

MARGULES, Lily
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Interviewed on April 20, 1992
One audiocassette

Abstract

Anthony Di Iorio interviews Lily Margules about her family's experiences during the Holocaust. Her mother worked as a dentist and her father was a pharmacist. She describes three layers of Jewish society in her village of Vilna; young Zionists who wanted to make Hebrew a living language, assimilated Jews who spoke Russian and Polish, and people who believed that Yiddish should be the language of the Jewish people. She says that the people who spoke Yiddish represented the largest population, and she says that she learned Yiddish in the ghetto. Her mother died of cancer in 1939, and her family moved from Vilna to Soły [Salos]. On September 23, 1943 the ghetto in Soły [Salos] was liquidated and she was sent with her sister to the labor camp Dünawerke and her father was sent to the Kaiserwald concentration camp. The last time she saw her father was at the Kaiserwald camp. She and her sister survived the labor camp and stayed at a DP camp in Italy after the war. Her uncle secured papers for Lily and her sister that stated they were Protestants, and they immigrated to Buenos Aires, Argentina in June 1948. She married and had two sons; her sister married and had three children. Lily came to the United States on October 30, 1956. Her sister remained in Buenos Aires.

Transcript
Tape One, Side A

Anthony: I am Anthony Di Iorio and I am at the home of Mrs. Lily Margules in the Bronx, New York. I am here on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to interview Mrs. Margules about her family's experiences during the Holocaust. Good morning.

Lily: Good morning.

Anthony: Perhaps we can begin by, since we have already interviewed you before--we know a lot about you, when you were born--perhaps you can describe what it was like growing up in your parents' home during the 1930's.

Lily: My parents were a young professional couple and as a child, I and my sister had a very comfortable life. We had a nanny who took care of us because my mother was a dentist and she was working. It was really a very pastoral, pleasant life. We were good taken care of; we were sent to a private school, we took ballet and music, piano lessons. My parents wanted to inject into us as much culture as possible so we used to go to children's plays in the theater and to the operas. Summertime we used to go to have very nice vacations where we were swimming in the River Vilija. We had little friends; we had--. Most of the people, the little girls and boys we associated, were in the same class so it was a very sheltered childhood. We actually were quite happy with our life.

Anthony: Now, you had a sister?

- Lily:** Yes, I had a younger sister.
- Anthony:** What was her name?
- Lily:** Her name was Raya. Hebrew name, Rachel. She is four years younger than I. As two little girls, sometimes we used to fight but she was a very pretty, vivacious girl. We got along quite well except that she was more spoiled than I. Like from the beginning, I was told that I have to be a professional. It was not--my parents didn't ask. It was decided that I have to go to medical school to be a doctor. For her, was decided that she has to marry somebody well-off, a good provider, a handsome husband, children and she just had to be like a lady of the house, a hostess. Just looking pretty and behaving.
- Anthony:** Is that something she wanted to be?
- Lily:** Well, she accepted this role from the beginning. She never was trying to have good grades. She was just passing and she liked the ballet, she liked to play the piano. Also she had her little friends and really she was like mentally prepared to a very pleasant life, being very spoiled by both parents and the nanny.
- Anthony:** What about you? Did you really want to be a doctor?
- Lily:** It was not a question that I want to be a doctor. It was just put before me that *fait accompli* and I just had to be and--. Also, I liked to study. As strange as it sounds today, I really--I was very interested in reading. When I was six years old, I was introduced to books and I was a voracious reader. I was very interested in a lot of things. Also in school I was a very good student and it used to come very easy to me. I didn't have to study a lot. When I had to write an essay I could write it in two minutes. I used to write a few essays for my little friends that had difficulties. I was not crazy about math but somehow I managed and I used to be a teacher's pet.
- Anthony:** I noticed your report card and it was quite good.
- Lily:** Thank you.
- Anthony:** Now your little sister went to the same school?
- Lily:** Yes. We went to a private school.
- Anthony:** Was this a Jewish school?
- Lily:** This was a private Jewish school that only Jewish children went to there. We were off on Saturdays and Sunday was a school day but all the instructions were in Polish. We also had two times a week Hebrew but everything was taught in Polish.
- Anthony:** What was the language in your household?

Lily: When I was a little girl, my parents spoke Russian because when they went to the university and before I was born, Vilna was occupied by Russia and the young people, at this time, spoke Russian. Then when I started to get older, my father one time came from work and said we have to speak Polish. The child will have to go to a Polish school and she is still talking Russian. Then they were starting to speak Polish but when their friends came and when they are talking between themselves, Russian was the language that they spoke.

Anthony: Did they speak any other languages between Russian and Polish?

Lily: There was a Jewish paper that used to come. My mother didn't read Jewish but my father read the Jewish paper. I imagine that my mother spoke Jewish. But when she spoke with her friends or her family, it was mostly in Russian. Do you know the Jewish population had three layers of society? There were these people that were assimilated Jews and they mainly spoke Russian and Polish. There were the people that were young Zionists and they sent their children to Hebrew School and they were trying to make Hebrew a living language. The third layer of the Jewish society was people that believe that Yiddish is the language of the Jewish people. There were very famous "Ragymnasium" [?] (88) that were taught only in Jewish and the children were sent to this school. They were taught Yiddish and they were speaking between themselves also in Yiddish. There were like three layers of Jewish society. Unfortunately, my parents were very assimilated and they, because of their professional background, felt that the Russian revolution and the Russian language is kind of salvation for all people. They believed in all the ideals that sounded very nice on paper but unfortunately fell apart later.

Anthony: So you would describe your parents as being Socialists at that time?

Lily: No, they were not Socialist, I mean maybe as young students. As young students they believed in all the revolutionary ideals. I remember that my father used to just ask me from time to time to sing the International. I had a good voice and even when the Russian came, his biggest pleasure was just when I was singing the International for him. He believed in those ideas, equality, was very idealistic about it.

Anthony: Definitely not a Stalinist but--.

Lily: No, no, no. Was very idealistic because at this time, when he was a student, all those ideas of Lenin and Trotsky were very much in the mind of the young students who believed very deeply that the oppressed people have to unite and everybody has the same right. Religion shouldn't imprison people. So they were very idealistic and very much for equal rights for everybody.

Anthony: Would you describe your parents as being secular, more secular than religious?

Lily: Very secular, very secular. As a matter of fact, I didn't know that I was Jewish until I went to school. It was a very hard experience for me because a lot of people that I went to school, the children, were from religious families. When I went to school the first day, my nanny prepared me my lunch. It was a Kaiser roll with butter and ham. I

had no idea that there's something wrong. When I opened the lunch and there are children, who can be very cruel, saw my lunch; they said, you are not Jewish. I said, yes I am Jewish. I mean it was like a revelation for me that it came out that I was Jewish. I started to cry. I didn't want to eat. They said to me, do you know that Jewish children are not allowed to eat ham and do you know that Jewish children are not allowed to rip paper or grab something on a Saturday. When my nanny came to pick me up, I was in tears. When I came, she called my mother. We sat down and I told her the whole story. She told me I'm Jewish, we are not religious, but we are Jews and you are going to Jewish school with Jewish children. I had a very good friend of mine and every Friday night, they used to light candles. When I went there and I saw that they are lighting candles, I was very impressed with the whole dinner and everything that was--. I came home and I said to my mother, I was told that God will punish us, we don't light candles. I was so distressed that my mother went out and bought two candlesticks and she started to light candles on Friday just to pacify me. Because it was a revelation for me. I started to ask her because I never knew my grandparents. Then she told me that her father who passed away at a young age, was a religious Jew, was not fanatic with a big white beard. Then I kind of was researching my background and I was very impressed and this is how I come to know my heritage.

Anthony: Did you speak any other languages besides Polish?

Lily: Yes, I speak Russian. I speak Spanish, Castellan Spanish. I speak Yiddish. I used to speak and write a very good German. Even I used to write the Gothic German but I have a mental block now and I just--I get very upset even when I hear the language even spoken so I don't count German.

Anthony: When you were young, growing up in Vilna, could you speak Yiddish?

Lily: No, no. I learned to speak Yiddish when I was brought into ghetto. Because when I was brought into ghetto, I met there people that if I would live in Vilna a hundred years, I would never meet those kind of people. I grew up in a very sheltered and restricted little society. My peers spoke Polish, only Polish. But when I came to the ghetto, I met all kinds of people; I started to mingle and I learned Yiddish. I know the alphabet because I was taught Hebrew as a child when I went to school, but I never learned to read Yiddish. I also, there was a time that I know quite well, White Russian, but not anymore.

Anthony: Earlier you divided the Jewish population of Vilna into three groups?

Lily: Yes.

Anthony: Which would you say was the most numerous of the three?

Lily: It's very hard for me to say. I would say the most numerous were the Yiddish-speaking people. This was the most numerous. This was actually the working-class language. There were a lot of very, very poor people, Jewish people, in Vilna that lived in basements and had a very hard life. They were speaking Yiddish. Those people who

were assimilated and those people that spoke Hebrew were more elitist and they were fewer.

Anthony: Minority?

Lily: Minority, yes.

Anthony: Your nanny, you mentioned your nanny. Your nanny was not Jewish?

Lily: No, she was a Polish girl that was a--. The day that my mother brought me from the hospital, she was there already. She was brought over because my mother was a working dentist, yes, she was a working woman. She was a young girl at this time and my mother kind of--. My mother was a very good heart person. She kind of taught her manners and she kind of took her into the family. She was never outside. She was always a member and she was very, very fond of my mother. After she became a member of the family, she kind of took over. I tell you a little instance. Every morning, she used to dress me up, very, very nice, even with gloves. We used to go to a park. The park was called Katajenka. Over there the other nannies were bringing their little children from parents that were in the same class and all the nannies used to brag about, oh my lady did this and my lady, they went to this theater and they had this and all--it was like kind of a competition between how the children were dressed. When my nanny decided that I needed a new dress; she didn't go to my mother or my father to ask. She went to a store where we had a credit, she chose the material. She went to a dressmaker, she chose the style. The dressmaker knew, already, that she is reliable. After she did it, she also went and bought me a new pair of shoes, a new pair of gloves; she came and she said to my mother, you know, I did today, this and this and this. My mother would never say no to her but when my father got the bills and he used to question her, she used to say, what do you want me to go with your little girl--like a pauper to the park? My father would never, never speak against her. She was just like the boss. She knew that she has to take care of her little girls later on--in the beginning, just me. She knew that she had to take care of my mother and she was a part of the family.

Anthony: What kind of house did you live in?

Lily: I lived in an apartment house. I was born in an apartment house on Ludwisarska Four. My mother's office was right there. She had an office and she had a waiting room. Then there were quarters, living quarters. But when my sister was born, the apartment became too small. We moved to Pilsaskero, where we lived until 1939.

Anthony: That was also an apartment?

Lily: This was an apartment. We lived on the second floor. It was a very nice apartment with a balcony. They were very nice quarters. My mother also had an office and there was a waiting room. Also there was a room for my nanny. It had two entrances. One was the entrance that you went into the kitchen and one was a front entrance that the patient used to come. It was beautiful furnished. When I was trying to furnish my house--when I married and I settled down--I always was trying to imitate whatever I

saw. Like we had a grandfather clock and I had a grandfather clock. We had a piano and I didn't have furniture yet but I bought a piano, the first thing we bought a piano. I always--even the coloring--if you look at my apartment, this is the coloring that I was trying to imitate

Anthony: Very interesting. So that was the yardstick by which you measured good taste?

Lily: Good taste, yes. My mother had a very good taste. I never saw my mother without a hat and a pair of gloves. She was a very good looking woman, a beautiful woman and on Fridays was her day off. Before I started school, when I was a little girl, my biggest pleasure was Fridays. Because in the morning, she used to dress up and we used to go and do errands, whatever she had to do on her day off. Strange men on the street used to tip their hat to my mother. I was very proud that this is my mother. It was a real--like I was admiring her, not only because she was very good but because she was very attractive. When I remember my mother, I always see her in the white doctor coat, this is how I remember her or when she was walking on the street dressed up with the hat and the gloves and men just tipping their hat to her.

Anthony: Your parents wanted you to be like her?

Lily: I don't know if they wanted me to be like her but it was taken for granted that I have to be in the medical profession. I mean it was no question asked; it was just, this is how I was groomed to be.

Anthony: Did you live in a mainly Jewish neighborhood or was it a mixed neighborhood?

Lily: It was a mixed neighborhood. We lived nearby from the medical faculty of the university. I remember the riots, it started at the synagogue riots and it was very hard for the Jew to go to a medical university, a medical college. In Poland, it was different. When you finished high school, you didn't go to college. You go right away to university and you had to make up your mind what you wanted to study. Now here, here you go to college and then you go to medical school or to law school. Over there, it was different. It was very hard for a Jew to go in and study medicine. From the whole school that I went to, it was a private school, just one person was accepted per year for a period of two or three years. So those few medical students that were in the university studying medicine, Jewish, were really persecuted. There was a time that they were not allowed to sit. They were assigned special seats on the left. They rebelled and they were standing up and they were taking notes during the lecture. I met some people after liberation that were medical students in Vilna and they were telling me about those times. I, myself, remember that there were riots and my mother came running to school to pick me up because she was afraid that I should be assaulted by those people that were just rioting nearby where we were living.

Anthony: Do you know why your parents sent you to a private Jewish school?

Lily: My parents wanted me to have the best education and this was a very fine school, one of the best. I wish I could give my children the kind of education that I and my sister had as children. The professors were very educated; they were highly dedicated.

Most of the students were motivated. There were some children that went there just to please their parents and tried to get away but we had movies, we had a chemical laboratory, we had a physics laboratory; we had field trips; we had a gym, gym was important; we had all kinds of visual aids to make the education more interesting. Also when we had French Revolution, they were teaching us about French Revolution. It was not that they told us about Robespierre and Marat, but we had a mock judgment. There was a judge assigned; there was somebody who was Marat, who was Robespierre and somebody that was just from the people. The history, all of a sudden, became alive. I just recently met a friend of mine that I didn't see for many, many years and we started to talk. He said he was amazed how alive the French Revolution became when we were students. Every class had a school paper. We had to write articles; the class paper was coming out every month. The best article from the class paper was put in the school paper. Those articles were amazing. This is--the atmosphere was very conducive to bring up an intelligent human being. This is the reason I was sent there.

Anthony: How would you characterize relations between Jews and non-Jews in Vilna?

Lily: There were a lot of anti-Semites. I think that I told in the previous interview that my father was really having a very hard time when he went for an exam. You see, my father was working in a pharmacy. This was a pharmacy from --a very big pharmacy that was from the city pharmacy. Every worker that worked had a kind of insurance. When he needed a prescription, he went to this pharmacy. It was a very big outfit; it was called "Casa Horich" [phonetic] (324). It was like a big insurance for the workers. From this pharmacy was employed a lot of pharmacists, only three Jewish pharmacists were employed. In 1935, those three pharmacists were told that they don't have enough education; they have to go and pass a test. They cannot do just a simple pharmacist; they have to have Masters in pharmacy. It was called Magister der Pharmazie. Here was my father, a young man, with a wife and two children, and he had to go to work and also study. I remember that he used to go and dig up all kinds of herbs and study all kinds of things. He used to close himself and study whatever, he just had a chance. Then he went for the test. The test was in the medical faculty of the university. Unfortunately there was a professor there and his name was Macheski, one of the biggest anti-Semites. He passed the written test and then he passed the oral test. As he was coming out, he asked him, by the way, what is the chemical formula for carbonated water? My father was so unnerved that he got a mental block and he didn't answer him. He didn't pass the test. So he had to study again and he had to travel to Warsaw. He went there and he passed the test there. I remember when he sent us a telegram, "I passed!" and it was one of the biggest joys for us. But it didn't take long and all three Jewish pharmacists were told that they had to go. They didn't want a Jew to have a civil service job.

Anthony: So even though he got the Masters and he qualified, he still lost?

Lily: Yes, he lost. Then we had like a family pow-wow. He lost the job. We didn't know what to do. So it was decided that everybody will help him and he will have to buy a pharmacy because he couldn't get a job. When he went to buy a pharmacy, he found a pharmacy in a place called Soty [Salos], S-o-l-y. As a Jew, he couldn't buy the

pharmacy so somehow he found a Polish pharmacist whose name was Vishnefski. He gave him a sum of money, this Vishnefski bought the pharmacy and my father was the owner and he worked there. This Vishnefski was not even there. This was in 1938.

Anthony: That's when he lost the shop?

Lily: He lost his job in 1936 or 1937. For a year or a year and a half, he didn't work. There were a lot of anti-Semites.

Anthony: Did you notice whether there was any difference between Poles and Lithuanians, for example?

Lily: Well, actually, I didn't get in touch during my childhood too much with Lithuanians. I started to know Lithuanians when, in 1940, Russia took over and it then became Lithuania. So for a year, you know, but... also I got in touch with Lithuanians when they were guarding the ghetto. They were very tall, the policemen. We used to call them "aniterate" [?] (391), this how tall they were. Lithuanians were also very anti-Semitic, very anti-Semitic, especially those who were sympathizers with the Germans.

Anthony: If you had to compare the two, would you say that one was worse than the other? Lithuanian anti-Semitism or Polish?

Lily: I would say they were just--both of them were bad. It is hard to compare.

Anthony: Earlier, you mentioned that there were some anti-Semitic pogroms?

Lily: They were actually not pogroms. They were riots between the students, between the Polish students and the Jewish students and the university.

Anthony: But you were protected from all that because you were still going to the Jewish school?

Lily: I was protected because, first of all I was a little girl and I was going to a Jewish school.

Anthony: How about your mother? Who were her clients?

Lily: My mother had a lot of non-Jewish clients. I remember that well-to-do Polish landowners used to come to her and they used to come with a horse and buggy. They used to come like the driver used to sit in the front of the house and wait for them. They were very tall, young men, middle-aged men. A lot of them used to come with boots and they used to bend down and kiss my mother's hand. Especially in the springtime, they used to bring her like strawberries or fresh things. My mother was a very good dentist and she had a very good reputation that she had a very light hand, they used to say, for extraction of the teeth. She used to make very nice false teeth. She had a dental mechanic that was working with her. Those people used to come for miles to her because they used to like her work. Of course, I mentioned that they trusted her if they came to her. They used to sometimes bring their wives, children to attend her. But there was one day that my mother used to do a lot of pro bono work.

Any poor Jewish or non-Jewish people knew that if they have a toothache, they can ring the bell and they can come in. She would just help them and cure them and do whatever; she would treat them like the most expensive patients and she wouldn't charge them. She just had this obligation to do good. As a matter of fact, when I was in concentration camps, I met a few people that said to me, you know, I know you. I used to see you in your mother's office. Sometimes I would sneak in. I used to pretend that I am a helper. I would just stay in the corner and look. Apparently they saw me. You know that your mother didn't charge me at all. We're poor people and she was just like an angel to us. One of the women worked in the kitchen and she used to help me because my mother helped her when she was a little girl and she had a toothache. This is my recollection about the--.

Anthony: A very-loved mother?

Lily: Yes, a very good person.

Anthony: The poorest classes and the richest classes?

Lily: Yes. She always--and I remember her telling me if you see somebody that puts a hand out, you have to put something in it. We always had a few boxes in our house. One box was for orphans, one blue box was to buy land for Israel, there was Keren Kayemet. It was a Hebrew organization and when we used to get allowance, we had to put a few pennies into this box. When I got older and I started to think about Israel and all the things, I was very much interested in it. I was very pleased that even my mother was not a Zionist but she had the sense that you have to help; that you have to kind of go out and start to think about your own land if you are to be a whole person. So charity I learned in my house.

Anthony: Charity begins at home?

Lily: Yes, it really began with me at home.

Anthony: Now 1939 was a very bad year for your family?

Lily: A very bad year.

Anthony: Before the war?

Lily: Yes, yes. I never saw my mother sick. Then in 1938, she went to a doctor and she was diagnosed as having cancer. She was operated on in a very good hospital. She was opened and closed. The professor that operated on her called my father and said to him; unfortunately your wife has a month or two to live. She has cancer of the ovary that it metastasized. Your two little girls, you have to think about it and you have to say mentally goodbye to her. Of course, it was a very big tragedy because my parents--they met as students and they had a very good relationship. My father put my mother on a pedestal and he couldn't believe it because she was never sick. We were not told about it. We were very sheltered. My aunt Sonia kind of took over. My mother was brought home; there was a hospital bed there and every day, she was

taken for radiation treatments. Sometimes, I would skip school and I was going with her for the radiation treatment. She was taking it very bad. She was very nauseous and we used to save a piece of herring for her after the treatment; something to--the nausea should go away. I was very, very distressed about it. I don't think my sister realized what was going on but I understood and after a while, a miracle happened. She kind of had a relapse, just happened to feel better. When she was sick, she was lying in this big salon, this big waiting area and the dog, Rex, was just lying there. We had to disconnect the bell because people wouldn't let go. The patients just wanted to come and say hello to her and she needed all her privacy and she couldn't continue her practice. But as soon as she got better, she recovered, and she started to practice again. She started slowly but all of a sudden, everybody came back. It was very anxious for her to resume practice. Maybe for four or five months, everything came to normal and then she had a relapse. After a month, again the hospital bed came and May 24th, she passed away. My aunt Sonia, who was a midwife and a nurse, took care of her. She was giving her all medication but there was nothing we could do. I remember, you know in Jewish tradition, you sit Shiva and my mother passed away on a Thursday. It was the first day of a Jewish holiday called Shavuot which is a very happy holiday. Saturday morning, my little friends came to take me out and it was in May. It was a beautiful, beautiful day. In May in Vilna, the lilacs were blooming; the smell in the air was incredible. The birds were singing and the sun was shining and I was walking on the sidewalk with my little friends and I said, my God, the world goes on and my mother is not there. I also have to mention to you that my mother had a very big funeral. People that knew her; all the patients came, all the students from the school from me and from my sister's and we had a problem with Rex because he wanted to go behind. He had just--had to be taken away. I remember when my mother passed away it was maybe like four o' clock in the morning, and in my ear is this terrible howling of this dog. This dog was howling, inhuman. When I woke, up and my aunt that was present, started to cry. Then this dog has to be taken out of the house and then I realize that I lost my mother. It was a very, very hard time for me. I was always a good student but because I was going for the treatments with my mother, my grades fell down. The teacher came to pay me a visit and he says to me you should come back to school and improve your grades. What's going on? After all you were always like a very good student. I said to him, I'm sorry I just cannot do it. My world ended and I just cannot do it. He said to me all right, maybe after the summer, he says, we will put you like kind of probation. We won't give you the bad grade because this is not you. After the summer, you will pass the exams, and then we will give you the report card. I says, all right but I just couldn't bring myself back to go to school because the school year ended June 20, so I still had plenty of time to go, I just couldn't do it. This summer was a very sad summer for me because me and my sister and our nanny, we were sent to Soły [Salos] where my father had the pharmacy.

Tape One, Side B

Anthony: So it's the summer of 1939, and you're in Soły [Salos]?

Lily: Yes, I'm in Soły [Salos]. It was a very big adjustment for us because all of a sudden we met different youngsters and different people. We were very heartbroken. We were very grateful that my aunt could stay with us for a month which was kind of our link.

She became our second mother; she took over very swiftly. Then we were preparing ourselves; in September the school was supposed to resume. I was sitting in a hammock; it was September 1, I think, reading a book. All of a sudden my nanny came running and she said your father wants you to come over right away to the pharmacy. This where we found out that the war broke out and the Germans were invading. Then the pandemonium broke because all of a sudden Soły [Salos] became White Russia and we were isolated from Vilna. My aunt sent somebody to take both of us to her; we should go to school there. But my father said no, they have to be with me. We had to stay in White Russia. I was sent to the school in Ashmyana because there was no high school there and my sister was going to a school in Soły [Salos]. This is--.

Anthony: Goodbye Vilna?

Lily: Yes. During the vacation, my father sent us to my aunt because we were missing her a lot. We went there and we stayed there during the winter vacation for a week or two.

Anthony: In Vilna?

Lily: In Vilna, yes. But I just didn't find anything because most--it was just not the Vilna that I remembered. It became completely different so that when we came back, we were staying till 1941.

Anthony: In Soły [Salos]?

Lily: Yes--no, not in Soły [Salos] because when the Russian came, my father didn't get a passport because he was bourgeois. He was the owner of the pharmacy so he was persecuted by the Russian also. They took away the pharmacy and they sent us to a small village called Ostrowiec [Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski]. Over there, he became the manager. My sister had to go to a school there and I was still in Ashmyana. In 1941, the war, when the Germans took over, we were in Ostrowiec [Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski]. From there, me and my sister escaped back to Vilna and then my father came.

Anthony: Now your aunt Sonia, she was your mother's older sister?

Lily: Older sister, yes.

Anthony: Could you tell us a little bit more about her? She was a midwife and a nurse in Vilna?

Lily: Yes. My mother and my aunt Sonia were very close. There was not a day that they didn't see each other. When my Aunt Sonia was a young girl, she was romantically involved with one of the leaders of the revolution. As a matter of fact, she escaped her father's house and she wanted like a set-up, they believed in free-love, and she wanted like to set up house with this young revolutionary. But my grandfather put his foot down. He came and took her practically by the hand and said that no daughter of mine will do this thing. She was a very good-looking woman. For the longest time she didn't have a boyfriend, she was not interested, she was just interested in the profession. She married late in life and her wedding was in our house. She met this

very nice young fellow whose name was Joseph Persky. After the wedding, after the honeymoon, they set up house, not far from us.

Anthony: This was before your mother died?

Lily: This was before my--.

Anthony: During the 1930's?

Lily: Yes, the 1930's. I was very close with her because there was not a day that she didn't come to our house or we didn't go to her. She never had children and she was very, very dedicated to both of us and, of course, to my mother. My mother had also an older sister, her name was Esther. She was married with two children but there was a very big binding with those two sisters. Actually, after my mother passed away, she took her place. When we escaped from Ostrowiec [Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski] and me and my sister came as the little two peasant girls, we came to her house. We were staying in her house; she was very good to us. We found shelter and comfort in her house and my father also stayed in her house. With her, we went to the ghetto when the Jews from Vilna were sent to the ghetto. The whole time in ghetto, we were together, me and my sister and my aunt and my father. My aunt and my sister slept in one bed and my father slept on the floor. She was working in the Jewish Hospital as a nurse. She was very instrumental in saving, actually, my life because I was in the hospital. I told about it so I don't want to repeat it. But she took me out from the hospital just in time when the Germans were asking for 500 people, Jews, from the commander of the ghetto. He, in order to save able-bodied Jews, said to them, send them sick people from the hospital. She, being a nurse, found out just the night before she took me out. The whole time during the liquidation of the ghetto, we were together. When we came to the Rosa Cemetery, there was a selection. My sister looked very, very young so my aunt took off a pair of shoes with heels and she gave it to my sister. Also she stuffed her bosom with a pair of socks. We were all three going together. I don't know how it happened but we got separated from my aunt. She was sent to the left and both of us were sent to the right. When I realized that she was sent to the left, I became hysterical and I was running back to the left. A German SS man with a rifle beat me over the head and says to me, you are too young. You have to work for the Fatherland. Took me off the floor and there were some other girls just took me away and I never saw my aunt again.

Anthony: Do you remember that date?

Lily: I will never forget it. It was September 23, 1943; it was the day of the liquidation of the ghetto. This was the last time that I saw her.

Anthony: Mr. Persky, her husband, was he separated earlier?

Lily: He was a merchant. He had a business in wild mushrooms and furs. He had a lot of contact with peasant, buying from them, the wild mushrooms. Also, he didn't look Jewish. He looked very much like a Pole. So before--when they send notices that they next day they send us to the ghetto, he called my aunt and said to her, he's not going

to the ghetto. He's going to the country. He want her to go with him. But she said she cannot separate herself from the children and also my father and both of us, me and my sister, we look very Jewish. He could take just one, her, but not us. She said that she is going with us to the ghetto and this was the sacrifice that she made. Because I always think that maybe if she would went with him to the country, he would be alive. When I survived, I was searching for him. I was asking about him, but I could never find a trace, because he was very good to us.

Anthony: So you don't know whether he survived?

Lily: I don't know, I don't know.

Anthony: When your aunt was young, did she also attend the university?

Lily: Yes, she attended the university, yes.

Anthony: The same one as your mother?

Lily: I don't know because--. I don't know exactly. I know that there was always talk that she was with the students, with her romance, with this revolution. There was always like family secrets and things like this about my stern grandfather who put his foot down but I don't know this I don't know. I imagine because this is what they were sent to study so I imagine but I don't know.

Anthony: Now your father, these are bad years for your father, the loss of his job, the loss of his wife, then loss of the next job, and being forced to move. Now what happens to him during these months?

Lily: What time of--?

Anthony: He was in Soły [Salos] and then he loses the pharmacy because he's too bourgeois. Then he is forced to move to Ostrowiec [Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski], where he just was an employee--.

Lily: He was a manager.

Anthony: Manager?

Lily: Yes. He was a manager and it was a small pharmacy and he was the only one that worked but he didn't own it. Of course it was very hard years for him. He developed a lot of friendship with the doctors that used to come, the Russian doctors used to come for the medicine over there. Since he spoke Russian--but when the German came, there was some Russian doctor that wanted to take us deep into Russia. He didn't want to do it because he said that during the war, you have to have a roof above your head so he didn't want to do it. But as soon as the Russian left and the German came, a lot of pogroms started against the Jews, against the Jews in Ostrowiec [Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski]. When the Russian were there, the Polish landowners suffered a lot because they were just the same bourgeois. When they used to come to the

pharmacy, there was a room in the back where my father used to prepare their medicines and they used to congregate there. They used to come--they could freely talk without being observed by the communists. They were kind of friendly so when the pogroms started, one of them came and said that you should take our belongings and he will save us and he will take us to this big house that he said belonged (one word unclear). So my father and my sister put some belongings on their wagon and he took them going there to this big house. On the way, they were accosted by twenty Poles and my father was put against a tree, blindfolded and they wanted to shot him in the presence of my little sister. They just hurt him but we suspected that it was arranged by the landowner who wanted just to take the belongings that my father was taking and scare him. When my father came home, I was waiting for him. When I saw him bleeding, we understood that they were just false people that want to take advantage and they want to take our furniture, our bedding, whatever we had there. My father went to the rabbi of the house, of the little town and said to him that if we could sleep a few nights there because our life is in danger. The rabbi let us stay over there. About two days later, he sent both of us with a peasant to Vilna and then he waited two days and then--we became--. Those were very hard times for him. First of all, he believed in those people that wanted to save us and it was a very big let-down that only for material thing but it was morally, he lost faith. He was like--here he was a Jew in Poland; then he was persecuted by the Russian as a bourgeois; then with somebody who was supposed to be his friend, whom he did favors, let him also down. It was--. When my father came to Vilna, he was walking, he walked. From all the aggravation, he developed a very big abscess right here in the back. He went to the hospital and when it came the time of liquidation of the Jewish population and everybody was sent, we were actually separated. I went to the ghetto with my aunt and my sister and my father was already in the ghetto because the Jewish hospital was there. He was desperate because he was operated on and he was lying in bed and he thought that he lost his two little girls and his sister-in-law. Somehow, somebody that knew us came to visit him in the hospital and told him that we are alive. He was still in bad shape when he came out from the hospital and we were in the ghetto together. After he got a little better, he got a job as a pharmacist in a--it was called the Spanish lazareth, the pharmacy and he worked there for a time. Later on, it was liquidated and he worked in the hospital pharmacy in ghetto. I was sick in the hospital with the infection and my father was taken out by the Gestapo in his white coat, from the pharmacy with another group of people from the hospital staff, and they were sent to a labor camp in Estonia.

Anthony: You remember when this was?

Lily: The liquidation of the ghetto was in September in 1943 and this was during the summer in 1943. I saw once, my father, later on. When I was in labor camp, Dünawerke, it was nearby of Kaiserwald [did not specify whether Kaiserwald camp or town of Kaiserwald, now Mezaparks], once a woman came and said, you know, I met somebody who says he is David Mazur and he was crying going around there looking for his two daughters, little girls. I said that I know you because when we had a very bad toothache, from the labor camp they used to send us to Kaiserwald, to this German dentist, and she had a very bad toothache. She went and she met him. I really don't know exactly how they met but he was desperate. When he heard there

are women from Vilna, he was looking for us. He was sent from Estonia to this concentration camp, Kaiserwald.

Anthony: Kaiserwald, where you go?

Lily: Yes, we go Kaiserwald. The next day I went and I pretended that I have a very bad toothache and I went to Kaiserwald. I risked my life and I found him. Before I went there, I collected some bread and I brought him bread. When I saw him, I didn't recognize him. He was wearing the striped uniform and all of a sudden he shrunk and I mean that it was just somebody that was not my father. We were standing behind the wall because women and men were not supposed to--Jewish women and men were not supposed to communicate even. We were standing and he asked me where is my sister? I think it was the time when my sister was very sick with rheumatic fever. This was the reason she didn't come and she was in a small like a--it was called a krankenrevier, in this labor camp. I said that she was all right and that she's with me together. He said, look after we will survive, I want you to come to the pharmacy in Soły [Salos] and this is where we are to meet. When you come there, the only thing I ask you, you should bring me your good name. I understand he meant that he wants to see me and my sister, two virgins, he meant. He says to me, I don't need so much bread, I need cigarettes. He wanted to smoke. Can you come tomorrow again? I came back and I asked again and somehow they let me come. I remember that my friends there that worked in the labor camp, we collected warm socks and gloves and also got some tobacco and paper and I was so happy because when we were working in the labor camp, there were also some day workers. They asked them for this tobacco and they gave it to them. They were Latvian day workers, and also prisoners of war from Holland. The next day when I came there and I was looking for him but he wasn't there.

Anthony: You don't know what happened?

Lily: I don't know what happened. I was searching for him after we survived. I was on my way to Soły [Salos] but we never--. It's a long story, we never got there. There were some rumors that he survived and that he is in Russia but it was never confirmed. I could never, never, ---. So actually the last time that I can say that I was in touch with my father was in Kaiserwald concentration camp.

Anthony: The day that you saw him?

Lily: That I saw.

Anthony: Do you remember the date?

Lily: We arrived in Kaiserwald sometime in September. It must have been in 1943, in fall of 1943, yes.

Anthony: Ironically, he was acting as a dentist?

Lily: No, he wasn't acting--.

Anthony: He was the pharmacist but--?

Lily: No, no. He was brought from Estonia to Kaiserwald. He was not acting as a dentist. I was brought--.

Anthony: You were pretending to be--?

Lily: No, no. I was--you see when we worked in the labor camp, Dünawerke, when we had a very bad toothache, we had permission to go to visit a German dentist in Kaiserwald.

Anthony: And that's how you saw your father?

Lily: This is how I saw because I escaped; I didn't go to the dentist. I escaped and I was roaming around in their camp asking around, where is the contingent of men that were shipped from Estonia to Kaiserwald? They show me the place and I just went there and I looked for my father. I met him there.

Anthony: Was he still acting as a pharmacist or was he just a--?

Lily: No, no, no.

Anthony: Just a prisoner in a uniform?

Lily: No, no. The first thing that they stripped the professional, Jewish people from their profession. They were just treated like dirt, like laborers, like slaves. They were stripped away from their human dignity. This was the first thing, was to break their spirit.

Anthony: So after he left the ghetto, he was no longer a pharmacist?

Lily: No, he was not a pharmacist; he was just a simple slave, doing slave work. .

Anthony: Now your story, I'm very familiar with your story and with your sister's story as well. Are there any major differences between your sister's story and yours after--?

Lily: We were always together. I think we survived because we were together. We helped each other. During the incarcerations time, I was the one that was helping her. After liberation, when I was very sick, she recovered sooner and she was--kind of took over and she became the older sister. But I think that because we were together, it gave us strength and this helped us a lot, too, to survive.

Anthony: You could give each other moral support and also physical support?

Lily: Physical support is kind of--we were looking out for each other. There was the loneliness and abandonment--is a very big moral deterrent. We kind of stuck together. At night, when we slept, we were always together so this kind of gave us strength.

- Anthony:** So other than when you were sick, you were never separated?
- Lily:** No. My sister had a very hard time in ghetto because she was there, she was a little girl, and she was very, very hungry, very undernourished. She didn't have her friends, she didn't know what to do with herself; she was mostly spending that time waiting for me or my aunt or my father to come back and bring her something to eat. My sister, even now, is very, very depressed. She is under a psychiatrist's care because she suffers very strong bouts of depression. She's always admiring me that I remember so well because she doesn't remember. She just simply does not remember things. I don't know if it's she blocked it out or it was intentional but when she needs something what happened, she has to ask me.
- Anthony:** You became like her mother?
- Lily:** Yes, I assumed the role of her mother after liberation. Even today I kind of have the mother role. I never thought that we will be separated but she is now in Argentina. But imagine, she was born in 1928, so in 1939, she was just eleven years old. The whole world crumbled around her and she was just--. I was never a teenager also but she was never even a child and a teenager, so many lost years from 1939 to 1945, six years lost.
- Anthony:** She had hardly any schooling, two years?
- Lily:** She hardly had any school, yes. She was always very much alive and there was no joy in her life. I mean it was just misery and misery and hunger and cold. It was six years of indescribable suffering, moral and physical.
- Anthony:** Just the moving around, even if the other horrors hadn't occurred. Just the moving around and the loss--.
- Lily:** Uprooting, uprooting.
- Anthony:** That's right--would have been traumatic.
- Lily:** That's right, she lost everything.
- Anthony:** She lost her mother, and then she lost, in a sense, her aunt/stepmother.
- Lily:** Yes, she lost her father, she lost her house, she lost her friends, she lost her school, she lost her ballet, I mean the piano lessons. Everything that is important--her little friends, everything that is important.
- Anthony:** Then from time to time, she almost lost you?
- Lily:** Oh, yes.
- Anthony:** That must have been frightening?

- Lily:** Yes, very much.
- Anthony:** But you were liberated and you survived. At the end of the war, you made some attempt to go back to Soły [Salos] but--?
- Lily:** No. When we came into Łódź, we were told that if we cross the River Bok and we go to the Russians, we will never come out from there. There is no point for us to go there. We have to stay with the West. I met somebody from Vilna that was older. She was one of the medical students that I told you about it. We decided that we should stay in the West and we never went back.
- Anthony:** You emigrated to the United States and your sister went to ---?
- Lily:** No, no. I didn't immigrate. I was in the DP camps. I was for a year, sick, very sick. After we recovered, we were on our way to Soły [Salos] and we went to Łódź. In Łódź, we were in a kibbutz for orphans that will be sent to Israel. We were going on our way to the kibbutz, emigrating from Poland to Czechoslovakia on our way to Israel. From Czechoslovakia, we went to Italy. We had to cross the Alps. We were crossing the Alps Christmas time. When we came to Italy, we were put in a DP camp, a Displaced Persons camp. There we were on our way to Israel. Then my uncle, my father's younger brother found us. He told us that you'll go to Israel late; he made us papers as Christians, as Protestants and we were brought to Argentina. There my sister and my husband. I met my husband in Italy. We were in Buenos Aires, Argentina. We were there for nine and a half years. Then me and my husband and my two sons who were born in Argentina emigrated. My sister remained--she was supposed to come but she never did.
- Anthony:** When did you arrive in Argentina?
- Lily:** In Argentina, I arrived in June, 1948.
- Anthony:** Then you and your family came to the United States in what year?
- Lily:** On October 30, 1956.
- Anthony:** Argentina also being America, we keep forgetting that.
- Lily:** South America.
- Anthony:** South America, yes. And your sister has also raised a family?
- Lily:** Yes, my sister has a husband and three children. She has two sons and a daughter. The older son graduated his degree in political science and is an economist but he doesn't work in his profession. The younger son is a medical doctor. He married and has two children; the older son, he's married to a psychologist. Her younger daughter, the only daughter, lives in Cyprus. She met her future husband in Israel and she has three little boys.

Anthony: How many children did you have?

Lily: I have two sons. My sons are not married.

Anthony: Not yet?

Lily: Not yet. I hope they will. They are very good sons but they are not married.

Anthony: Did either of them become a medical doctor?

Lily: No. My youngest son was pre-med and then changed his major and finished Boston College in communication. At the present time, he is literary agent working in Los Angeles. He represents producers and writers--writers, producers--and directors working in TV and movies. My oldest son is a probation officer.

Anthony: Probation officer. In the New York area?

Lily: Yes.

Anthony: There's a lot of need for that.

Lily: Oh, yes.

Anthony: I see a little irony in that your sister produced the doctor so far?

Lily: Yes, yes. Very nice doctor, very nice young man visiting us--very nice family.

Anthony: Is there anything else that we forgot, either today or in the last interview that you would like to add?

Lily: I really don't know. There are so many things that you can talk about. You can talk for days and days. There's really no end.

Anthony: Your testimony is detailed.

Lily: Yes, it is. I think the testimony that there were songs composed.

Anthony: Yes and the poem.

Lily: The poem, the songs composed. I want it to be, this is a very important part that--.

Anthony: They'll need someone who can write it and listen to it--transcribe it because I notice those lines were left blank on the transcript that you interviewed.

Lily: It would be nice if somebody could--because I sang those things so it would be nice if they would transcribe it.

Anthony: Apparently whoever did the transcription only knew English so it was left blank.

Lily: Oh, you mean the words.

Anthony: Yes, the words are in --?

Lily: Yiddish.

Anthony: Yiddish, yes. But I'm sure they will be transcribed.

Lily: I heard that you have a musical department.

Anthony: Yes, yes.

Lily: I think it would be good if they would transcribe it.

Anthony: Yes, yes. In fact, I can say this. Some of the songs are being collected and I think that, without having heard yours, yours should be included. Several other songs, I know, have been recorded and passed on with the words.

Lily: They should be included because this is a very important part. Some of the songs, I saw the "triptych" [?] (470) of the life and the hopes--. After all, we were very young at this time, it should be included, and it's a very important part.

Anthony: Do you listen to NPR, *All Things Considered*? NPR is *All Things Considered* on public radio, national public radio. WNYC?

Lily: No.

Anthony: There was a program a few months ago which summarized and played excerpts from a recording that the museum produced. Ghetto songs.

Lily: Oh, I didn't know that.

Anthony: Including, I recall, including from Vilna.

Lily: Oh, yeah? I didn't know that.

Anthony: Yes, yes. I know that now they're on sale. They have audio and compact discs, recordings. What I should do is, as soon as our interview is complete, I should take down the name of the song and then put you in touch or put the woman who's in charge of the music in touch with you.

Lily: I gave them the songs and everything. I gave them. I have someplace--I have copies here. I would be more than pleased to give it to you because this is a very important part and I think it should be included, it should be documented. I don't want it to be lost because this is the homage of those people in those difficult circumstances, still have the spirit to compose and to write, and beautifully write.

Anthony: And then sing it?

Lily: Sing it, yes. We were singing.

Anthony: Thank you very much.

Lily: You are welcome.