

This is Louisa Hext, interviewing Lady Jacobovitz, on September 15th, 1987, in St. ^{Taha} ~~Dunns~~wood, London, England. This is interview number two.

I had the very good fortune of being the daughter of unfortunately a father who is no longer alive, who has died in the last few years, but he has been one of the foremost Orthodox leaders of Judaism in France, between the middle 30's until we had to escape from nazi Germany. The takeover of the nazis, when they came into Paris in the late 1939, was when we had to escape. So my background is the daughter of a rabbi and the daughter of a very wonderful, very positive mother, always looking up on life in a very positive way.

I was very young when we had to leave Paris in 1939, although very young I was the oldest daughter of a family of four, and shared every experience with my mother very intimately because it was a very horrendous experience. As for instance when we had to leave Paris with the last carriage and the last train which got out from Paris before the Germans started coming, and had to sit on the train in exactly the same spot for eight days, as I've been to... and until we got to the very end of the French border with the...and got off there.

I had a very happy childhood, being born into, rather ~~two parents who were very, very secure in themselves and~~

~~with each other and their community, their friends, we~~
~~never had any problems whatsoever.~~ Those few horrendous
 years, which would be very much to hard to explain to you
 or to talk about in a short interview, I have often thought
 since have thrown, at that time, situations on to me far
~~beyond what a person is called upon to deal with at the age~~
~~of 10 or 11 in normal times.~~ In retrospect it probably
~~sharpens my sense of deep independence, counting very much~~
~~on my own initiative and my own instinctive sense of~~
~~protection~~ as we all have as human beings and probably
 being, in retrospect, of enormous help to me in doing the
 work which I now do by the side of my husband who is
chief rabbi of England
 a...and have been doing for the last twenty years. I am
~~one of those, thank god, thousands and thousands of~~
~~survivors - because there are thousands and thousands of~~
~~survivors - who very deeply thinks that I was born~~
~~literally twice...I just cannot believe that I went through~~
~~what I went through and after coming out of the war was~~
~~able to begin a life, for the first two or three years,~~
~~nearly normal and since I met...in 1949 becoming more and~~
 more exciting in the just opposite way of the ~~whole horrific~~ *things*
~~experience~~ which I had experienced for six or seven years.

So that when I, and I do that a few times a day, think
 about my life I am just overwhelmed with *gratitude to the Almighty*
~~through that alright, of being, actually born, not only~~
 emotionally, but feeling that I am physically born twice.

Was your family very religious?

Yes, my family was. Well, you know religious is a very relative term. We were strictly Orthodox. And my parentsand my husband and his parents...when we met in 1949 that part of it, you know, was not even up for discussion ...our six children and grandchildren are on the exactly same wavelengths as we are. We are very very fortunate, we have no generation gap.

Did that religion have something to do or help you as far as the survival and...

Oh I have no doubt about it. Not as a survivor because that doesn't...I mean there's no one in the world who can explain in this human intellect, which is very limited, why some of us survived and others didn't survived. Certainly in human terms there's no more merits in us surviving than those of us who didn't survive, the other 6 million who did not survive. I don't think any of us can claim that.

*that was at
the hand of the
Almighty*

What did help us is this unquestioning faith that we would construe in one way or another. Having said that, of course, I have to make you quite sure that most of the 6 million who perished also had that faith...but we never, never gave up hope whatsoever. And there's no question that it did help you and keep going all the times when we had to...

So when you were so young as you were, what did you think about...

I was much too young to understand the real dangers. I knew there were dangers, I remember distinctly that intellectually I knew there were normal dangers, but you had to be very much older than myself at that time to realize emotionally the total dangers...my parents of course and all their generations knew, emotionally terrified that, very fearful that the worst could happen to any member of their family, as it did...who lost many of their closest relatives. But at the age of 10 or 11 or 12 you're much too young to actually realize the terrible dangers, and you also are very much more courageous in many ways, to go through any kind of...I remember before I was totally fearless of doing any kind of sport, after I saw twice before going up the slope and skiing down or whatever thing. But you do not as a youngster realize the terrible things and you really feel very deeply that you're only responsible for yourself. That also makes a...you don't realize the danger, you're just responsible for your own ~~survival~~ self and not responsible for anyone else that's around and you grow up to take the responsibility not only for your own survival but for those who are dependant, you hope, only to survive.

Were you with your family throughout?

More or less. Not perpetually but more or less always miraculously we found each other. My father was separated from us he was first in the army then in different

concentration camps and where we were, we were separated during this long trip when we escaped from the south of France into Switzerland several times, and even when we did arrive in Switzerland he was taken away from us without us knowing. So we ^{weren't} ~~went~~ always together but we miraculously ~~always got back to together.~~

You spoke before of your close relationship with your mother. Do you think that the situation brought you close together, or...

Not only with my mother but also with my father. I had, actually, a very intimate relationship with my father, from my very early childhood my father and I didn't speak together: we felt, and we saw things. And you had a very secure upbringing, ...that in itself took away some of the ~~potential fear...~~ potential fear...

And you had brothers and sisters?

I am the youngest of seven brothers and sisters.

How many brothers and sisters?

I have two brothers and five sisters, no four sisters.

And you left all together?

No, we left Paris and there were five children, and by the time we came back my parents had seven children. Some ^{miraculously} ~~were born along the way~~ were born along the way - another long story...I think this here will give you a lot of information, it will give you a taste of, uh, I want you to read this. I can't use it actually because it's been used by this John Kotz in his

book, and, but you can use it as a basis of the interview.

What's the book about, specifically?

Read it, it's a....

Can you tell me anything about, you know, your journeys and travels? Maybe a few personal incidents that cost you for...you're saying that it's in here.

Well the major thing, the most moving thing is in there, yes.

Can you just mention what it was, very briefly. I'll read this as well.

It's a long story, it would take me three-quarters of an hour to tell you this story. To do justice, that's why I'm very happy to give it to you on the paper. I think it would be much easier for you if you can...

What about the sense of Shabbat, or something that caused you, as a group...

That never left us, we were always somehow able to certainly, not keep Shabbat as usual, but as I know it, ever since the liberation of the, the Americans coming in, we were always able to have, if not always the ritual of Shabbat, we always had the spirit of Shabbat, we were always able to live accordingly, we always managed somehow or another to find if not a whole candle, certainly a part of a candle to....and we were always able to find some bread, somewhere or another, under terrible circumstances, even in camps to make a...on Shabbat.

I am very happy in a way that I haven't got any desperate memory that I did not have a Shabbat, even if it was under very, very difficult circumstances. What we ~~didn't have was, for instance, a...~~ which is a day of when we had to leave Paris, the day before...^{shabbat} when the Germans came to bomb Paris. And all that week of course we, in fact when I came off the train after one week, I had to go and spend 48 hours with thousands of people who had tried to escape from France, in a huge barrack which was acquisitioned.

As I have said, as I do say when I speak about it because I can really express myself better when I am standing and only speak about that and nothing else, with no interruptions, I do feel very strongly that those of us, those of us survivors who are able to speak about it and have been able to do so for the last, in my case 30 years or so, are able to cope very much better as a result of that, than those of us who just cannot think about it to this day. They are the ones who are now, after 40 years, having a delayed reaction and suffering very badly.

I have very dear friends who are going through terrific, the most terribly traumatic times now. Not in between. Up to now they were okay. And they married, and they had lovely families, and now they go through terrible times because they just cannot speak about it. And those of us who can speak about it seem to be able to cope very much

better, having found our feet again and be emotionally much better adjusted than those who unfortunately cannot speak about it. And once we all had decided, those of us who had survived all of us decided at the end of the war, that we weren't going to speak about our experiences, because we are here, and alive, and therefore it wouldn't be fair to those who died that we should speak about it, because we were all afraid that if we do speak about it it would sound like we were bragging: we are alive and they are not alive. And we made a conscious decision not to talk about it, ever.

You'll find in ^{Sh'vunt} in his books, for ten years he just couldn't get himself to speak about it. But then when our children began to be old enough, at the age of six or seven years, in my opinion as a mother, to be able to understand, if I speak to him every day about it. But because his parents survived, and because he is alive, we are going to grow up together with the knowledge that we all can learn very much more than we would have done not having said anything. It is a privilege to be alive and therefore we have to give the very best that we know how to the society around us.

Then there was, in many ways, a u-turn, if I may put it that way, and some of us decided that we must, and that we all must speak about it, because that was a part of our own further development, and gratitude to the almighty, and

conscious realization that we have to do our very best for those who have so much less than ourselves. But at the same time I think it has given us I think a new turn. Not that we thought that we wanted, or did want, or we're going to get a new turn, there was no motivation of speaking about it...the motivation was entirely to teach ourselves and our children that we all have a tremendous amount of giving in every sense of the word, to our own families and to our society, to the society in which the almighty was going to put us, just as a token, a very, very, very small token of ~~saying thank you for being alive.~~

It has at the same time given us a sense of emotional balance, which unfortunately those who are not able to speak can have, and in that sense I am very, very fortunate, as well as I am....

Maybe I can ask you, very quickly, something about, this is a view that I have - I could be wrong, from lots of videos that I've seen and these mainly women survivors - that they had to have someone to survive with and some sort of relationship, just a close friendship or something like that, whether it be with family, with someone else. Do you feel that that was a necessary sense of community?

No, I don't think you can make any generalities of that sort, not generalities...I have a very dear friend - I want to give you that tape - I have a very dear friend who got married at the age of fifteen, in...And her parents, and

the parents of the young boy who she loved so dearly, allowed them to get married at the age of fifteen because of the circumstances in which we lived. Because nobody know whether we would be alive, when you got up in the morning, whether you would be alive at night, or whether you would be alive the next morning. And so those parents of this young couple felt that whatever little happiness might be in store for them, they should live together. In those days you didn't think of living together, you got married together. Being religious people they had a proper religious ceremony at the age of fifteen, which under normal circumstances no parents allowed.

A week after they got married they got...in...and she never saw her husband again, ever. But nine months later she had a baby, and she was sent to Auschwitz, nine months later she had a baby in Auschwitz. And as the baby was born, and delivered, the Germans came to the woman and took the baby from her and said, have a good look at your little son, it is the first time and the last time that you will ever see him, and choked him in front of her. And she never saw the baby again... and she survived. She escaped Auschwitz, and she survived, and she came back to Paris and she was unbelievable. She was the first one who gave musical parties and evening parties and went to the beauty parlor, I mean, those survivors who could not bear to see her being able to cope, and thinking that she just rejected _____

or pretended it didn't happen were very critical of her. My father, who was then, again, the rabbinical leader of the same community as he had left before the war, explained to his community from the pulpit that there is no such thing as one human being being able to criticize another human being's reaction to any given tragedy, whether it is the Holocaust or a terrible illness - whatever tragedy it may be. Because we ourselves never know how we would react today. It could be very different from what we would have reacted exactly the same event yesterday.

His guess is a woman who is able, a young woman who is able to cope again, just only has within herself an enormous amount of strength to be able to cope again. Because she probably knows that where she doesn't cope in her life as she does she would probably collapse.

The result is that we just have to be very grateful that there are some human beings who can cope after a terrible tragedy. And she became and she is today one of my very good friends who is a grandmother and has many many children, and a mother, and you know, a matriarch of 150 human beings, because she was able to pretend, to the outside world, regardless of the terrible suffering which was going on within her, that it never really happened. It was like she read a horrific book, closed the book, and pretended she never read the book, and doesn't want to think about it. And she never talked about it. She is one

of those I was referring to who is suffering desperately now, although she has achieved an enormous amount of good things: getting happily married, having a family, very busy in social work, but never speaking about the Holocaust...and she is beginning to have a reaction now. She only just asked me a few months ago whether I had a reaction to the Holocaust and I said...I don't. But I was able to tell her that I...because I have been speaking about it alot, a long time ago.

So she had no, my answer to your question is, that she had noone...to live for. She had lost her young husband, she had lost her baby. She was really on her own, totally on her own. And she escaped Auschwitz by herself. She had no particular person to actually survive with except that she was hoping desperately to find her parents again, somewhere or another - that she did have. That motivation she did have.

Did you have any particular motivation other than religion, other than your family? Strength?

Oh, just the...^{youth on my side} I was probably carried on this...^{despite the troubles} being carried on the wave of total faith not only in...^{the Almighty} but in my parents who actually survived together with me. So the family unit, somehow or another, miraculously was always there in one form or another.

And you were in camps in France?

I wasn't tortured in any way. I mean I wasn't

emotionally tortured in any sense.

But you were in camps in France? Work house?

I was in...and...and...in France, and not allowed to go to school, you know, we went to school occasionally every three months, possibly in the dark, behind dark alleys because we usually were not allowed to go to school, under very dangerous circumstances.

~~What about your form of resistance, were you...~~ I'm not really sure what you did when you were escaping, was it to escape, to get out of the country...

Just a second...

End of Side A. No Side B.