

Dates of Interviews: 5/05/81  
5/14/81  
5/26/81

Interviewee: Helene Erman  
Interviewer: Carole Erich

### Interview History

A two- part interview was held with Mrs. Helene Erman in connection with the Dayton Oral Holocaust Project. Mrs. Erman was born in Germany and emigrated through Poland to the land of Israel.

Interviewer: Carole A. Erich, Graduate Student, Wright state University.

Conduct of the Interview: An interview lasting one hour and fifteen minutes was conducted with Helene Erman in her residence at 3160 Valerie Arms Drive, Dayton, Ohio on May 19, 1981 at 10:00 a.m. The concluding segment of the interview was held on June 2, 1981 at the same time. The inquiry took place in the dining room of a combined living/dining room. The microphone was placed on the table between us. Mrs. Erman also taped the conversation. Helene Erman is a sixty-year old woman of medium height and weight. She is a sensitive woman who gave much thought to her responses. There were no interruptions during the questioning

Q: We are at 3160 Valerie Arms Drive, Dayton, Ohio. I will be interviewing Mrs. Erman in connection with the Dayton Area Holocaust Project

OK. Mrs. Erman, I like to start off by asking you first of all where were you born?

A: I was born in Dortmund, Germany on June 16, 1921. I am the youngest daughter of five children. When I was two years old, my father passed away and my mother was the sole supporter of our family. Not only did she take good care of us, but she went into business and supported the family. She did a grand job personally and in financial things. When Hitler came to power, in 1933, the family was together, that means we all lived together. Suddenly the whole picture changed and everybody went different ways

Q: This is getting quite a bit ahead of the project. Let's go back a little. I like to know your parents names.

A: My mother's name was Dora Laufer. My father's name was Jacob Laufer. My brothers and sisters were Erna, for my sister; Max, Ferdinand and Leo for my brothers in order of age. The only survivors are Leo and Erna. They both live in St. Louis.

- Q: You said that your father died when you were two years old. What did he do to earn a living?
- A: He was a businessman. He had stores. When my father passed away, by the way he passed away in Poland, since both my parents were Polish citizens, my mother had to sell everything in order to go to Poland and see what was going on. During WWI (at that time no Polish state existed. Poland was re-established by the Allies in 1919.) He drank some poison which affected his lungs. After that he was sick all the time.
- Q: Let us talk a little more about your basic background. You were born in Germany of Polish heritage?
- A: That is true.
- Q: Do you have any idea how long your family lived in Poland, or in Germany? (Prior to 1919 portions of Poland were integral parts of Germany.)
- A: My parents were born in Germany. Both their families were born in Germany. They did not come to Dortmund as a married couple. They met and fell in love in Germany. They came to Germany proper as teenagers. They went to school in Germany. Later they got married in Germany. By the way, when my father was sick, he went back to Poland. I don't know whether they had better doctors there, (Germany had past WWI and was in the middle of a bottomless inflation) or whether he just wanted to be with his family. I was the only one of the family who was with him when he died. This was a sad picture for the entire family. My mother never remarried. She always said that she wanted to raise her own children.
- A: What year was it that your father died?
- Q: 1923. In Poland.
- Q: You said you were the only one with him. You then were two years old. How did it happen that you, as a two year old were with your father in Poland?
- A: The other children were in school. I was with my father at his family's. This lasted for only a short while, I believe. Then my mother came. She had to sell everything in Germany. Of course she thought that she might set up her life again, in Poland. Then she felt that that was not possible, the situation was not as she would have liked it to be. She took all of us back to Germany. The burial had taken place in Poland.
- Q: You said that your father was in business. Do you know what kind of business?
- A: Clothing business. He sold textiles in stores.

- Q: He did not own his business himself.
- A: Yes, he owned his own business. Later on my mother owned the business.
- Q: Do you recall the name of your father's business?
- A: No, I don't.
- Q: Was he in business alone?
- A: Yes. That is together with my mother.
- Q: Your mother apparently did help in the business?
- A: Yes. We did have help at home.
- Q: That is one of the questions I was coming to. What kind of help was that?
- A: We had a sleep-in help. We did not call her a maid. She slept with us, later on also, when my mother was busy. As a matter of fact, she was so devoted, that my mother said she could trust her more than she could trust us. However when Hitler came to power, all the girls had to leave Jewish homes. So she had to leave.
- Q: Do you remember her name?
- A: Yes, it was Mary.
- Q: Let us now talk a little about the cultural aspects of your lives. Were your parents involved in the arts? Did they take part in plays, did they go to the opera in Germany, anything of that type?
- A: I remember that my mother loved music. She went to concerts, and to the theaters. She took us children, along many times. My love for music came from hers. She was always singing. I always sang. As a matter of fact, I had some parts in Aida (Verdi opera) and in Shulamite (possibly another opera or oratorio), not solo parts, but in choirs. I always sang in choirs.
- Q: Did any of the children take lessons?
- A: Music lessons? No, nobody did. I did later on in the U.S. I don't believe that the money was available for that. After all, she had five children to support in public schools and other schooling, as well as clothing and feeding. That was quite a job. I believe that this might have been one of the factors.

- Q: However she apparently introduced you to the world of music.
- A: Definitely! Oh, definitely!
- Q: What was the range of ages of the children?
- A: My older brother was fourteen years older than I. The next two were one and two years younger respectively, the next one was eight years older than I.
- Q: Your father died in 1923. You said that he had been injured during the war. Had he been a serviceman during the war?
- A: Yes, he was a soldier.
- Q: For Germany?
- A: For Prussia, actually that was part of the German army.
- Q: Do you know how he could have been injured?
- A: Yes. He sniffed some kind of acid, by accident. This burned his lungs.
- Q: Did he receive a pension because of that?
- A: No, he did not. The Germans always said that it wasn't their fault, but his own fault. My mother tried to obtain a pension, but she never succeeded.
- Q: Were either of your parents ever politically oriented?
- A: No. Not my parents. My brothers were. But not my parents.
- Q: They probably were not even able to vote in Germany. Were they?
- A: I am not sure whether they could or couldn't.
- Q: When your father died, your mother carried on the business or did she re-establish it?
- A: First she sold everything because my father was in Poland. Then she returned and she established another business, the same kind of business.
- Q: Do you believe that was successful?
- A: I think so. She was able to raise five children. Not only that, but she bought an apartment house. We were not rich people, but she could do all these things. Later on, I guess that I am again jumping ahead, when Hitler came to power and

her business was no longer lucrative, since people did not want to pay, she just ignored it and gave it up. She said that she would not work for people who don't want to pay. Then she was able to live from the revenue of the building.

- Q: You mentioned briefly that you lived reasonably well. Could you give us some kind of idea into which economic class you could have been put, at that time?
- A: I believe that it could not have been the middle class, it could have been the lower middle class.
- Q: All of your children attended school?
- A: Yes, certainly! (Education until age fourteen was required by law).
- Q: Did everyone graduate?
- A: Yes.
- Q: The neighborhood where you lived, was it predominately German or Jewish? Or mixed?
- A: The area where we bought our house was all lived in by gentiles.
- Q: You owned a home?
- A: My mother owned a building, which contained apartments. This was all occupied by gentiles. Before that we always had tried to live in an area where Jewish families lived. My mother had brothers and sisters in Dortmund. They tried to live together.
- Q: When your mother bought this apartment in all this gentile neighborhood, did you live in one of the apartments?
- A: Yes, later when one became vacant, we moved into it.
- Q: How religious was your family?
- A: I am talking about my mother now. My mother was observant. For instance, we had a kosher home. However, if a customer came in on Saturday she would take money for whatever she sold. We had someone who turned on our lights on Shabbat. I would not call this being super religious, but she was observant.
- Q: Your children all attended the Holy Day events?
- A: Yes! Yes.

Q: Were your brothers Bar Mitzvahed?

A: Oh, yes!

Q: Were there ever any incidents in your childhood, which you can recall now, where you were discriminated against because you were a Jewish child?

A: Yes, I went to a Jewish Day School, therefore most of my friends were Jewish. I should say "all my close friends were Jewish". At home, however, we lived in an area where there were a lot of gentiles. At the beginning, I was a tomboy. Everybody liked to play with me and I liked to play rough games. That was fine, however, when Hitler came, slowly, slowly they had to remove themselves without letting me know that they were doing it because I was Jewish. Nobody said it, but it was known. So I went with my own friends. Instead of playing in the neighborhood, I went over to their (the Jewish) neighborhood. They also came to me.

Q: You felt that then there was an actual separation from the gentiles?

A: Yes.

Q: That was the influence of the Nazis?

A: Yes.

Q: You were probably around fifteen at that time?

A: No, I was born in '21, so I was twelve.

Q: So you had some inkling of what was happening?

A: Yes.

Q: That was as a young child. You had older brothers and sisters, were they influential in any way how you felt as a child toward what was going on? Did they see things happening with their older groups, which you were not aware of?

A: Oh, definitely yes! I remember that my brother had a gentile girlfriend. He was dating a gentile girl. The first thing everybody told him was "that if you don't want to be arrested, you better drop her, or leave her, or she will leave you". That is what it was. It was a matter of time until they had to be separated. Now when Hitler came to power, my brother belonged to a political organization. It was called the "Reich's Banner" (translated into "State's Flag"). Our house was searched one week after Hitler came to power because my brother was on their wanted list. Just one day before our house was searched to look for him or to look for anything, he left Germany. He just had to flee Germany. He went first to

Holland (the closest border to Dortmund) and then to Belgium, then to France. Finally he settled in Israel, then Palestine.

- Q: Let us talk a little about that. First I wanted to ask you -- up and until this point, before 1933, when the Nazis (means National Sozialistische Partei, the official, legal name of Hitler's political party) actually took over, were there any indications with your mother's business or anything else, were there influences which were pressuring her about her business? I mean before that time only, before Hitler took power.
- A: No, never. No, my mother did her business. She went out to the farmers and sold her merchandise. They did not always have the money ready, so they told her "Come back in a year" or come back in two months or whatever. She had what was then called "abzahlungs geschäft", which means that people bought on credit, like charge accounts. They knew that every month or every two months either they sent the money in, or my mother would come and bring something new and they would pay it off. That worked well. That is, it did work fine until Hitler came to power. Most of them did pay what was owed, but some of them said, "Why should we? Anyhow Mrs. Laufer is a Jew and she can't do anything to us. The law is on our side." So some of them did not pay what was due. Many big stores in our city, owned by Jews, had their windows smashed. People stood in front of Jewish owned stores shouting "Don't go in! Don't buy! If you want to help Germany, stay out of there!" (That was a one day organized boycott, which took place shortly after Hitler became German Chancellor). Right after that Jews were taken into prisons. Again whoever was on their list. If you belonged to a political party, if you had married a gentile, all these people were on the list. They came to pick these people. Fortunately they did not arrest any in my immediate family, but we knew many people who got arrested and who were kept for months or years.
- Q: Did your mother employ gentiles in her business?
- A: No, she did not. Yes, I believe there was one gentile. Most of her dealings came from Jewish people.
- Q: She worked by herself didn't she?
- A: Yes, that she did. She had one employee who helped her carry things into the car.
- Q: You said that your brother got out just before they came to arrest him. He was aware of what was going on. Who did he contact to get out? What was his route for escaping?
- A: My brother belonged to a Zionist organization, also, as I did, like the rest of the family. He had a group of friends, a group of eight friends who put all the money they had together and during the night, they went to Holland and then Belgium.

Then naturally they had to go further. Wherever they went they got some help from Jewish organizations. However, they could not find employment -- you were a fugitive and you were not allowed to be employed. In Belgium he had an uncle, where he stayed for a while. While he was in France he became sick and he stayed there for a while until finally his papers to go to Israel came through (at that time immigration to Israel/Palestine was fairly open).

Q: Now this was your oldest brother?

A: No, my youngest brother.

Q: Your youngest brother! What about the others?

A: My oldest brother went to Israel via Belgium under normal circumstances. The middle brother stayed in Germany.

Q: What year did your oldest brother leave?

A: He left later, but he was not personally wanted by the Nazis, so he could stay. He was not on the wanted list. So he could stay. He was not on the blacklist.

Q: They did not want to prosecute him.

A: That is right.

Q: So there were four of you left with your mother. This was in 1933. The Nazis were taking over. How did this affect your mother's business? Can you go a little more in depth on that score, if you will?

A: She really gave it up very quickly, since she could see no future in it. If you buy merchandise, naturally she had to pay for the merchandise, and if only 70% pay her back she couldn't stay in business.

Q: No one came to her and threatened her?

A: No!

Q: OK. That is what I wanted to establish. No word came down that she should close?

A: No. It was just the attitude of the people. If the government says "don't buy from Jews, and if you bought from Jews you don't have to pay". Decent people paid anyhow when they got their merchandise. Whoever did not want to pay didn't have to. So what is the use of keeping up with a business that is a losing proposition?



- Q: Are you still in the city where you were originally?
- A: Where I was born, Dortmund?
- Q: Yes. What did your mother do at that point? She still had four children to take care of?
- A: No! The older children were on their own. The boys were on their own. I was the only one who still was in school and we had the apartment house. She could live from the rent she received. Of course, she could not live very well, not in luxury, but she could support me.
- Q: Considering the fact that you were a Jewish family living in a gentile apartment house, how did that work as a relationship with your tenants?
- A: There was only one Jewish family living in our building, the rest of them were gentile. They paid their rent; that did not change. (The Nazis had made no special rules) If they didn't pay their rent, my mother took the proper action. There was no problem.
- Q: What year did you graduate?
- A: I believe in 1936.
- Q: You were able to attend school until the year 1936, without any problems?
- A: I went to a Jewish elementary school. A Jewish school. We were taught by Jewish teachers. The school was supported by the Jewish agencies. All our faculty was Jewish (fairly early under the Nazi regime no Jewish teacher was allowed to teach in other than Jewish schools -- that caused many teachers to be available, if there was a Jewish school in town).
- Q: There was no attempt by the government to close you down?
- A: No. Then already they did not want Jewish students to enter high school, or colleges. So they were happy with Jewish Day Schools. It was hard (for Jewish students) to get into a university.
- Q: There were no problems which you remember at this particular time, which you or your mother came up against in the years from 1933 through '36, when you completed school. Things went along normally?
- A: I remember one incident. I belonged to a Zionist group. Every weekend we went on trips, field trips. There was a period of time when the SS (Schultz Staffel, the black shirted so-called elite troops, who furnished personal protection for Hitler, etc. and who later manned the concentration camps) or the SA (Sturm Abteilung,

the brown shirted storm troopers who provided most of the Nazi manpower) attacked these groups every Sunday night by stoning or any other means and the students were injured. So we had to make a decision. Should we go on our field trips, or should we just abandon it? We voted against abandoning, but we said that we would be ready. So, instead of going to sleep we took big sticks in our hands and stones, also, and we fought against them. I still remember this, that we had to fight back against our attackers. We did that.

Q: Do you remember what year it was?

A: This might have been in 1936, or so. Maybe 1937.

Q: You were still a teenager?

A: Yes, sure, we were all teenagers!

Q: Did the “Nuremberg Laws” affect you? Or your family in any way?

A: What do you call the “Nuremberg Laws”?

Q: The ones which came into force and you mentioned earlier that Jews were not allowed to associate with, to marry or to have any relationship with gentiles. I mean that type of thing, not anything specific, but restrictions of any kind which were placed on you because of you being defined as “Non-Aryans”.

A: The restrictions? You know it was made a crime, just being a Jew. (Being a Jew was defined “legally” as having at least one Jewish grandparent.) If you were not Aryan, that means a German born so over some generations that meant you are different and you don’t belong there.

Q: Did they, at that time, make any moves to eliminate or to keep you away from your synagogues?

A: No! No!

Q: Were you allowed to attend?

A: Yes, we were allowed that. The only thing which was not allowed, in the pursuit of our religion, was the required slaughter for the butchers. The ritual slaughter of animals was not allowed so we did not have red meat. People who wanted to follow their religion could not eat red meat unless it was imported from Poland, Holland or Belgium.

Q: Were you able to go out and shop without any problems?

A: Oh, yes. (At that early time).

Q: You were not arrested on the street, or anything like that?

A: No. There was a time. I am only talking about the beginning, that Hitler was only very firm against the Jews. Then, that very quiet and peaceful and tranquil time started and the Jews thought, "Maybe the bad period will be behind us. However this was only the quiet before the storm really broke out. It was like that in Germany.

Q: Once you had completed school, did you attempt to get employment of some kind?

A: Yes. My goal was to go to Palestine/Israel. In order to go there, one had to go to a "Preparation School". However, there was a waiting list for this school because everybody wanted to leave, especially the youngsters. There was no future (in Germany) for the youth. Of course, everybody really was ready to go someplace, emigrate to the U.S., for that you needed a permit, or a visa. There was a quota there. So our family decided that our goal is Israel. I went to Cologne (Koln or Cologne) to what is called "Hach Shara". They prepared the people for Israel. They taught people about Jewish history, some of them went out to farm to learn to be agriculturalists, or they learned professions such as sewing and carpentry. Here truly the biggest tragedy started. In 1938, all Polish citizens were supposed to leave Germany. That included me. When they knocked at our door and they said "Helene Erman (this probably should be "Helene Laufer") has to come tomorrow morning to the train station and she will be deported to Poland". Now I could not reach my mother, because she did not have a phone. My sister, who lived in Berlin, she had a phone and I reached her after a lot of trouble. She said that I should go with the group because they are going to catch me anyhow and she added that she would attempt to somehow get word to my mother. So we all were assembled into groups at the station. In the morning the Jewish Committee came and brought us some food. the next evening we were put on the train in order to go to "Spaunching". Spaunching (which could not readily be located -- it may be what is today called "Sosnowiec" then at the German-Polish border now well inside of Poland) is a place between Germany and Poland. The Poles didn't want to let us in and the Germans threw us out. My sister was not able to get in touch with my mother because of that lack of a phone at my mother's, but she contacted neighbors, friends and they told her that my mother had been arrested also. She also was brought to Poland. There were two different places to which she could have been brought to, they were Baunschen and Bousen (these places could not be located). I remember when, after a long, long ride being sixteen or seventeen years old, not knowing what had happened, we finally came to a railroad station and I heard someone yelling "Where is my child?" My mother then came to the train to look for me. That was a very emotional experience. I believe that we stayed there for 1/2 year, until my mother could return to Germany in order to liquidate all our belongings. Of course the big building which was worth a lot of money just could not be sold for what it was

worth. They knew that she came to liquidate and they gave her a fraction of what it was really worth. From there on, when my mother returned, we could have gone into Poland by then because now we had the means to support ourselves. However, shortly after that, the war broke out, that was WWII, my mother went to her former home town which had been called Bochnia (located near Krakow) in Galicia and I was trying to get to Vilna. Here again, we were a group of seven students and we tried to stay ahead of the Germans. Every day we were ahead of the German soldiers. The war was going on. The German soldiers were marching into Poland. In our group of eight, seven people were trying to survive. We had to work, but we couldn't find work. At night we lived in hedges, in farms or wherever. During the day we tried to find some food. We were always afraid that we might be caught. Amongst us there was only one girl who knew Polish. It was a terrible life. It was a life of a fugitive. It was really awful. Some of the girls and boys got sick, so we had to stop, but somehow we survived by a miracle and we came to Vilna. Vilna at the time belonged to Poland. During the war, Vilna was "given" by Poland to Russia, as a result of the German-Russian friendship pact. Then Russia gave it to Lithuania. Do you know what a pogrom is? A pogrom is always directed against the Jews, who serve always as escape goats. When the Russians came they asked "Who is here? The Jews and the Polacks!" (derogatory term for Poles) The Poles attacked the Jews in Vilna. It was terrible, really it was. It was a pogrom!

Q: Why was it that your mother and you decided to separate?

A: Because all the time we thought it would be better for me. She lived in a very small town where she had a very ill father. She felt that she had to help him. Also she knew that I would not get the right education in Bochnia. She also hoped that from Vilna I could go to Palestine from there. People were able to go to Palestine from there. These were the main reasons.

Q: So she thought that when you left that you were going to eventually get to go to Palestine?

A: Oh, yes! My objective was to reach Israel. That was my goal. As far as I was concerned, it was only a question of time until I got there, and that is what really happened.

Q: You said that you stayed in Baunschen for about six months?

A: Yes, maybe a little more.

Q: Can you describe what the situation was like during those months?

A: They had assembled Jews from all over Germany. We lived in one room, maybe eight or seven families, all together. We did not have beds, we lived on mattresses on the floor. The Polish People Support gave us lunch once a day and

we could take food along for breakfast and dinner. I should say that the Polish People Support were Polish Jews, or a Polish Jewish Committee. The younger people, of course, worked. We worked for the Jewish government in Baunschen. We didn't get paid, but of course this No-man's land became like a small country so it had to be governed. So a hospital was established in a hurry, so were schools. They set up committees to address all the problems people had. All of this had to be established from nothing.

Q: How big a population was there?

A: It was very small. Like a small town. I don't know exactly, maybe about 2,000 Poles altogether.

Q: And the Jewish people who came from Germany were included?

A: We were there for maybe nine months, until the war broke out.

Q: You said that the Jewish Committee was in charge, more or less, of itself.

A: Yes, it governed itself.

Q: Were you, in any way, super-governed by the Germans? or the Poles?

A: No Germans. The Polish government, rather. The Germans just dumped us. The only things we had to do was to obey the rules of the Poles.

Q: Were you kept under guard at this point?

A: Definitely. We could not leave that freshly set up country until somebody of a family went back to Germany and liquidated their belongings and assets. Then you could go into Poland. From there they might go further but my mother decided that we should stay. That is what we did.

Q: You were in a very small town on the border. Was there any way that you were in a camp? Did they build any housing?

A: They did not build anything except maybe for barriers. Yes, there were barriers around. At the beginning, as I said, you could have gone, you could even have broken out, over the barriers, however, later on soldiers surrounded the area.

Q: You said that your mother was able to return to Dortmund and to liquidate her assets and then to return with them. She was having no problem doing that, apparently, other than the fact that she had not received the full amount.

A: That is right.

- Q: What, at this point, happened to your brothers? Your sister was in Berlin.
- A: Yes, my sister had married a German. She was in Berlin and from there she came to the U.S. Two brothers were in Palestine. The oldest of my brothers was wandering around. He was in Russia later on, he was caught by the Russians and he got very sick. After the war was over, he went back to Germany and he passed away shortly after that. He had been in Siberia.
- Q: You apparently left Germany before “Kristallnacht” (November 10, 1938).
- A: Yes. My sister was in Germany during that Kristallnacht.
- Q: Was her relationship with her husband changed because of that? What happened?
- A: No! He was a Jewish man. No, no!! He was a Jew, he is a Jew. A German Jewish man. They now live in St. Louis.
- Q: Now you and seven other young people decided to leave Baunschen. I am asking all these questions about being within a camp is that I wonder how you were able to get out of that situation.
- A: The war started. So there were no barriers involved any more. The war started and everyone went running. Everybody started running and to spread out. My mother left one or maybe two weeks before the war broke out. This was one good part. We young people decided to stay together. We were seven students, as well as friends. We walked out through the location of the barriers through the area where the bombs were falling. The shooting sometimes went over our heads. We attempted to always be one day ahead of the Polish soldiers.
- (Here the tape was changed and apparently some of the story was lost in the interval. Apparently as the tape resumes HE is explaining her and her mother’s decision to separate in Baunschen).
- Q: That was a hard decision for you to separate.
- A: Yes, she was very torn by doubts. Also for me to make the decision not to go with her was quite a hard one to make. After all, in her eyes, I was still a young child. I felt very close to her also. However, at the time, we felt that was the best for me. From Bochnia, I probably would never have been able to get out, since my mother vanished from Bochnia, her hometown. It turns out this was the better thing to do.
- Q: Now, how did your group leave the area? By train?

- A: No, No! By foot, everything by foot. We went from one side of Poland to the other by foot. We could not and did not go into a train. Occasionally we hitched a ride on a wagon with straw, but as a rule, we walked from one end to the other.
- Q: Were you able to formulate any plans? You knew you were going someplace.
- A: Yes, our destination was Vilna, since we knew that in Vilna there is a place where we first are going to find shelter and then we would get to an organized group who would send us to Israel, who would support us. They would give the needed papers and shelter and food, and then we would get an opportunity to go to Israel.
- N
- Q: Now between Baunschen and Vilna, did you have any problems getting along the road. In other words, what was the situation like other than the fact that you stayed just ahead of the fighting? Were you able to move directly to Vilna or did you have to go by a round about road.
- A: It took us almost two years, actually one and a half years to get to our destination (One year and nine and a half months elapsed between the German invasion of Poland and their invasion of Russia, and Vilna was overrun within one week after the invasion of Russia).
- Q: So we got a lot to talk about?
- A: That's right. It took us almost that long
- Q: Can you describe to me the type of things you ran into? What happened in that time?
- A: The things we ran into was just a case of survival. We were fugitives, we slept on the ground, we slept in barracks. We ate what we found, sometimes, at night we had to pick up garbage. We did whatever we felt had to be done for survival.
- Q: Were the Polish people themselves, not the Polish Jewish people, but the Polish people helpful in any way?
- A: Some of them were very helpful. Some of them took us in so that we could take a bath and some of them were afraid. You know that the worst anti-Semitism existed in Poland. Hitler set his concentration camps up in Poland because he knew that they would have good support there, since the Poles did not like the Jews either.
- Q: Did you ever get to a point where the fighting was where you were at the time -- I know that you said that you always were able to be one day ahead of them.
- A: We just somehow made it, by a miracle, by our strength, by our know-how, by our will to live.

- Q: You mentioned that some of the people got sick along the way.
- A: When people got sick, we had to take care of them. We had, sometimes, to get people to a doctor. We were pretty well living without money.
- Q: Were you able to move in spurts? Did you get to a place, then stop for a while?
- A: Yes. We stopped in bigger cities. We supplied ourselves with food. Sometimes, we worked for a few days. We got help from Jewish families. After all, we could not always walk.
- Q: I was going to ask you if you ever came in contact with Jewish Refugee Organizations?
- A: As a matter of fact, toward the end our group grew. We picked up some more refugees, that is Jewish refugees.
- Q: You didn't run across any particular organization which took you in? or aided you?
- A: You know we Jewish people are very unique people. If someone is in need, they will get help. We know that and we got that help. It shows again that it's hard to get somebody down if you really are determined.
- Q: During all of this time the Nazis were rounding up Jewish people all over Poland, and shipping them to various camps.
- A: This came a little later (actually during most of this time HE and her group must have been in Russian controlled Poland). The concentration camps came later.
- Q: What year are we talking about?
- A: We are talking about 1939 and 1940. We arrived in Vilna in early 1941.
- Q: When you arrived in Vilna, how many of the original group were with you?
- A: Our group grew. We picked up more people. There were thousands and thousands of people in Vilna. Jewish people who wanted to go to Israel, who prepared themselves for Israel. We received a hero's welcome. As a matter of fact, at the same time our group arrived other groups came also. That was like a reunion although it was with people we had never met. Of course they did not have all the facilities to house us, and to feed us. We wound up with four people in our bed.
- Q: The seven other people you left Baunschen with?



- A: They all came. We all finished together. We all made it.
- Q: Vilna, I am not very familiar with it. Was it a ghetto? Was it a refugee center?
- A: In a way it was a refugee center. (It was, of course, a relatively large town for this area of Lithuania -- White Russia. It also used to be the center of a thriving Jewish community over 100 years ago.) We knew that from Vilna there was a regular route to go to Palestine. There were people who organized this. There were people who would falsify our dates, for instance, since the British government allowed entry to people who were \sixteen years old or less. At the time, in 1941, I was older so they falsified my documents including passport, identification papers, etc. I was made three years younger. I was in Vilna for half a year till I moved on.
- Q: Now, Vilna, was that a situation where the Polish army was in control as it had been earlier (Vilna by that time had been overrun by the Russians, and the Polish army no longer existed as a national force.)
- A: Vilna was like an oasis covered by the Polish government. Only afterwards Russia took over. The Poles gave Vilna up and Russia took over, however, only for a very brief time then they turned it over to Lithuania. That is really when things started to move. They were peaceful, quiet people and things started to move.
- Q: How many Jewish people were there in Vilna when you got there?
- A: Thousands. Thousand youngsters.
- Q: You mentioned briefly that you were four in a bed. Could you describe this a little more?
- A: You see we had to make the best of what existed. We slept in three shifts. During that time everybody else worked. We did outside work. I remember doing lumber work and housework, farming, anything which was to be done. Everywhere where people needed help, we provided it. We were a group of 1,000 people who had to be fed and housed. We lived in a barracks where soldiers had lived. That is where our headquarters were. This place was also bombed by the Germans and some people were wounded (prior to Russia occupying her part of Poland in 1939). One mother had been holding her child when it was killed in her arms. There were some dramatic experiences. However, as long as we were young, everything seemed so different. The only thing we could never understand was why all this happened to us. Why is it a crime to be Jewish? This was always a question which never left us.
- Q: Did you feel that, once you had reached Vilna, you were safe?

A: Yes, safe! Definitely.

Q: Were you able to check on your mother at that point?

A: Yes. We had letters from each other all the time. She was all right. She lived with her father, in Bochnia. My uncle came to Bochnia, actually two uncles, with their families. She lived amongst her relatives.

Q: You stayed in Vilna, a matter of six months, what was taking place around you at that time? Where were the Germans? Were you relatively safe at that time so you didn't have to make a rash move? Was it all very well planned out?

A: It was very well planned out. The Germans did not come into Vilna. The Germans gave Vilna and the other portions of Eastern Poland to Russia. Later Russia gave Vilna to Lithuania.

Q: This took place at the same time you were there?

A: Yes, this took place when I was there.

Q: Did the Russians ever move on the area?

A: Yes. However, the Russians didn't do anything to us.

Q: Now the Lithuanians, I assume moved in. Did you feel threatened at that stage?

A: Yes, they moved in. Then I got a Lithuanian passport going to Israel. They were very orderly. Very nice. We could work. It was rather a peaceful time.

Q: Now you had a forged passport, making you three years younger, to go to Palestine, the land of Israel. Tell me what took place at this point. How many of you were scheduled to leave? When were you scheduled to leave and how were you scheduled to leave?

A: Unfortunately there were many left behind. Unfortunately and this always bothered me terribly. As a matter of fact, I had a very close friend whom I had made during all these hard times, going through Poland. She was not supposed to leave and I put my foot down and I said "If Rachel doesn't go, I am not going either". I spoke to the President of our organization. He said "OK lady, we are going to give Rachel her papers". The reason for that was that she looked older, actually she was a year older than I, and that is what they were afraid of. They were afraid that if one did not look real they might jeopardize the whole organization. Then she was able to come with me. We got on a train through Poland, Moscow, Odessa, Turkey, Syria and Lebanon finally to Palestine – Israel. That was our road.

Q: How many were you at that time? all together?

A: We were a very small group. We always left by small groups of maybe ten to twelve people at the most. There were many who left before me. There were many who went to Japan. That was a different road. That was our road. I believe in our group there were twelve people, including me.

Q: A mixed group, boys and girls?

A: Yes, a mixed group.

Q: What was your next stop after you left Vilna?

A: I was two days in Moscow, two days in Odessa, one day on the Turkish border, I forgot the name of the place. Then we went through Syria and Lebanon.

Q: What were your accommodations like, on the train?

A: They were excellent, truly excellent. The Jewish Committee had us stay at beautiful hotels in Russia. We were fed royally. That was the first time we had seen good food. We had a good bed. It was the same way in Turkey. Of course in Syria and Lebanon we could not be seen because of the anti-Jewish feeling. Then we drove through the Arab countryside by car.

Q: While you were on the train, passing through Russia, did you ever run into any problems with your passport or identification papers?

A: No. the only thing was that we were watched constantly. For instance, when we went sight seeing we always knew that someone was behind us, following us, and watching us, and listening to what we were saying. We always knew that there was someone who watched us. At night, I told you that we stayed in a beautiful hotel, we went to a show, we always knew that we were watched.

Q: What were conditions like in Russia at this point?

A: I really couldn't go into details because I knew that people were afraid to speak. I had a toothache, so I went to a dentist. I took two of my girlfriends along. The girls spoke Polish, they did not speak Russian. We all spoke Yiddish. The dentist looked Jewish to me. He didn't speak Polish. They asked him if he spoke Polish. "No." If he spoke Yiddish? "No." Then I said, "Do you speak German?" He said "Yes." However his German was like Yiddish. This means that he was a Jew, who was afraid to concede that he was a Jew. This is the way we felt all the time. Jews were afraid to proclaim their religion in Russia. However we did not go into details. We were there for two days. You know that really was not on our minds. All we wanted was to get to the land of Israel.

Q: Can you remember the date when you actually left Vilna?

A: No.

Q: Do you remember what month or time of year that might have been?

A: I know it was in 1941. It must have been in February or March. I did reach Israel March 25, so it must have been March.

Q: So it was before the Allies had entered the war?

A: Yes. (England and France had declared war on Germany in September 1939, Norway and Denmark had been invaded in April 1940 and the Benelux countries in May 1940, so that recollection is not accurate for the European allies.) It was two months before Russia went against Germany. (Germany invaded Russia on June 22, 1941) so the timing was as if an angel watched over us, guiding us.

Q: Just backtracking a little. You mentioned that you had been in touch with your mother all the time you were in Vilna. Was she finally aware that you had left Poland?

A: Yes.

Q: She had that peace of mind?

A: Yes, she knew. I was in contact with her before I left and then from our way we always had contact through the Red Cross. The Red Cross served us by transmitting letters so I was always in touch with her.

Q: You went from Moscow to Odessa? Did anything occur along that segment of your trip?

A: Yes, something which at the time was like a terrible thing, which now seems very small. Before I left Vilna, my friends gave me a pair of beautiful wool gloves. You know it was very cold in Vilna. Sometimes as low as 40 or 45 degrees below zero. They didn't have anything, nobody had any money, so they bought me as a going away present a pair of gloves. I hung my coat up in the train, not in the station, but in the train, while we were traveling, and when I woke up in the morning, my gloves were gone. Oh, I thought that this was the worst thing, not only because they stole my gloves, but because they were the nicest souvenir which I could have gotten. That was taken away from me. This was very disappointing, but it was nothing special.

Q: You were not stopped or interrogated, or anything like that on your trip?

- A: No. the only thing is that we were followed in Russia, observed as if we were spies or something.
- Q: Now we are assuming that it was the Russians who were following you.
- A: Definitely, but definitely it could only have been the Russians. There were no other people there.
- Q: You went to Odessa and went to Turkey, you said?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Were you in Istanbul?
- A: Yes, in Istanbul.
- Q: Did you have any problems crossing that border?
- A: No, not at all. All our passports were made up beautifully. They did a very good job. There again we stayed for maybe a week, until we were ready to go to Israel, to the land of Israel.
- Q: During the trip and realizing that this was a rather pleasant trip compared to the hardship you had gone through, other than being followed and someone being aware of your moves, did you ever feel as if you were never going to get to your destination? Or did you feel that eventually you would get there?
- A: The only time we felt threatened was in Syria and in Lebanon. Prior to our getting there, they told us, "Make sure no one sees you!" we arrived at night. We were pushed while they were saying, "Sh! Very quiet, very quiet" into the hotel rooms. Our food was brought into our rooms in bags. We were told "Don't speak! Make sure that you don't speak German, Yiddish or Hebrew, or whatever you speak. Let nobody hear you!" Early in the morning, at dawn, the bus driver picked us up. He didn't speak. He got money out of doing this job. That is how he made money. Until we reached the border of the land of Israel we didn't know how it would end. For one and a half days through Syria and Lebanon, these were again tense moments.
- Q: You said that you stopped in a hotel, and then there was a bus driver. Were the people Arabs?
- A: Yes, Arabs. These were Arab people who worked for the money.
- Q: Other than the fact that it was a very precarious situation, you had no problem getting across any borders? From one border to the next?

- A: No. The driver knew his way. He had done this several times before. That was the way in which our people were brought into Israel.
- Q: Just to clarify this a little, did you actually cross borders at checkpoints?
- A: No, not at checkpoints. No we did not cross borders at official crossings. He knew his road. It was his livelihood to smuggle people into the land of Israel.
- Q: OK, so you came in through the back door?
- A: Yes, definitely, through the back door.
- Q: What were your feelings when you crossed the border into Israel? I am sure that you recall them.
- A: Unbelievable! We were lying on the ground and kissing the ground. We were singing and we were jubilant. We were dancing. It was a moment we will never forget. Then the people who lived there, came to join us and we were brought up to Haifa to get all our injections. Then my brothers called and later I rejoined my brothers. So this was something special. Then I started school, high school again.
- Q: When you entered Israel, what was the village or town, what was the point of entry? Did you go to a central point other than Haifa? at first?
- A: We entered through a small village close to Lebanon. Then another driver came on the bus and we were driven, that was now an Israeli bus driver, and drove us to Haifa. There we were checked over, we got our shots, whatever we needed. Then we had our slip telling us what our destination was. I went to visit my brothers. They lived, at the time, in Richon Le-Zion (just south of Tel Aviv.)
- Q: Before we get to that point were you ever aided at any point along the route by any Jewish organization?
- A: Certainly! The whole thing was set up and aided by Jewish organizations.
- Q: I realize that. Can you name some of these organizations, I wondered if you had the titles of some of these groups. Do you remember who they were? I know that in Germany and later in the U.S. there was the Joint Distribution Committee.
- A: In Turkey, it was the Joint. The VIZO. There was something like the UJA. All of the organizations cooperated. You just don't bring people into a country by one man or one organization. It was a joint effort and a joint doing.
- Q: It was organized.
- A: Yes, very organized.

- Q: There was someone to meet you in the Land of Israel, when you arrived?
- A: There? Yes! Of course. Wherever we came we were met, we were welcomed. You knew that you were amongst friends.
- Q: Do you remember now? You left basically in March 1941, and you arrived? How long a trip was it?
- A: We arrived in March 1941.
- Q: So it was a matter of about two or three weeks?
- A: Yes.
- Q: You said that you went as soon as you could to visit your brothers. You had two brothers living in Israel at the time?
- A: Yes.
- Q: The other one was in Russia, and you were not aware of his whereabouts?
- A: That is right.
- Q: Did you know that he was in Russia when you passed through that country?
- A: No. Even if I had, I couldn't have done anything. I knew that he was someplace, but he was in a different area entirely. I could never have left my assigned route. As a matter of fact, at the time he was in Poland. Then he was sent to Siberia. I don't believe that I knew that at that time either. I only heard about this afterwards.
- Q: Were your brothers married at the time?
- A: Both my brothers got married in Palestine-Israel.
- Q: They had established themselves in Palestine-Israel.
- A: When I arrived one of my brothers was married. Yes they were both established.
- Q: You attended school in Haifa?
- A: No, in Richon Le-Zion. My first school was an agricultural high school. Then I attended school in Jerusalem, and then I attended school in Tel Aviv.

- Q: The first school was an agricultural high school which trained you to work on something like a Kibbutz.
- A: Yes. I had a choice. Either I could go straight to Jerusalem and to the university there, or I could go to Richon Le-Zion into that agricultural high school. I decided to finish two years in the latter, because my brothers were there. I felt that since I had not been close to my family for such a long time, this would give me the support I needed.
- Q: When were you able to find out more about what happened to your mother?
- A: From time to time we received Red Cross letters. (These were notes mailed on letters where you could indicate by check marks which of several phrases you felt were applicable -- that way absolutely no intelligence information could be transmitted since nothing other than the name was written.) The final thing about her, most of her brothers and sisters and sisters-in-law vanishing, we found out after the war only.
- Q: So you were really unawares for what happened to her for about three or four years?
- A: I still had letters from her in 1943. So that means since the war was over in 1945, that two years before the war finished, I still had letters from her.
- Q: So you have any idea where, or when she was sent?
- A: She was sent to Krakow Concentration Camp. The last letter I received from her was from Krakosh, in Galizia. Then the letters stopped!
- Q: You were in school. Your plan is to stay in Israel-Palestine.
- A: Oh, yes!
- Q: Can you describe to me what conditions were like in Israel-Palestine when you arrived?
- A: At that time the country was under the British Mandate. The country was surrounded by Arabs and so it still is. The Arabs didn't want us. The British did not want to leave. In other words, it was in some kind of uproar. For us Jews that was the only country to live in.
- Q: It is June 2, 1981. This is the second part of an interview which I am having with Helen Erman on the Dayton Area Holocaust project. It is 10:A.M.
- Q: Helen, when we ended last time, we were talking about the situation in the Land of Israel. I want to start off this time by asking you; did any of the events which



were taking place at that time, when you first moved there influence your future?  
You were apparently living with your brothers, or, at least, one of your brothers.

A: No. When I first moved there, I first came to the place where all the new immigrants come. It is called Bet Olim (Olim is a Hebrew word which means New Immigrant). There tests were taken. I was checked to see if I was well. We got all the needed shots. Then I went straight to school, to the agricultural high school for two years. Of course, I visited my brothers but in Richon Le-Zion. I stayed for two years in the agricultural school.

Q: Was the idea of the high school to prepare you for the Kibbutz type living?

A: No, that was not the case. I could have gone to a Kibbutz, as a matter of fact, I worked for three months on a Kibbutz, but this school was not a preparation for Kibbutz life. We studied Hebrew first and then Jewish history, and Jewish literature and we worked half day. So we studied half day and we worked for half day. We supported ourselves with the vegetables we grew. We, also, had cows, chickens and so on. We supported ourselves.

Q: May I ask you, now while we are talking about school, how many languages do you speak?

A: I speak four -- let me change that to three and a half. They are German, Hebrew, English and Yiddish.

Q: No Polish?

A: No, I don't know Polish.

Q: While you were in that school, that is where you met Hans?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you complete the school training?

A: Yes. We did not marry when I met him. We got married two years later. After we got married, I went to another school, that was part time. It was a college in Tel Aviv and in Jerusalem.

Q: What did you study there?

A: I studied Home Economics, but I never worked in that field.

Q: In what year were you married?

A: In 1945. Both our children were born in Israel. This was the greatest joy we could imagine.

Q: Could you give me their names?

A: Our son's name is Stanley. That means that his Hebrew name is Etan. Our daughter's name is Dori. Her Hebrew name is Dorit.

Q: How long did you stay in Israel, after the children were born?

A: We left Israel in 1954. That means that our son was six and a half and our daughter was three and a half.

Q: So you were in Israel during the time of the War of Independence. Would you like just to talk about that, those particular years, between the time you were married and the time you left? What was going on in Israel?

A: When I came to Israel the British Mandate was going on. They really had a very rough time to please the Jews and to please the Arabs. Of course they could not please anybody. The Jews made demands for more immigration, i.e. for more Jews to come to Israel, and that was rejected by the Arabs. The attacks of the Arabs were always present. Our school was attacked at least ten times during the two years I went there. The first thing we had to learn was how to use weapons. At that time, I was nineteen years old. We had to learn how to use the weapons, how to pull guard duty, how to throw a hand grenade. We had to learn all these things. We had to be alert. We also had many casualties.

Q: The school you were talking about defending, that was the agricultural school?

A: Yes.

Q: You were never drafted into the Israeli Armed Forces? into any kind of military?

A: No. At this time girls could join. Some of my fellow students and classmates did join, but you were not drafted. Presently it is a different thing. At present any girl who is not married actually joins the army.

Q: Did you have any contact with any Arabs, during these years?

A: Yes, after I was married the lady who cleaned my house was an Arab. She came once a week. She did our laundry and when something was going on. i.e., when the situation was not smooth, she didn't come. But one knew that she was safe and was a lovely person. Arabs who stayed did very well. Their children received education; they earned a decent income. As a matter of fact, when the War of Independence broke out, there was a group of people, a group of Arabs in our neighborhood. We told them to stay and we said, "Nothing will happen to

you. We are going to protect you”. However, their leaders said, “Leave, there is nothing for you! There is no future for you. We are going to attack the Jews and we are going to destroy them, or at least drive them out”. However, thank God, it never happened.

Q: You were aware that the British had theorized that the Jewish population and the Arab population were going to be integrated on a very equal basis. So there was not going to be any problem of the kind which did arrive and which caused the war. Was there ever a feeling of wellbeing between the two peoples? You know since you were there? Was there ever that feeling?

A: I think that it could have worked out. I really do. At that time there were only 600,000 Arabs and maybe 500,000 Jews, so we were pretty evenly matched. It could have worked out if the big powers would not have interfered as they did. You know there are also Arab states which surround Palestine, if they would not have interfered. It was a power struggle.

Q: Did you ever feel at any time you were there, that you personally, were in a great deal of danger? Living as you did in that part of the world?

A: In Israel?

Q: Yes.

A: Not really. If you live in Israel, you know that you are surrounded by enemies, and you have to live with that in mind. You have to watch out, you have to be alert, you have to be prepared, but I never felt that “tomorrow might be my last day”. That is the same thing as happens here. It happened to the President, it happened to the Pope! However, in Israel I felt very strong. I am a very positive Zionist. I am a very positive Jew, so I don’t hesitate.

Q: Tell me about the war of 1948. How did it involve you, and your family?

A: Our son was, at the time, one year old. When the War of Independence was declared. At night we heard bombs. Egypt bombed Tel Aviv, not far from us. We lived on one floor in a house, right under the roof. So we took our son to some friends of ours, who lived at the lower level. Now we had two stories above us, and we felt that this was a little better than nothing. Of course food was scarce. This really was a very bad time. we did not have much to fight back with. Israel, at the time, was very weak. I remember that we had “Little Sputnicks”, as we called them, really they didn’t amount to anything. At times we fought until the last dozen Jews were left. Somehow we came out of it.

Q: Your family was not involved in the actual fighting? How about your brothers? Did they have to fight?

- A: My husband was a soldier. He was drafted as a soldier and he really had more to do with the education than the actual fighting. He taught the new immigrants Hebrew, and how to get around and how to get along. But he was drafted. My brothers were drafted. One brother was drafted and was in Sinai. One brother was wounded in his arm. Yes, during the War of Independence we had some problems.
- Q: OK. You survived the war and things settled down into a post war low, if you can call it that! Why then did you decide to leave Israel?
- A: We decided to leave Israel because my husband wanted to study. He wanted to complete his studies. This was one reason why we left. My husband also had only one sister who lived, at the time, in the U.S. We also wanted to be with her.
- Q: May I ask your feeling upon leaving? I know being there was very close to your heart. How did you feel about leaving from a place which meant so much?
- A: I can only tell you that coming to Chicago with my tears just running down my cheeks constantly, when I compared what I had in Israel with what I had in the U.S. when we came. Israel is a very small country. You know everybody. You know your neighbors. You feel the troubles of other people. You feel the joy of other people. You are like a large family. Here I was a nobody. Nobody knew me. I knew nobody. I did not know the language. It was very, very difficult until I got use to the U.S. Even today, if someone asked me, "What is your homeland?" I would not answer Germany! Never! My eyes feel very strong and very close to the Land of Israel and their wellbeing.
- Q: I would like to ask you a little about the time you spent in Chicago, and various places where your husband went to school.
- A: I went to school in Chicago also.
- Q: Where did you go to school?
- A: To the Hebrew College.
- Q: Did you get a degree?
- A: I got half my degree in Israel and half my degree here. So I can teach.
- Q: Your children were small then.
- A: Our son was close to seven and our daughter was close to four.
- Q: I know that your husband moved around at different times in his career, in order to move upward, what were your feelings about the moves you had to make? In

all the moves, did you ever feel comfortable? Did you ever live in a Jewish neighborhood or community? Did you have the feeling that you belonged?

A: I am a person who adjusts very well, otherwise, we could not have moved. From Chicago we moved to Des Moines, then to Atlanta, then to New Haven and now in Dayton. Being in the position that we are, working amongst our people, we always made friends, not always close friends -- but a lot of acquaintances. There was never a problem that we felt that we didn't belong because I was teaching Hebrew -- so there were children involved and parents involved -- and with my husband's position -- so there never was a question of not knowing people. We knew many people but, of course, that does not mean that you always make a lot of friends. However, we did make friends wherever we were. Then it was always hard to leave the place, but there was always something to look forward to, so it wasn't together bad. You learn from every city and everybody. I could say that you learn from every child. You just have to keep an open mind and something will come of it.

Q: Your relationships have generally been with the Jewish community?

A: Only! I never worked for a non-Jewish group.

Q: That interests me. Obviously you feel comfortable there and your husband's position puts you in this environment.. Would you feel uncomfortable if you were thrown in a position, now that your husband is retiring, where you were not quite totally within the Jewish community?

A: No, I don't think that I would. I would definitely not feel uncomfortable because now I will meet gentile people, but I would not have called them close relationships. In our building here, there is a gentile couple and I respect her and she respects me. You respect a person for what he is, not for what his religion is. However, it happened that during all our years in the U.S., we worked amongst Jews, Jewish schools and Jewish education and Jewish community. We were always surrounded by Jews.

Q: You are very dedicated to the people.

A: Yes, definitely.

Q: This leads me to another question. Based on your past experience, what you have been through, what is it like to be a Jewish woman?

A: That is the only thing I have ever been, so that is all I know. I was born a Jew. I feel strongly towards Judaism. I am not a religious person. I don't go to services every day, however, I am very committed towards Judaism.

Q: Do you feel that because of the experience you have been through, that the Jewish people are very special people in some regard? That they have to carry on?

A: I don't know if they are special people, but I do know that if we don't look out for ourselves -- if we don't help each other -- nobody will do it for us. So I think that, in order for us to survive, if the Holocaust had not been, it would be a different story. However, we have learned through persecutions, including the Holocaust, and now with the fighting with the Arabs, that we have to look out for ourselves. We have to help each other, otherwise, we won't survive. The question of survival is a very strong one.

Q: People are very strong.

A: Yes, in general, people are strong, but many nations and many peoples have been lost during these generations, as civilizations. Thanks God the Jews still remain, even if only a small remnant but they are still struggling and they are still powerful and we have the will to live.

Q: You said that you were not necessarily a very religious person. I want to ask you what part religion played in your life? Or has played since you have been in the U.S.?

A: We are Conservative Jews. I keep a kosher home. We eat only kosher food. We go to services, not every Saturday and not every day, but I would say, three times a month. I enjoy prayers. I had an uncle who was a rabbi. I had an uncle who was a cantor. It is involved in me. I like the Jewish atmosphere. I like the feeling of Jews. We celebrate the Holy Days. On Friday nights I light the candles and we have a festival meal. Friday and Shabbat is different than any other day. I do enjoy the holiday.

Q: What part has the synagogue played in your social life? Apart from the religious life?

A: I do belong to the Sisterhood, but I hardly ever attend because of my working schedule. You see school starts (that is for religious after school classes) at 3:30 P.M. and the Sisterhood meetings involve that time. So, at this point, in Dayton, I am not very active in the Sisterhood of the synagogue. , However I am active in Hadassah. Hadassah is a women's organization which is very pro-Israel. They have a hospital in Jerusalem on Mt. Scopus. I am an active member.

Q: Do you still have relatives of any kind living in Israel?

A: I have nieces and nephews and a sister-in-law, as well as cousins. My brother passed away not long ago.

Q: How often do you visit Israel?

A: Not often enough. We were supposed to go this summer, if we were not going to move. So we will get there hopefully next year. We would like to go. We get letters and they tell us how awful the situation in Israel is. The inflation is terrible. However somehow they are going to make it.

Q: Have your children ever visited Israel?

A: No! No.

Q: Don't they have any desire to?

A: Very much so, but the last time we went to Israel we were planning to take our children along. They have some very purist rules there, such as: If you are a Sabra, that means you were born in Israel, which our children are, and you come back you have to join the army. We were afraid even though they were in college here at the time, that if they came back they would have to join the army. If they didn't join the army, it would take them a long time until everything would be straightened out. After all we are still Israelis! We have dual citizenship, because if you are once an Israeli, you are always an Israeli. So we were afraid to take our children. However, now that they are older they also have changed their rules in Israel.

Q: Do your children have dual citizenship?

A: Yes, both.

Q: Your children have families now?

A: They have two children.

Q: That would make a difference, as far as being drafted doesn't it?

A: No. My brother was drafted when he was sixty years old, in Israel. If the need is there you do. You know, if the need is there you pitch in.

Q: How about your grandchildren now. They are getting a little older?

A: They are too young.

Q: They are still too young to appreciate a visit to Israel?

A: Yes. That they are.

Q: Would you like to take them someday?

- A: Oh, yes! Definitely. If I can afford it.
- Q: I asked your husband this question. I will now ask you this question, also. You have been through a traumatic life. You were exposed to a great deal of hardship. How has this manifested itself in the way you raised your children? Do you know of anything that, because you lived the life that you did live, you raised your children in a very special way?
- A: I don't know if this is a special way. We involved a lot of love in our children. The special way could be that we told them, "Don't lie". Is that what you mean?
- A: Yes.
- Q: We had some difficulties with that. Sometimes you have to tell a "white lie" in order to survive. When you look back, the people, the best people really vanished in concentration camps because they didn't know how to fight back. People with stronger shoulders and with stronger personalities survived. It always was a question which we repeated to our children, "Be honest! Do your best! However, in some cases you have to use a white lie then do it!" It didn't happen to them because they are decent kids.
- Q: There is nothing that you felt that, because you had gone through this, your children were raised any differently than perhaps if you had not?
- A: Not that I know of. They both were good students. They both learned an instrument. They were always able to make friends. As a matter of fact neither one has an accent. They are Americans! They are American Jews! They are pro-Israel, of course, but 100% American.
- Q: You mentioned briefly a couple of times that you don't know what will happen in Israel. Would you like to elaborate on that a little? Your feeling about what is going on over there now. Is there a future, a decent future for the country? Or will there always be this constant struggle against it's neighbors?
- A: I think that is actually a struggle amongst the big powers. I think that the Arabs and the Jews could eventually live in harmony, if the big powers would not interfere. On the other hand you know that the U.S. needs Israel. I am actually not a politician, so I really don't know.
- Q: However you would favor allowing Israel and it's neighbors to settle things?
- A: Oh, yes! Definitely! I would love them to settle things amongst themselves. They could help each other tremendously. It would be an asset to all of them. You would know that, if you go to Egypt. People, who have gone to Egypt now that Egypt is open, say that the poverty is so bad. The children are on the ground, on floors, and the sickness is unbelievable. The majority is very, very poor and



- sick. The cities are dirty. I haven't been there but people who went have told me that it's unbelievable.
- Q: This is probably one of the reasons why Sadat favored peace? He cannot fight a war and feed his people, also.
- A: Sure, sure. They could only benefit. You see Israel is a small country, but they are so determined to make it. They would do it for any price, they would pay just to have peace in the country.
- Q: Then you obviously favor the Camp David accords?
- A: Oh, definitely! It is a big step forward. But, unfortunately so, for only Egypt has gained from the whole thing. Egypt got the Sinai Peninsula back and the oil fields. The only one who has really benefited is Egypt.
- Q: What do you really think Begin and the government should do at this stage? Incidentally, there are meetings again with Sadat coming up.
- A: Now there is another problem. The problem is Syria and also, the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). They are having a lot of problems and inflation is very big. They would like more people, you know, Jews, to immigrate to Israel. There are problems. Many Israelis are leaving, even if it's only for a short while. Good people are leaving because they need employment. The housing problem is not good. Yes, there are problems, unfortunately.
- Q: I realize that you are moving to St. Louis, because your daughter lives there.
- A: Yes, my daughter, my grandchildren and my son-in-law and my brother and sister as well as nephews and nieces.
- Q: Had you ever considered to retire to Israel?
- A: Oh, yes!
- Q: And you turned it down?
- A: Well, not quite. It all depends. If my children would go to Israel, we would all go. There is no question about it. However, at this point, my son is settled here and so is my daughter, so we won't leave them. That is one of the reasons why we are going to St. Louis. That way we will be close to at least one of the children. Maybe eventually our son will settle there. Also, hopefully. But, if they would settle in Israel, there is no question we would go.

Q: You are going to retire. Your husband is going to retire to St. Louis. Do you have plans for yourself after you retire? Is there something special you plan to do?

A: I know one thing. I won't sit in a rocking chair. First, I am going to enjoy my grandchildren. I might do some kind of teaching, maybe some tutoring. I am going to be active in Hadassah. We are going to join a synagogue and I will be active there. So there is a lot to look forward to.

Q: You are at a happy stage in your life

A: That is right. Let us hope that we all stay well. That is most important.

Q: Is there anything that we have not covered in this interview, which you would like to say at this time? I believe that we talked about your life and about what has transpired.

A: Yes, very briefly.

Q: Is there anything which I have neglected to ask you, which you would like to put on the tape?

A: No, not that I know of.

Q: You think that we have covered it all?

A: Yes, I believe so.

Q: Well, I have really enjoyed it enormously and we are so pleased that you have volunteered to give us your story. I have enjoyed it very, very much. Thank you.

A: Thank you.

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