying, I said, let me go back...I say to my husband, this is no life.

End of Tape #1, side A.

Tape #1, side B.

SY: ...they took us to Indianapolis. The place they give us, like she said, one room and...the neighborhood was very bad...Black people...we couldn't stay over there...after that the Joint found me a place to work...to wrap chickens. From bookkeeping to wrap- ...I didn't go...after a few days, the Joint found me a place in a department store...I was good over there, but she didn't want to stay and she was right. Because then the room was detestable...

LY: ...I called my brother...and I say to my brother, 'Sammys, I want to go back to Salonika.' He said, 'Look I will take an apartment here in New York. I have, somebody won me a \$1,000.' And this time, a \$1,000 - a lot of money, 'and it's two bedrooms and with the furniture...'...in one week they both came and talk to me, and says, 'You go with the children, I give you First Class on the train,'...I say, 'No. (inaudible) I got to take my husband and my children and I have to go back.'

WH: ...when you came to New York, from Salonika, why did you go to Indianapolis rather than stay with him? He was in New York, right?

LY: No, they send him to St. Louis, he went one day, he came back.

WH: When you came to New York...did you come by boat?

SY: By boat, sure...from ?Peras?.

WH: Who met you at the boat?

LY: ...a very old friend from Salonika...he knew we were coming, and he came to pick up...(we were) dressing, like in Europe, all white, with the big, short pants, and shirt, all white, shoes white, and when my good friend, he saw me, and (inaudible), he says, 'Look, here is- the kind of weather to go with- (inaudible).' After I went, I (inaudible) they went black!' (laughs).

WH: They were dirty.

LY: Black! (laughs).

SY: We had a very hard time coming here. (inaudible) We were much depressed, because, with four languages, to stay in the street, or in the house, or any place, without to understand each other, to ask questions.

WH: It was terrible.

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

8

SY: Very terrible.

LY: Terrible!...

WH: How long did you stay in Indianapolis?

SY: From September to December.

WH: Two, three months. And you worked in the department store, and you came home every night, you were free when? Sunday?

SY: Shabbat and Sunday.

WH: Did you have a synagogue to go to?

SY: Yes...

WH: ...so you did not get any more support from the HIAS when you came back to New York?

SY: After I got the job, it is finished.

WH: So then what happened when you came to New York? You took a job?

LY: No, no job. He start to learn himself the English...

WH: How did you learn English?

SY: By myself.

WH: How?

SY: I brought from Salonika, two sets of books. Dictionary, and grammar. French, English, - English, French. And I was for two years, studying at night, after I came from work, or any holiday, studying home, - in my house.

WH: You didn't go to night school?

SY: No.

WH: They had a school then.

SY: I know.

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

9

LY: I went.

SY: I feel myself that I will do better by myself.

WH: Why?

SY: Because I want to learn words, vocabulary, roots, (?endings?), spelling, this and the other. You could not, at night school, learn all these things.

WH: Why?...night school was just speaking...and you were about 38 years old.

SY: Yes, I was.

WH: and you went to night school.

LY: I went to night school, but when we came in New York, somebody said, 'I come work for you.' 'What?' 'To sew,' I said, 'So you will sew in the linings in the coats'- (furs)- so, 'very good,' I said (inaudible) the children, you take care. And I work until you find.' After three days...Sammy got a high fever...he couldn't take care of the children. 'No go to work,' I said, 'I'm not going to work.' I said. 'I'm not going to work, first are the children. I stay home. I take care of the children.' And I start to sew for the - .

WH: Piece work.

LY: Yah.

WH: Where did you live in New York when you first came.

SY: Bronx, near the Zoo Park...Vyse Avenue...

LY: It was an apartment, 4 floors, and we went to the 4th floor, no elevator.

WH: Your brother got you the apartment.

LY: Yah. No choice.

WH: There were Jews living there, right?

LY: All Jewish.

WH: Were they nice to you?

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

10

- LY: No, because they told me 'Why you come here, you're not Jew. You don't speak Yiddish.'
- SY: The first night I went to the shul, close to my house, then I discover a Sephardic shul about a 20 minute walk. I went for mincha, they thought I was a spy or some...they start speaking to me in Yiddish, I couldn't answer, - Yiddish, neither English, so they were thinking, 'Who may be this man?'...they didn't know about Sephardim.
- WH: So what did they think? They saw you knew how to daven.
- SY: ...I don't know what they were thinking. They spoke to me in Yiddish, I couldn't answer, they spoke to me in English, I couldn't answer, so, - What's wrong with this man?'...they didn't know anything about Sephardim.
- LY: They didn't know nothing, but after a month, they saw us every Shabbat, and they didn't go to shul, and we used to go (inaudible)
- WH: And they didn't know about this Sephardic shul that was 20 minutes away?
- SY: They didn't know about Sephardim.
- LY: Nothing.
- WH: And what about the synagogue you went to that you found - .
- SY: Then I found, yes, they told me, we found - I used to walk every Shabbat, it was there...
- WH: And this shul, this Yiddish shul, they didn't know about the other shul? About the Sephardic shul?
- SY: No, no they didn't. They didn't know anything about Sephardim.
- LY: We can't explain to them because we didn't know the language.
- WH: How about the neighbors in the building?
- SY: No, no. They didn't know anything about it.
- LY: Nothing. And in the end, after 4, 5 months, I met a lady who knew French, a Jewish lady, who knew French, I speak with her. I get to understand. She said, 'You're not Jewish,' she told me in French. 'You don't know Yiddish.' I said, 'I'm (inaudible) a Jew.' She saw me going to shul every Shabbat and Rosh Hashanah, and - until we moved, they knew us, that we are not Jew.

SY: You might know, 1952- 37 years ago, most of the Ashkenazim here, they didn't know too much about Sephardim. After 37 years, there were so many marriages from the Ashkenazim, the knowledge of Sephardim, was much broader.

WH: What about the food when you came here? What did you think of the food?

LY: Then, I was miserable. Miserable, no good for me. (inaudible) Everything changed. First of all, the food was different, the life was different. More easy. Four girls in my house. (inaudible) One for the children, one for the wash, one for the - .

WH: You had four girls to help you after the war?

LY: After the war, because it was easy then...(inaudible) my brother helped me a lot. My brother was with me, he helping me a lot. So, (inaudible) start to look into the business of my fathers, the shop of my father he took, and he start to work because we need the money, so it was - .

WH: So in other words you were working as a goldsmith?

LY: No, stamps...anyway, he was working, and we were living very good. When I came in with the two children, no language, and in these two bedrooms upstairs, four floors, it was terrible. The food, and - Solomon used to go shop now in the beginning. But after he start to work, I come to - .

WH: Four floors, to come upstairs with the packages - .

LY: I was pregnant! -

WH: You lost the baby.

LY: Because of the four floors.

SY: That was the first 3, 4 years, for her it was the first 4 years, for me, after I found a good job, I didn't think too much. But she wants to return.

WH: You wanted to go back.

LY: ...I wanted to go back...to go away from America. But thank G-d, today, I say (inaudible). I suffered...because you- (inaudible) go - you turning your head, you don't find nobody.

WH: What is it like in synagogue today?

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

12

LY: ...they are not very educated people...people here, I met in the park once...they said, 'What? In Greece was German? You are Sephardic.' Even today, I say, 'Why don't you read books? You go to the library, and read books,' I said to them.

WH: What did they say...?

SY: 'Is that possible that German came into Greece?'

WH: They didn't know that the Germans came to Greece?

LY: No, no. Today they have people they don't know nothing, believe me.

WH: ...work, when you went to work, in New York, you found a job, and you stayed home, and you went to work, what kind of job did you find in New York? What was the first job you had?

SY: The first job was temporary...just factory of woman dress...after that I found a good job, and which I say all the time, a man from Salonika, who lived in Italy...costume jewelry...

WH: How did you meet him?

SY: In 1939 he was here for the- World's Fair. The war broke out, and he couldn't go back. And he stayed here in New York. And he has an office, with his wife with stones. Costume Jewelry. He had a brother in Salonika, he told him to come here after the war, he's a survivor from the concentration camp. Well his brother didn't have the education needed for this business, he gave up, so one day I met him, I say, 'What are you doing,' and so on, and 'I'm looking for a job.'

WH: Where did you meet him?

SY: At the Brotherhood. It was the Jewish Community from the Sephardim. (inaudible) He gave me the address, and I go to see him, I went to see him, he says, 'Okay, come Monday.' I start over there - you know, every business you start, unknown business, takes still the time, and it took 2, 3 months, (inaudible)...

LY: He was a very good man. He helped a lot - .

WH: He taught you.

SY: Yah.

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

13

LY: Yah. He was very good. The only thing, also, we felt bad. My husband, when he was hiding, he had trouble with his eyes, ophthalmology,- (inaudible) -

WH: Hemorrhage in the eye.

LY: He...lost one eye.

WH: Isn't it hard to work with jewelry, in the stones?

LY: It was very hard.

SY: No, no, it was not...(inaudible).

WH: ...were you in the same place all these years?

SY: Yah...for 25 years.

LY: Yah, it was lucky. He was a good man. But he was lucky because he didn't know anything. He opened the business, and he knew nothing...

WH: Where was the place?

SY: ...40th Street...near the library...

WH: And you worked in the same place. Did you think, as you were working...did you ever think of changing your job?

SY: Not really...

WH: Why? For what reason?

SY: The money was good. The man was good. And the business was mine.

WH: When you say it was 'yours' you mean, - were you a partner?

SY: No, no I wasn't...I mean, I didn't have somebody has to bother me.

WH: You didn't have a boss.

SY: No...

WH: So you were working by yourself there.

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

14

SY: Like I was working for myself. Number one. Number two, my eyes didn't allow me to go too much around.

LY: He was scared, he was scared to go around because of the eyes. They was not so bad then, now they start to - .

WH: Could you read?

SY: I read, I write.

WH: ...how long did you live in the Bronx?

SY: Five years.

WH: Then where did you move?

SY: Forest Hills...we left Forest Hills in 1983.

WH: To move here, to be close to Sammy.

LY: The children...for five years, I was fighting it. We didn't want it...he didn't want to move. Because - we are like this in Salonika: where they stay in one house, they stay forever. (inaudible). First of all, the house was too uncomfortable, big house, I couldn't manage anymore. Aggravation. And this and this. He used to go to work, (inaudible) he didn't see the aggravation come with that. And, being no more younger, I say, and I wanted- he was sick, 2, 3 times. I want somebody (inaudible) my sister, where is my sister? Concentration camp. Where is my mother? Where - to whom to call, to help me. To friends? Friends, a lot. But you can't - but I say, 'At least I have- ' - (inaudible) showed me a lease, and like this, I went into it. For 5 years he was against me. And one day, I went to the doctors, I said, 'Maybe he's right.' My pressure was so high! After the war my pressure was high. And I say to the doctor, this and this, and he said, 'Why the pressure so high?' I said, '(inaudible)...he doesn't want to move.' He says to me, 'Look, somebody has to - give up...only one, or the other. So, somebody doesn't want, you have to say 'yes' that's it' (inaudible). And I say, 'You're right doctor.' So I was very strong in this matter, when the doctor told me this. I said, 'That's it! If you want to stay, stay. I come to Great Neck.'

WH: In Forest Hills, you had your own people, people from Salonika.

LY: No...we have good friends, only Ashkenazi, no Sephardic.

WH: ...in the time since you came to Great Neck, were you able to make new friends here?

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

15

LY: No.

WH: The people here were not friendly?

LY: No.

SY: No, they're friendly...they are polite...they don't need us, because they are the old people, they are not family. First of all, everyone has family...they don't need us because they have family, they have friends from the old, and they don't need any more.

LY: They will start again with us?...we are lonely, we are very lonely. We are very lonely. I try the best. I try, and- because somebody say because we're older, not to make a quick friends. I am, I make friends in ten minutes. I stood here, - nothing.

WH: ...when you came here in the early years, was there any organization of Jews from Salonika?

SY: No...was this Brotherhood...the Jewish Brotherhood of America.

WH: Can you tell me about this...who was the Jewish Brotherhood?

SY: In this community, there are Jews from (?Totten?), Salonika, and a few from other places.

WH: This was here already, before you came to America?

SY: Much before, sure. They had a big shul in the Bronx. Very big...Concourse...on Morris Avenue and 170th.

LY: Before the war, many Jewish Salonika, they came here...because...they didn't want to go to the army.

WH: In World War One?

LY: Before...

WH: So they formed a group.

SY: They formed a Jewish Community.

WH: When was the first time you went to this group, this Brotherhood.

SY: Soon as we came in...the Bronx...

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

16

WH: This Brotherhood, was it a social organization?

SY: Social organization...

WH: ...did you go to the parties?

LY: No, never.

WH: Not even in the Bronx?

LY: No...we didn't go because there were no kosher.

WH: Through the years, when you lived in the Bronx or Forest Hills, your friends were always Ashkenazim?

LY: All Ashkenazi. We used to go to the Young Israel parties.

WH: Isn't it hard, if you're friends with people who are Ashkenazim, isn't it hard to explain it to them? I mean, you don't have the same things in common...

LY: We have it immediately common. I don't know why. Immediately...our children were in the yeshiva...and we met in shul...

WH: Where did your children go to yeshiva?

SY: Chofetz Chaim...

WH: You're friends of Rabbi Ginzburg...

LY: I used to walk a lot with his - .

WH: ...I studied there for two years...?

LY: You know what happened? When G-d wanted to help you, I believe a lot, He help us...in this time, were not yeshivots, too many, just the Chofetz Chaim (inaudible) and they didn't know, because we didn't know the language, so they went for - three years, they went to public school, the children...one day I...met...Ashkenazi, we were very friendly, and she say, 'Why you send your children to public school? I say, 'Where I have to send them? Where is your son?' 'In this yeshiva.' I say, 'I don't have so much money to send them so much to the yeshiva.' She said, 'Look,' she gives me the Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim. 'Go there, talk to them about it.'...and I went to the Yeshiva...he took the two children for one. I pay for one child, - not for two.

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

17

WH: ...how were you able to save up enough for the house...

LY: My brother helping me a lot.

WH: ...he was a stamp dealer...

LY: ...(the children) and after, they went to the college...and Albert come one day...

WH: The older one?

LY: The older one. So, and one day...there was a Shabbaton...and a girl came...and they met and that there he start to go with this girl, and from New Jersey, no car, he used to go by bus. So one day he called me he says, 'Mother, I'm no coming home.' He was just finished college. He says, '(inaudible) because the bus pass already, and I don't know how to go.' I said to my husband, 'I worry. No good,' I says to my husband...in short, the mother call me one day, she says, 'You know, they love each other, they will - ' 21 which are they. 21.

SY: We were not prepared for this.

LY: And I start to cry. 'Don't worry mother.' I say, 'How you will manage?' 'Don't worry, I will work, I will be - ' And he start to teach. And the girl - just the same age. And I went to Rabbi (?) crying. I say, 'I was new in America, I don't know which family it is. I don't know the girl, I don't know nothing! How will he live!' And, 'Don't worry. He's not stupid, your son, he will be okay, Mrs. Yehaskel, I will take care that we see what kind of family it is,' (inaudible) So, thank G-d.

WH: What kind of family was it?

LY: The mother came from the - the father, from the concentration camp. She lost a rela- but he lost everyone - .

End of Tape #1, side B.

Tape #2, side A

LY: So soon after 6 months, they married, and for us was also difficult. We knew Ashkenazi people a lot, but - .

WH: Family is already - .

LY: Different. Very difficult. Very, very, different. But they were so nice people, you can't believe it.

SY: We did have nice people in Forest Hills, and Magda also, - (inaudible) a good family.

WH: And he's religious?

SY: Very religious.

LY: Five children...he's a chemist...he walks 40 minutes to go to shul...the thing I don't like, alright he's used to the walk, now we can't go any more for Shabbas there because Solomon he can't walk so much.

WH: ...Sammy works at Queens College, and works with hands, with the blinds.

LY: Right...but he works too hard...I'm not happy about it...

WH: But once you live here in this community, it's a very expensive community.

SY: That's why we are not pleased...on top of this, - .

LY: ...oh, I forgot to tell you.

SY: About the bank, they have a burglary over there. They cleaned us up. - we have the books, a stamp collection, about \$200,000, gold, and this and the other - everything...

LY: ...what we have to do, we scared in the house - so, a bank, we keep a box in a bank...all the pictures are gone...souvenirs, everything...Columbia Bank, Forest Hills...it was a big shock, we come here in America. A big shock! And today make me - so much - because we couldn't believe...

WH: ...you didn't have insurance...you didn't know...you lived through the war, right, and you believed that - you said to me before, that when you were by the boat, right, that it was in G-d's hands that you shouldn't go, right? The same thing here. This is also in G-d's hands. G-d wanted it that way. Maybe G-d wants to teach a person a lesson that money isn't everything, like you said.

SY: No, no, I agree with you. I agree with you 100%.

WH: ...when you think of what happened to the Jews in the concentration camp...how can we explain something like that in terms of G-d?

SY: Well, Shabbat...the Rabbi said (needs translation)...it's unbelievable, unbelievable, that the Jews lost so much faith in G-d. (needs translation)...(inaudible)...

WH: I understand what you're saying, but you know that there are Orthodox Jews, I think suffered more in the Holocaust than the non-religious ones, because, in America, at least, we know that from Europe, most of the Jews who missed the Holocaust, who didn't get killed, who were here. Most of those who came were not religious. And most of the religious ones who stayed in Europe during the Holocaust, they died. So, it's a question of 'Eov,' right? (needs translation). In other words, more Orthodox, more religious, believing, pious Jews, suffered than non-religious Jews...

SY: ...the Jews from Greece, who came here, there is a community now. From Salonika...all these Jews, the shul is, in one day, for a couple of hours, the shul is full. Very good Jews. Very good. Maybe a handful of them, will come on Shabbas...

WH: Did you ever ask, 'Why did G-d punish religious people during the Holocaust?'

LY: Many times. And I cannot – I can't find the answer...we used to go to the – Community...to ask, the first to come from the concentration camp, we find one day there, and we ask. And we said, 'What happen?' We were thinking, slowly, slowly, they will come, and there with family, somebody will come, some – and I ask. And he says, 'What are you thinking? Everybody they burn already. They were put into the oven.' I said to myself, 'You poor man. You came from the concentration crazy. He's no what he says. What he's thinking.' We didn't want ourselves to believe this happened! We didn't wanted then until this day. And after this man was the first, and then another and another...

SY: She thought the first man who talked made it up!

WH: He's crazy!

LY: He's crazy! (inaudible). Today, you don't have the answer...

SY: ...babies...the son of my sister, one year old (clack!)...

WH: And when you think of that, what do you say?

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

20

SY: What can you say?...(inaudible)...

WH: So how can you stay religious when you ask that question?

SY: I don't ask this question. You cannot have these questions. There's no answer to it. There is no answer to it!...you don't ask.

LY: ...the Rabbi of the Jewish Center, Rabbi Gruenblatt...he says, 'There's no answer for this. I believe there's no answer.' Still, I say to myself, maybe G-d has the answers. G-d is the only one who has the answer, he wanted it like this, and this is, because I believe it. I saw so many miracles in life today, miracles, really...

WH: ...what about the other miracle, the fact that it's not a miracle, it's what your husband said, a million babies, the children.

LY: My sister, the one 9 years old, the other 12 (inaudible)...they didn't come back.

WH: When you ask that question, you still believe?

LY: Many times. It's just – many times on Shabbas, we were talking, 'How can we - ?' But I say that G-d wanted (inaudible). He's the boss of it. G-d wanted it (inaudible). But something made me – (inaudible) feel very upset. I say, these people...like babies, young people...they were sweeter than – 'how come?' My mother used to say, a proverb in Spanish, 'There is a fire, there are dry things, and fresh things. (inaudible) There are fresh trees, and dry trees. From the dry trees, put fire. The other – dry, - dry trees. But near the dry, there are the fresh. Only the fresh will perish.'

LY: Understand what he mean?

SY: Now, during the Holocaust...these people, they didn't deserve this kind of dying. Of end...

WH: But shouldn't G-d be able to separate one from the other?

SY: There was a fire, they were near, they have to perish also.

WH: Maybe they shouldn't have been near the fire...tell me, you're close with the children now?

LY: Yes...

WH: Do you think that the fact that you are survivors...do you think it affected your children in any way?...the way you brought them up.

SY: No.

LY: ...I have friends, no family any more. So with the friends, we used to be all together. When we came in America, the children, they don't have the opportunity to go some place to sleep. Some place – an aunt, some place to grandma. They didn't have this opportunity. They miss it. They missing it – So, they missing, for them, was different the life like the other America.

WH: Do you think you tried to protect them more than most parents, because they were your only family, really?

SY: No, because I was like this. I was very attached to the children. Very...I didn't even – they were 12 years old, already (inaudible) when they used to go in public school, before the Yeshivas...and at 4 o'clock they used to go to Hebrew School. I used to take him by the hand, I don't leave him a minute alone. I was scared, maybe from the war I was like this. I was a scared to leave my children.

SY: Our affection was, so much, so much...we spend our retirement for the children, because we didn't know here, In America they use the insurance for the old age, there are savings for the old age, all these things, we spend – we put in the bank, for our two sons...

LY: They didn't missing anything. They missing family, Grandparents. But for everything, we (inaudible) I don't leave it to missing anything. Books...

SY: We spend in different ways. Gifts, presents, cash and this and this. Now, we should be in winter in – for a month in Florida...we cannot do it. Once a year. I don't know what it means to make two vacations a year. I make one. Which is a treatment and a vacation. To go to Israel to go to the (inaudible). and I need this treatment very bad, and this year I didn't go, which this year, I made more than ever than ever before...and I cannot do it...

LY: I told you a million times, and I tell it to Willie now. It is a mistake what he says. We give to the children with love. We used to go trips, in Paris, and this and this, to buy for me, nothing. For my husband, nothing. For the children. The grandchildren. For Magda. For Sarah. For Albert. For Sammy. We used to give a lot. This is true. But with a heart...(inaudible).

WH: You're not sorry, right, because you love your children, right?

SY: NO!! We are not sorry. How can you be sorry about this?

LY: He shouldn't have mentioned – he shouldn't have mentioned. Every time when he mention I say, 'No, you are wrong. Thank G-d, we could afford, and we starting to give to the children. Thank G-d,' I say, a million times...(inaudible).

WH: ...in general, what you have, all the money can't buy you. You know why? Because you have beautiful grandchildren, and you have lovely children. I talked to people who have a lot of money, and they are very unhappy. You know why? Because their children married non-Jews...and if G-d forbid that would happen, what good would all the money do?

LY: Nothing.

WH: ...do you think that what happened to the Jews in Europe, do you think it can happen here, in America?

SY: Yes and no. Yes, because the (inaudible) of the Holocaust will be repeating in 25 years, in my way of thinking...I hope not...because all the survivors, whether went in the concentration camps, or in my case, were hiding, or fighting, all these survivors in 25 years, will not be here. And, I don't think that the young generation will be so much interested in fighting like they are now.

WH: You don't think that you can pass this on to your children, this concern.

SY: We talk about it with the children...we take them to the commemoration every year...to our shul, to our community...Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood...108th Street.

LY: From the people who be from Salonika. And we go every year...they were 10 year old I start to tell them.

WH: ...do you think that if people will forget, then it could happen again...

LY: It can happen, sure.

WH: ...do you think that Israel will survive?

LY: It will survive - .

SY: I'm afraid.

WH: ...did you feel that the Greek people, were they anti-Semitic?

LY: Very, very, very anti-Semitic.

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

23

SY: Today, yes. Why? No life in Salonika. We didn't feel so much. But they were jealous for the Jewish. (inaudible) was prosperous. Today, show this article from the New Jewish Digest...(inaudible).

WH: But for political reasons, or for religious reasons.

SY: No, political. It's the sanctuary of the international - .

WH: P.L.O. – the terrorist.

LY: That's it. He knows.

WH: How about when you meet Greek Americans here in America?

LY: We don't meet Greeks here.

End of Tape #2, side A.

Tape #2, side B.

WH: Do think that they dislike Jews more than whites, or do you think that Jesse Jackson is not the usual?

SY: ...we were afraid to talk about Jesse Jackson.

WH: We were afraid.

SY: During the elections. Because he's anti-Jew. (inaudible) if, G-d forbid, it would be one of this or Democratic, with – Dukakis. We were afraid...we were afraid about the result of the elections. Because we know what would happen to the Jewish – to Israel, let's say.

WH: Bush is better?

SY: I mean, he's not a friend of Israel. The politics force him to be pro-Israel. Even Reagan, because they need Israel, that's all.

WH: Do you vote?

LY: Of course.

WH: Do you usually vote Republican or Democrat?

SY: No, we are not. We choose. We think - .

WH: Individual, the person.

SY: Right...we vote for Bush because Jesse Jackson was - .

WH: Otherwise you'd vote Democrat?

SY: We vote also for Reagan, because we thought that Reagan would be a better - .

LY: ...I remember, I never forgot, I said to my husband, 'Never I'm going to Greece any more.' And, there were two Greek together, the one of the hotel, let's say, and another one. He says, 'This dirty Jew! Still they come here! These dirty Jew!' When I hear this, I say, 'I'm not staying in the hotel.' And my friend says, 'Look Lucy, what you can do?' What I have to do? I have to hear this word after the war, I have to hear this 'dirty Jews?' – (inaudible) I didn't do any more to this hotel..

SY: (inaudible) what counts is the head of the government. That what counts. He is anti-Semitic or not.

WH: Papandreou is anti-Semite.

LY: He is.

WH: Do you think that in this country...the Blacks, the Puerto Ricans, do you think that they feel maybe more sympathy for Jews?

SY: No.

LY: They don't know things like this. They don't know. What is Jew, they don't know. They hear, but they did not know.

SY: In Greece was too much jealousy, but no open anti-Semitism.

WH: How come not open...?

SY: I don't know why...

WH: ...do you like Nixon?

SY: Nixon was for Israel.

WH: What about Watergate...do you think it was it a terrible thing?

SY: It was a terrible thing.

WH: What about the Viet Nam War?

SY: The Viet Nam War was not a good war, a good thought from the administration – there was only one administration.

WH: It was a mistake also.

SY: It was a mistake.

LY: ...if you see how much I was in this time. The children were in college.

WH: You were worried that they would be drafted.

LY: I was very worried. Thank G-d they got good marks, because many people of Salonika they went to Viet Nam. Many...I had a very bad time...

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

26

- SY: What we do with Viet Nam? If you say now, South America, we have to send (inaudible) because you need good neighbor. You need good. Panama, and this and all this, but Viet Nam - .
- WH: Do you think that if there was a Holocaust here, do you think that your children would have a chance of surviving?
- LY: Yes.
- WH: Why?
- LY: Because America is not Salonika. It is a big country. You can go wherever you want. You can fly, you can - .
- SY: You could not hide in Salonika...
- LY: Here you have the chance. Very much chance. And, in the end, I suffer too much, and I am no-so much, but I am happy, the children, they were in America, they have the education because in Salonika they were lost. They will be lost.
- WH: When you think over the years...what gives you the greatest accomplishment?
- LY: To see the children.
- SY: To educate the children.
- WH: ...and what do you regret most? What are you most sorry about?
- LY: To lost all my family. I regret.
- WH: And since you came to America, what do you most regret? What decision?
- LY: No, I don't regret the money, don't regret the Greece, - I regret I lost all my family.
- SY: We have to repeat now the same story, we are completely alone.
- LY: But still I thank G-d I am alive...but we don't have nobody. This is the worse. What we have to do?...
- WH: (your grandchildren) do you baby-sit?

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0000

27

LY: Sometimes...I go with pleasure...but the worse is, I was thinking sometime, what can I do to make the life more pleasant for my husband and me. I can't tell you. I can't tell you. Many times he say...he say, 'at my age, it is over. To be alone (inaudible)..

End of Tape #2, side B.

End of interview.