

Lea Bonk, née Lea Pontremoli, was born in Alexandria, Egypt January 1, 1932. Her mother, Allegra Belleli was born in Egypt of Greek parents (Corfu); her father was Vitali Pontremoli, whose heritage was Spanish, then to Italy, Izimir (Turkey) and finally to Egypt. Her father died when Lea was five. She was the youngest of five: two sisters, Esther born in 1921 and Sara in 1925; two brothers, Solomon born in 1923 and Piero Alfredo in 1928. They had to leave Egypt in the 1950's as tension rose with Europe and Israel. One sister lives in Israel, a brother and sister in Brazil, and Lea in Australia.

Lea says she had a pleasant young life with many friends, Jewish and non-Jewish. She lived in Egypt during WWII and she saw many soldiers. Her father had an antique shop until he died. She spoke Arabic frequently to her neighbors, shopkeepers and other Jews, such as those from Yemen. She did not speak Hebrew or Yiddish. Her family kept kosher, buying meat from a local Arab butcher. Their family had Italian passports.

When Nasser came to power in Egypt, conditions became harder for Jews. Her husband, Moises Belleli (yes, apparently the same surname as her mother's family), had a lost a limb in WWII fighting for in a Greek brigade based in Egypt. News reports often mis-reported the political and military events surrounding the 1948 war, compounding some of the negative attitude that arose against Jews in Egypt. With tensions became worse in 1956, they began to sell some of their belongings in preparation for departing. This was permitted for those with passports, but many local British and French citizens had their goods confiscated. Government inquiries into their status and conduct did not result in any charges or harassment.

Lea had a three-month and three-year old sons when she moved to Australia. Her husband was a radio technician, still receiving a pension from the Greek army. They decided on Australia as her husband's sister was there, while Israel seemed to be too dangerous through the eyes of the Arab press that they had read, and Greece didn't suit them. Her first husband passed away in 1970. Her second (and final) husband, Chaim (Charlie), was born in Warsaw, went to Russia during the war, and then to Israel, fighting with the Palmach.

As Sephardic, she cited very few difficulties in integrating into the Ashkenazi community in Australia (Melbourne), though she describes some of the variations among certain foods.

The tape concludes with Lea showing various family photos and genealogy charts.