

Tape two, side one:

EA: What's the date?
SS: The 29th.
EA: Of what?
SS: Of August, 1939.
EA: Oh boy. Oh boy. Just in time before the war broke out.
SS: Yeah, yeah.
EA: And you went straight to London, you said.
SS: To, yes. The ship arrived in London. We were all taken to a very large restaurant for lunch. And there people arrived to take children.
EA: What kind of people came? What kind of people arrived?
SS: Well, English people, who had agreed to take a child into their home.
EA: Who found those [unclear] families, do you know?
SS: I think it was Bloomsbury House Committee. And from the restaurant, they were taken straight from the restaurant. [unclear].
EA: You just sat there and waited to be picked up?
SS: Yes. Now I don't know what the situation was. I have gone through life assuming that these children were picked at random. Whether this is true or not I don't know, to this day. All I know is that I was left over.
EA: You were left over?
SS: I was the only one left over. Whether it was because the person who was to come and get me changed his mind, her mind, or whether everyone picked somebody and I wasn't pickable, or take-home-able, or lovable, I don't know.
EA: Oh my.
SS: I don't know to this day what the situation was. But, I'm, I went through life thinking that I wasn't, that I wasn't wanted at that point. And so the people, the restaurant people, said, "Well, would you like to stay with us?" They had not planned to take a child, because they were very busy.
EA: There was nobody from Bloomsbury House there with you?
SS: There must have been. There must have been. But when I was left over I suppose they didn't know what to do with me, and the Blooms decided to keep me, if I wanted to stay.
EA: That was a Jewish restaurant?
SS: Yes, kosher restaurant. And, I said, "Yes," although [unclear].
EA: [laughs] You had no choice!
SS: No choice. And, but I desperately wanted to go to my sister. I wanted to go where she was. And I was terribly unhappy in this, in this home.
EA: Did, you knew where your sister was?
SS: Yes. She was in Burgess Hill.

EA: And you knew her address?

SS: I knew her address. I wrote to her. We wrote to each other.

EA: And you said to the Bloomsbury House, "I want to be with my sister."

SS: I said to the Blooms, the people who...

EA: Oh, to the Blooms.

SS: Yes, I said, "I want to be with her," and "I'll take."

EA: What happened?

SS: Well, they took me. And they wouldn't accept me, because I had, quote "spots" unquote. I had psoriasis. They didn't know what it was. They would not accept me. So back I went with the Blooms. I cried day and night.

EA: But you saw Ruth.

SS: I saw her, which only made it worse because I was terribly unhappy then without her. And I cried day and night and I was so, I cried so hard that they actually heard me downstairs in the restaurant and sent up one of the waiters to see what was the matter with me. And I was too embarrassed to tell him what was wrong. I said I had a toothache. Of course I was taken to the dentist, and, who couldn't find anything wrong with my tooth. And I kept pointing to a tooth, and so he took it out.

EA: Oh no! [laughs]

SS: Yes, yes. I lost two teeth that way. After that I thought, "Well, I can't go on like this. I'll have to tell the truth." So I told Mr. Bloom that I was so unhappy without my sister. I wanted to be with her. And so he said, "Well, I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll just take you there and tell them I can't keep you anymore and leave you there." He said, "Would you like me to do that?" I said, "Yes."

EA: Oh my God.

SS: And so they drove me there and said, "We can't keep her." And that's how I got to be with my sister.

EA: Oh my God. But you knew that that was just an excuse.

SS: Yes. He told me that...

EA: That, oh.

SS: Yes. In fact, I mean, he sent me parcels. I always got, you know, food parcels and sweets from them for many, you know, many months. And then I was with my sister. I was upset by the institution atmosphere, and a very strict matron who was terribly feared.

EA: Do you, was she German?

SS: No, she was English, but she was an absolute horror. She was a dreadful person. We were not allowed to speak anything but English. Anyone who spoke German was punished.

EA: Oh my word! How many children were there in the hostel?

SS: About 60.

EA: 60!?

SS: Yes.

EA: 60 children? All refugees?

SS: Yes.

EA: And that was run by a, who?

SS: By this matron and her little helpers, who were just...

EA: Do you think you were paid for?

SS: No, I don't.

EA: Are you sure?

SS: I imagine so. I mean I really don't know.

EA: Did you have anybody come and visit you from the Bloomsbury House or...

SS: Not to my knowledge.

EA: Did you go to school?

SS: We went to school, to the local school. Up until then I had not gone to school, because all the time I was in London. This, also and everything was evacuated. But I remained there, because I, there was no place to send me.

EA: What part of London did the Blooms have?

SS: They lived in the east end of London, where their restaurant was, and their factory. They were very wealthy. And they had a very beautiful apartment, which took up the entire upper floor of the restaurant, and was very elegant, as I remember. And they had two German girls who were about seventeen or eighteen, German refugee girls who did the cleaning, who came to clean. Because that's all they could get.

EA: Here we, on the domestic visa.

SS: Visa, yes. And the interesting part was that both these girls were from Cologne. They knew me, they knew my family.

EA: Oh my!

SS: And they hated me and were very unkind to me, because I was what they called, "The Princess." I was 11 years old. And I was taken care of while they had to go to work. So, from the very beginning I was, I was never made to feel very welcome or happy. The Blooms had a daughter whose name was also Sylvia. And so of course I lost my name. She didn't lose hers. And I was not even called by my own name. I was called Ginger, because we couldn't have two Sylvias now, could we?

EA: Oh my!

SS: And, there was another loss. I mean it was just continuous trauma. There was no end to it. Anyway, by now I was in, at Wyberlie with my sister. And this terrible matron who was always threatening to cut people's hair off, cut their braids off, and she was really awful.

EA: Sadistic.

SS: Yes. She was really not nice, and I was very unhappy there, but I was glad to be with my sister. [unclear].

EA: Approximately [unclear].

SS: In a huge town it was a large house. It had been a convalescent home and was made into a hostel for us. Then, I think it was about February of 1941. We were transferred from Wyberlie. We couldn't stay there any longer. We had, there were a lot of raids, air raids.

[voice interruption]

SS: The air raids, I don't know when the air raids started. I know that we went through quite a few of them before we were moved from there. And I must say, even though we were very frightened by the bombs flying around us, it was a different kind of fear, for me, anyway. It was, it was we were with the good guys. Do you know what I mean? We were afraid, but it was a different kind of fear. It was not a terror. We weren't being terrorized. Somehow, it was different. As dangerous as it was, we felt a different kind of danger, and it wasn't quite as--it wasn't as terrifying a danger.

EA: It wasn't such a personal threat.

SS: Right. Well, the threat was to our lives, but that's all. [chuckles] Not to our way of life. We were safe in terms, we weren't being persecuted, personally. If we were going to be killed it was by something very impersonal like a bomb. And that was less frightening to me.

EA: Very interesting.

SS: In any event, we were then split up. Some of us went to a hospital. To a, I keep calling it a hospital. A hostel.

EA: A hostel.

SS: A hostel, in Tunbridge Wells, at Kent.

EA: Oh!

SS: The Beacon. In fact we all went there for about two weeks, and from there we were moved. My sister and I were moved to a family in Rutherford in Sussex, in a little village.

EA: Together?

SS: Together. And we went to the same family. It was an old couple.

EA: Hmm! That must have felt good.

SS: No, it didn't. It was the worst thing that could have happened to me. It was a dreadful place.

EA: Ah, well, but you were with Ruth.

SS: Yes, but that didn't last either.

EA: Oh no!

SS: It lasted about a week and when they decided they didn't have room for both of us. It was a tiny little cottage, without a toilet, without a bathroom. I mean it just was very, very primitive, no electric light. It was all with gas. And I think it was either that way or had just been converted. It was really very bad. And my sister was then taken by another family. And she was quite happy there. They were very nice people. The husband was an attorney, a lawyer, and they treated her very well and were very fond of her.

EA: That was also in Rutherford?
SS: In Rutherford, yes.
EA: Rutherford.
SS: Yes.
EA: Where is Rutherford? In Kent?
SS: It's in Sussex.
EA: In Sussex.
SS: On the border, really, near Suss--near Kent. And there we went to the village school.
EA: Wait, wait, wait. Ruth went to the attorney. Where did you go?
SS: I stayed with this...
EA: You stayed with this couple.
SS: Couple. Yes. Yes.
EA: Oh boy.
SS: And I hated them. They were, they tried, they were the couple who tried to convert me. They wanted me to become Christian. And I was very frightened by it, and I didn't know what to do for quite a long time, because they threatened me. They threatened that if I did not do as I was told, they would complain to the committee to say that I was untidy, that I was dirty, that I didn't wash, that I didn't brush my teeth. I, who couldn't live without a toothbrush in a camp, you know. It was rather ironic, wasn't it?
EA: It was ironic.
SS: Yes. And however, I mean, having come from a religious Jewish family there was no way I could be persuaded to become Christian. And I went to the, to a woman who had, who was sort of in charge of this group of children in Rutherford with the different families. There were...
EA: Oh there were...
SS: There were about a dozen of us, in different homes. And there was this one woman who had one child. But she was the person to go to if you had a problem.
EA: Oh you, so you did have somebody.
SS: Yes. She was an English woman, a very strict Catholic, but a very understanding person. When she heard that I was, that they were trying to convert me--I never told that they threatened to say that I was dirty and untidy, but I did tell her that they tried to persuade me to convert. And she immediately found me a teacher, a Hebrew teacher, a Miss Lazarus, who taught me you know, religion.
EA: And that what, that's to counteract?
SS: Yes.
EA: You didn't complain about your conditions of that couple?
SS: No. There was an, I was afraid. I was absolutely afraid. And...
EA: Did Miss Lazarus come to you?
SS: No, I went to this woman, Miss Trouten.

EA: Yes. And...

SS: But then Miss Lazarus came there to teach me.

EA: To her house?

SS: A really, yes, when I say to teach me, I mean I did come from a very Orthodox Jewish background, so this was just to keep me in touch with my religion. And I think she was trying to...

EA: Counteract...

SS: Counteract.

EA: This. Sure.

SS: Yes. I also asked Miss Trouten if I could come and have a bath at her house, because there was no bathroom. All I got was a bowl of water, and, to wash with in the morning. And she let me come to have a bath there once a week.

EA: She did not offer to take you in?

SS: No. She had one child already, and she did not offer to take me, no.

EA: Did you know that child?

SS: Yes, she's still a friend of mine. We are...

EA: Oh really?

SS: Still very close, yes.

EA: Did you go to the same school?

SS: Yes. We went to the same school.

EA: And you are still friends with her now.

SS: Yes. In fact I've known her since Zbaszyn.

EA: Oh my! That's great! Wow! "I was afraid to complain." That's the name of this stor--game, isn't it?

SS: Yes.

EA: You were at their mercy.

SS: Yes. So, I continued school till I was 14, then I was told, "It's time to go to work. We can't support you any longer." So they found me a job working in Tunbridge Wells, which was...

EA: How far was that?

SS: In Kent, not very far. But, and I was to live at the Beacon Hostel. I was paid a minimum amount of money which I had to give up to the hostel, and I was allowed to keep a tiny amount of pocket money, six pence I think, or a shilling. And it was in a lingerie shop, where I worked as an, what was called an apprenticeship, which meant I cleaned the floor. I polished the floor. I ironed the things that were to go into the window. And the owner was a dreadful old woman, came in once a week to change the window, and make sure that everything was all right. And I worked with another woman who was a manageress, who lived in Tunbridge Wells, who was a wonderful, wonderful person, and with whom I stayed in touch until she died two years ago.

EA: Oh!

SS: Who was somebody very special in my life. The only person at that time who had any care, who cared at all for me. She was very kind. She knew I had only one dress, and so she made me a dress but didn't tell me it was from her. She said that the owner of the shop had a rule that anyone who came got a new dress. This was totally untrue. She did this out of the kindness of her heart. And this, always very tactful. And she knew I didn't really get enough to eat at the Beacon, and so she used to send me down the road to the bakery for some buns. And we would have them with a cup of tea. And I don't remember her ever eating one.

EA: [laughs] So *we* had a tea break, but *you* ate!

SS: It seems that way.

EA: Wonderful!

SS: I really never had anything that was...

EA: Was she English?

SS: An Englishwoman, yes, a wonderful, wonderful woman.

EA: Do you know I think, since you, we've started talking, except for your mother, your father, that's the first kind person...

SS: Yes, I think you're right. I think you're right.

EA: You're talking about.

SS: Yes, absolutely.

EA: That you felt there was a bond of any kind.

SS: Absolutely, yeah. And I was grateful to her for the rest of her life, and will be for the rest of mine, I'm quite sure.

EA: And you really became friends.

SS: Friends, yes. I still go to see her husband, and I spend a day with her son when I'm in England.

EA: They're still in Tunbridge Wells?

SS: Her husband is in Tunbridge Wells. Her son is in London, and I go to visit him. And he's a very lovely person, a very fine...

EA: Did you know him then? He was probably a child also then.

SS: He was a, yes. He's only a year older than I am. He was just a young boy.

EA: Did you like him?

SS: At the time I don't think so. I don't think I had anything to do with him at the time. He'd come into the shop occasionally, but we never spoke. I was extremely shy, and perhaps he was too. I, of course, assumed he didn't like me, but that was natural for me.

EA: Sure.

SS: So, but I find that, him to be a very compassionate and a very fine person, which is not surprising, with such a mother. So, obviously my thinking he didn't like me was my problem.

EA: Well, you were only 14 anyway.

SS: Yes.

EA: Were there boys and girls at the Beacon?

SS: No, just girls. So, then, this was, actually, this was in September of 1942 that I started there. I was there for nearly two years, and living at the Beacon at the time. Then, in August of 1944--again I'm giving these dates and I'm not sure of them--I went to complain. I met a Mrs. Bethel, who was the committee, one of the committee, she was employed by the committee. She was not a part of the committee. And I said that I was unhappy with what I was doing and I felt that I should learn something and would it be possible to get a course in shorthand and typing?

EA: Good!

SS: And she said, "I will try." She said, "It's very difficult." I was also aware that there were some children at the Beacon who were even having piano lessons. And I thought, "What is this? I'm slaving away here, for ten shillings a week, cleaning floors, while somebody else is getting piano lessons! There must be some money somewhere!" And so, Mrs. Bethel said she would do her best. And she was a Canadian woman, who I had a very strong rapport with, a very good rapport with. And somehow she managed. There were people in, there was a school, it was called York House. And I went there and I got--and all this time I was separated from my sister, by the way, because she was studying to be a nurse. She was in a hospital.

EA: Oh?

SS: Training to be a nurse.

EA: Where did she go?

SS: She went to, somewhere near Croydon. And we were in touch. I wrote to her when I had money for stamps, which was very rare.

EA: Now, who paid for that?

SS: I have no idea. Obviously the committee.

EA: But that's what she wanted to do.

SS: That's what she wanted to do, yes.

EA: O.K. Well, wait a minute. That was already in '41 also?

SS: This was in '42.

EA: '42, yeah, that was war work. They had free training at that time...

SS: Ah, that's what it was.

EA: Because it was the war?

SS: The war.

EA: And they needed nurses.

SS: O.K. I see.

EA: So they had special courses.

SS: Well that's what she was doing. And I then could not stay at the Beacon because I couldn't pay. So, in Rutherford they found me a woman, and, my second good experience, a Miss Goffey. A very old lady who agreed to have me while I went to school.

EA: So you went back to Rutherford.
SS: I went back to Rutherford, but...
EA: Did she know your first couple who you lived with?
SS: Yes, I'm sure she did, because he was the local hairdresser. But I never mentioned them again because I couldn't bear to even think about these people.
EA: Miss Goffey was a kind person.
SS: Miss Goffey was, yes, she was very kind to me. She was an educated woman. She was a--I believe she was titled.
EA: Really?
SS: Or her family was. She lived in a beautiful old stone cottage. And I really had a very nice room there. And she was very kind to me.
EA: Good!
SS: She actually asked me, she said, "You're going to have to have a cereal every morning. You might as well tell me which kind you like." She actually let me choose, which was extraordinary to me. And also, since it was wartime and everything was in such short supply, she kept a couple of chickens in the garden. And when they laid an egg she would come in and say, "We have an egg!" Not, "I." She actually said, "We," which to me was just...
EA: Wonderful.
SS: So marvelous. She also had a large amount of books, which was wonderful for me, because I was able to read all these wonderful English literature, all this wonderful literature, which I've always been interested in since. I liked her very much. She was very kind to me.
EA: Never married?
SS: Never married. And I lived there until I finished my course. I did extremely well, and then when that was completed, by that time it was July or June of 1945. I went to Hove, Sussex. I went to stay with a Mrs. Immanuel, who was a philanthropist, and used to have children from hostels for Jewish holidays. She was a woman from Frankfurt, a very Orthodox Jewish woman, a widow. She had two sons. And I'm still in touch with her son, a very nice...
EA: Really?
SS: Very nice man, and whose wife has become a very dear friend of mine. I was not fond of Mrs. Immanuel. She was very cold. But, since she knew I was going to have to find a place to live and work she asked me if I'd like to rent her attic room. I said, "Yes." And there was a job found for me with a building society which I suppose you would call, a building society in England is an insurance company. I went to work as a typist there, and I paid Mrs. Immanuel--she thought it would be good for my character.
EA: [chuckles] And her pocketbook.
SS: She didn't need the money. I don't know why she charged me that.
EA: Well, probably...

SS: She said it built character. I had absolutely nothing. I didn't have clothes or anything. I mean, I couldn't afford a thing. But, be that as it may, I wasn't used to being treated well, so it didn't really mean very much to me. It didn't matter to me. Everything else had been bad.

EA: Do you remember what you earned?

SS: Yes. I think it was over a pound at that point.

EA: What, a week?

SS: Yes.

EA: A whole pound! [chuckles]

SS: Yes.

EA: And how much money did she make you pay for...

SS: Rent? Probably half. Maybe more. I know I got to keep very little, so little that I couldn't use my clothing coupons to buy clothes. And I couldn't use my sweet coupons to buy sweets.

EA: Oh my!

SS: And I walked to work, whether it rained or not, because it was quite a walk into Brighton. However, I was used to that too. I started there and lived with Mrs. Immanuel in her attic room. And one day I had gone for a walk along the seashore. And when I came back she called me into her drawing room, and she said, "I have to talk to you." She said, "Your sister is very ill." I said, "My sister died. Tell me the truth. Did she die?" And she said, "Yes." And I just went crazy.

EA: What happened?

SS: Well, she explained to me that she had gone to her supervisor and said that she had a headache, a severe headache. Could she go to the nurses home, which was across the lawn, and lie down. And they said, yes, she could go. And she collapsed on the way, across this lawn, and died. They did an autopsy and I was told that she died of an aneurysm, a blood clot caused by an old injury. And here we go back to the...

EA: Oh my God.

SS: The old injury which was the time when she was hit on the head. That was the only injury. They asked me if I knew of any injury to the head, and of course I did. And so in the end she was a victim of the Nazis as well, wasn't she?

EA: She certainly was.

SS: Yes. Well, I suddenly found myself [weeping] quite alone in the world. And so I didn't think I could bear it, especially since I remembered thinking so often, I had many friends who were alone, who didn't have sisters or brothers, and were alone. And I thought, "Thank God I have a sister and I am not alone. I don't know what I would do if I were alone." Well, I was finally alone, and I didn't know what I would do. I made many plans to...

EA: Did you go to the funeral or did you...

SS: Yes, Mrs. Immanuel took me to the funeral. And...

EA: Did she have friends by then, from Croydon, from the nurses?

SS: The only person who came was Mrs. Immanuel and the two people who were notified, the lawyer that she lived with for a short time in Rutherford, and his wife was not there because they had been divorced in the meantime. So it, there were about four people at this grave.

EA: Who arranged the funeral, Sylvia?

SS: Bloomsbury House Committee. And...

EA: Where was she buried?

SS: She was buried in Golders Green, in the...

EA: In Hoop Lane?

SS: Hoop Lane, no, not the crematoria. Across the street...

EA: No, but the, yeah...

SS: On the opposite side, in Temple Fortune.

EA: Yes.

SS: That's by Golders Green.

EA: Yes.

SS: There is a cemetery...

EA: I know. I lived there.

SS: One side is the Sephardic cemetery, and the left side is the Ashkenazi, and she's in the Reformed cemetery. And...

EA: But Mrs. Immanuel was, she was supportive?

SS: Not really.

EA: But she did come with you.

SS: She was a very cold person. And she did come with me, of course. Mrs. Immanuel did everything for appearances. And for appearance sake she, of course, came with me. Perhaps I'm being too harsh, but I always felt her a very, very cold. And of course I sat *shiva*, and...

EA: You sat *shiva* where? At the Immanuels'...

SS: At Mrs. Immanuel's. And I was in no physical or emotional condition to go to work, and after two days I was fired because I couldn't. I was told, you know, my leave was up, and they had given me the second day without complaining, and now I had to go find another job. So, I wasn't too concerned about that, actually, at that point. I just to, go to bed. Oh, I remember, I remember very distinctly wondering the next morning how the sun could come up [weeping] when I had no sister. How was this possible? And how could things continue? How could people walk in the street? How could the lines full of soldiers pass by? And how could they shout, "Hi, hey Ginger," when this terrible thing had happened to me? And I thought, "I could just go to sleep and never wake up again it would be so wonderful." But I didn't have this luck. So I had to carry on, and I found another job.

EA: Who helped you to?

SS: I don't know. I can't remember. I cannot remember.

Tape two, side two:

EA: Where were we? On the other side we...

SS: I got another job.

EA: Got another job and, where did you get another job?

SS: I worked for an English sea captain who was writing a book.

EA: Huh!

SS: And I was typing, I typed the manuscript. And until the book was finished, I had a job.

EA: A nice man?

SS: A, well a typical English, reserved sea captain. But it was a, the job was fine. I liked it well enough. And after that was done I worked for a plumber in a plumbing concern. I typed invoices and sent bills. It was very, not a very good job, not a very nice job. But, by that time I was already on my way to America. I found...

EA: How did you think about...

SS: They...

EA: America?

SS: I didn't...

EA: I mean, England...

SS: I didn't think about America. America thought about me.

EA: Oh! Who?

SS: I had an aunt, a sister of my mother's, whose husband had gone to America, and they were waiting, when we went to Zbaszyn, his wife, my aunt, and her children, were in Cologne waiting for papers to go. Now I had an...

EA: For an affidavit?

SS: For an affidavit. I had no idea whether they had gotten to America or not, before I left. But it seems, and of course they did not know where I was, or whether I had survived the war.

EA: So how was...

SS: So one day I got a letter from Bloomsbury House, to say that they had had a letter from a Mrs. Weiss, who said she's an aunt to Ruth Balbira. She was looking for my sister and wanted to know if they could help her. They apparently wrote back to her to say that my sister had died. However, if she was interested there is a Sylvia. And if she wanted to be in touch with me, they would let me know. And if I wanted to be in touch with her, I would write to her, which I did. And she said she was going to bring me to America. And I of course having no one and nothing decided that was a good thing to do.

EA: Did you know that aunt?

SS: Yes. We lived in...

EA: They lived close by.

SS: They lived close by.

EA: Was that the one with the two cousins?

SS: With the four...

EA: She had two children?

SS: She had four children.

EA: Four children.

SS: Yeah, who I, were my cousins, yeah.

EA: Yes.

SS: With whom I played as a child. And however, I had this terrible fear of another journey, and to another country. I was so traumatized by then that I was terrified of another move. I had grown roots in England, as miserable as I was, and I really didn't know what to do. I was very frightened. But there was really no alternative. And I came eventually, to America.

EA: Did you have anybody? Did you, could you talk to Mrs. Immanuel?

SS: No, no, I couldn't talk to anyone. I had no one to talk to really. No one.

EA: Nobody?

SS: And I felt I had no choice about going to America.

EA: And there was no one you could talk to.

SS: No. I was very much afraid of coming. And, but I did go.

EA: That was what year?

SS: This was, well in 1946. And it was, by the time I got the affidavit and every thing was organized and I left, it was 1947. I left on, well I arrived in New York on the 4th of March, in 1947. And my uncle came to the ship to get me, and brought me to my aunt and uncle in Brooklyn.

EA: You went by boat?

SS: I came by boat, yes.

EA: From London directly?

SS: From Southampton.

EA: What was the name of the boat, do you remember?

SS: Yes, it was the S.S. Washington. It was a troop ship which had been sort of converted into a one-class ship. I was...

EA: They sent the ticket?

SS: Terribly ill.

EA: They sent the ticket.

SS: Well, they had to. I had no money.

EA: Right.

SS: They absolutely had to. Of course when I got here and got a job I paid if back, because they were very poor and could not really afford to, you know, to pay for me. And it was very difficult for me at first.

EA: [unclear] aunt?

SS: Yes.

EA: They lived where?

SS: In Brooklyn.

EA: Brooklyn.

SS: We lived all together in a relatively small apartment. And my cousins were of course daughters. I was a niece. Again, I felt the outsider. And yet, there was a, there was a feeling of family, yes. But I was...

EA: You were an outsider but more of an "innie" than before.

SS: Yes.

EA: In any of the other...

SS: In any of...

EA: Because it was a blood relative?

SS: That's right.

EA: Is that...

SS: Then I began to have problems with my aunt. She apparently had tremendous resentment of my mother, who was an older sister. And she would tell me tales of when she was little. "Your mommy did this. Your mommy did that." They were all negative things. And I was terribly depressed about this. I was depressed anyway. I was terribly depressed for years.

EA: Wait a minute. We are now in 1947, Sylvia.

SS: Yes.

EA: At that time, what did you know about your parents?

SS: I knew nothing as yet. I didn't ask...

EA: Did you...

SS: Any questions.

EA: You wrote to anybody?

SS: I asked nothing.

EA: Anybody in...

SS: I wrote to no one. I was not prepared to know anything, yet.

EA: So you had no one like the International Red Cross.

SS: No. I knew nothing.

EA: Did they?

SS: No one told me anything.

EA: Did you ask?

SS: By they who do you mean?

EA: Your uncle and aunt...

SS: Oh, later, yes.

EA: In...

SS: They knew. But they did not tell me.

EA: What did they know?

SS: What they knew they didn't tell me. And I did eventually ask and they did eventually tell me. But at first I didn't ask anything. I was trying to adjust to being in a new country and leading a different life. I was depressed. When everybody was hearing from the Red Cross I didn't hear anything--this is in England--I knew nothing. Some people found their, found someone. I didn't find anyone. And at the time I assumed that they were, they had been killed, but I didn't know how and I was not prepared yet to ask any questions. But I knew I would eventually have to. In the meantime I was listening to all this negative, you know, dislike of my mother. I realized that this was, she was not talking about my mother. She was talking about her sister, long before she was a mother, or my mother, or anybody's mother. But I did take offense and I said to one of the children, "Please ask your mother to stop this. I can't take any more." And apparently that was done, and no more was said. Then when I felt I'm--one of the reasons why I didn't want to ask too many questions about my mother. When I finally did ask, I, my aunt had heard from several survivors that my mother had been taken from Krakow to Auschwitz in 1940. She was in a factory where they were sewing uniforms for the German soldiers, and from there she was taken to Auschwitz, where she eventually died in the gas ovens.

EA: Is that a reliable...

SS: I don't know.

EA: Story, you think?

SS: I believe so. My aunt believed it was very reliable. And I...

EA: Did they do any research at all?

SS: I don't know. I was so sensitive about this that I believed it, and left it at that. I totally believed it.

EA: At this time, have you since 1947 made any inquiries at all?

SS: No. I wouldn't know where to inquire.

EA: Would it make you feel better if you did now know?

SS: Well, I've always felt I knew, you see. But, if there is documentation I would like to have it, yes, of course.

EA: You would.

SS: Yes.

EA: How about your father?

SS: My father, I was told, again by my aunt, from that, from another source, that he died in concentration camp of tuberculosis.

EA: You had, had he, he died did you say in Belgium? What happened to him in Belgium? Did he stay in Belgium?

SS: I don't know. We don't know. I mean...

EA: You don't know anything.

SS: I do know he did show up again in Poland, in Krakow.

EA: He did show up.

SS: Somehow he got to Krakow. And he went to his wife's sister.

EA: His wife's sister. Wait a minute...

SS: My mother's sister in Krakow.

EA: Where you stayed.

SS: Yes. And we at the time were there.

EA: Oh! You saw your father again?

SS: And I saw my father again, for a moment. He was very ill, and my mother did not want him too near us, because of the tuberculosis. She was afraid, she had always been afraid. And so she let us talk to him through the window.

EA: Oh my!

SS: He also was very, he was on the run. He couldn't be caught.

EA: But you were in hiding there.

SS: He was hiding. We were all in hiding.

EA: You were all in hiding.

SS: We were all in hiding, yes. And so I heard my sister say, "No, you're not my father." She wouldn't, neither of us recognized him. Neither of us recognized him. He looked so old. He looked like someone's grandfather. First he spoke to my sister, alone. And then he spoke to me alone. And I said, "I don't know you."

EA: You did not recognize him.

SS: I did not recognize him either. I said, "You can't be my father." And he took a picture out of his pocket. And it was a picture of my first school day. And I remembered the picture very well. And so I began to suspect that this might be my father. And then he said to me, "I've always loved you best. You were always my favorite." And somehow I began to suspect that he was my father. But when I saw how he looked, I became so frightened. [pause] Because I couldn't put the words and the picture together. He looked nothing like my father, nothing at all. I was told he was. My mother said he was. He said he was. And I, there was such a discrepancy in my mind. And I've always wished I'd been kinder to him. Because it was the last time I saw him. I felt very guilty about it for so long, until I spoke to a psychiatrist who said to me, "Look, you did the best you could."

EA: You were a child!

SS: I was a child, yes. And I learned to live with it. I accepted it.

EA: You were a child... [crying]

SS: I know. I know. [crying]

EA: Who reacted to...

SS: There was really nothing else I could do.

EA: A stranger.

SS: Yes. And in any case, I feel it's over. It's no longer, there's nothing I can do. And it, it's over. [unclear].

EA: Sylvia, you, this is, you hadn't seen your father since, am I correct, 1938?

And...

SS: No, 1936.

EA: '39?
SS: '3--1936.
EA: '36 he left for Belgium.
SS: Yes.
EA: And then it was just before you left, and that was...
SS: And that was now...
EA: In...
SS: Three years later.
EA: Must have been in '39.
SS: Yes. And in three years he had--he must have aged so much that I found him unrecognizable. He must have gone through hell. I don't know what happened to him. Nobody knows.
EA: In Belgium actually...
SS: I don't know that he ever reached Belgium. We never...
EA: You never found out?
SS: We never--we don't know. I suspect he didn't.
EA: You never had any idea...
SS: No idea.
EA: What had happened to...
SS: No, no one had.
EA: Your grandmother either.
SS: No. No one ever found out.
EA: Oh my. So, really we are now in America.
SS: Yes. Yes.
EA: Let's talk about America.
SS: O.K.
EA: You lived with your aunt and your uncle...
SS: I lived with my aunt...
EA: And your cousins. And it was not too happy an experience. Did you work?
SS: I went to work almost immediately. Within two weeks I worked, I got a job. And I worked.
EA: Where?
SS: In Manhattan.
EA: So you traveled from Brooklyn to...
SS: To Manhattan. And I worked and I helped support the household, and paid back my uncle for the fare that he sent, on a weekly basis, till it was all paid back. And I began to, I began to feel more comfortable. And my cousins were helpful. They became my friends.
EA: How was the...
SS: The two older ones.

EA: Age difference?
SS: Well, I was the eldest. And my cousin Sonya is a year younger than I am.
And my cousin Sylvia is two years younger than I am.
EA: Oh, so you were the oldest.
SS: Yes.
EA: Wait, there were four children you said.
SS: And then came Esther, who I was very fond of. She was fourteen when I, she was four years younger than I am. And then Irene, who was ten years younger.
EA: Oh, so you were the oldest.
SS: I was the oldest. And then there was a little boy, whom I'd never met, who was born in this country, who was five. But I dated.
EA: You did?
SS: And...
EA: Did you meet any, did they, was it, well who were their friends? Were they refugees?
SS: No, no. I was not in contact with any refugees really, until much later.
EA: Hmm.
SS: Although my aunt and uncle had refugee friends, but they were of a different generation. And they weren't...
EA: They didn't have children your age?
SS: If they did I didn't know them.
EA: O.K.
SS: And I eventually met someone in the neighborhood...
EA: In Manhattan or in...
SS: Who is now my husband. No, in Brooklyn.
EA: Brooklyn. [chuckles]
SS: Yes. He lived right near by. And we met, and...
EA: Wait a minute! It's not as easy as that!
SS: [laughs]
EA: I'm not going to let you away with that.
SS: All right.
EA: So you worked in Manhattan...
SS: Yes.
EA: At what sort of a job?
SS: Secretarial.
EA: Did you enjoy that?
SS: Well, I've never really enjoyed...
EA: No?
SS: This kind of work, but it's all I know and I've always done it as well as I can.

EA: So where did you meet your husband?

SS: I met him, he lived, he was a friend of a friend. And my cousin Sonya was actually interested in him, and I said, "Well, I can get you an introduction." And when I met him I was immediately attracted and did not want to introduce him to Sonya at all. So I said, "You've got to find someone else."

EA: [laughs] Right, you've got to find your own.

SS: Yes. And it just flowered and blossomed and within less than a year we were married.

EA: Really.

SS: Mmm hmm.

EA: Did they give you a wedding, your aunt?

SS: Yes. Well, actually they really could not afford to. My husband's parents made a wedding.

EA: How did that feel?

SS: Very sad for me. Extremely sad.

EA: It must have been.

SS: Oh. It was awful. I cried through the ceremony. I was very emotionally thinking of my family. And all I had there was my aunt and uncle and cousins. And there were so many people. They were all people I didn't know. I felt a stranger at my own wedding. I kept looking for the bride, believe it or not. I couldn't really I couldn't relate to my own wedding too well, because I was among so many strangers. But, I then for the first time had a home of my own. It was a tiny little dolls' house as we called it, or a matchbox, a little furnished apartment.

EA: What did he do?

SS: Milton worked in Wall Street. He had a job with Merrill Lynch at the time.

EA: Oh really? So he was earning fairly well.

SS: Not all that well. We were making ends meet because...

EA: But you were...

SS: We were both working. That's why.

EA: Yes. And...

SS: But it did improve as time went on.

EA: And you...

SS: And we left...

EA: Lived where? In the, in Brooklyn or in Manhattan?

SS: In Brooklyn, in a furnished apartment. It was very hard to get apartments. But eventually we managed to move to Queens. And we found an apartment there which we furnished. And eventually our daughter was born.

EA: What year was she born?

SS: She was born in 1955.

EA: Oh!

SS: I very much wanted a child, and the day I found out I was pregnant, I, I was just so full of joy. And it's, I just, it was as if I was starting fresh.

EA: You were!

SS: Yes, I was. The only thing is, I wish I had not felt that I was beginning to replace my family. Really what I was doing was starting a new family. However, the thing is, I fell in love with this baby from day one, long before it was born.

EA: That's understandable.

SS: And I can't imagine anyone ever wanting and looking forward to having a child any more than I did. If ever a child was wanted, this one was, and loved, from the day she was born. I went through many depressions when she was first born. I think that that...

EA: After, post-natal?

SS: Post-natal, yes. And I think it...

EA: You, how was your pregnancy?

SS: The pregnancy was wonderful. My delivery was delightful. I gave birth in ten minutes. I never saw the...

EA: Oh my!

SS: Never saw the labor room. I went straight, you know, into the delivery room and she was born.

EA: A natural birth?

SS: No. I had a little help, but it went very well, very quickly. And, it was an adorable baby. I loved this baby, this child...

EA: Was she a gingy? [English for red-head]

SS: And this adult. Pardon me?

EA: Was she a gingy?

SS: No.

EA: No?

SS: No.

EA: What color is your husband's hair?

SS: My husband is fair-skinned, dark hair, and my daughter is, has the same color and looks very much like him, but also looks very much like my sister Ruth.

EA: Oh!

SS: And, there are people who say I re--she resembles me, but not too many. People who see her, and have not met my husband will say she resembles me, but once they see her father, they can only see the likeness to him. She looks far more like him than she does me. So...

EA: She has brown eyes?

SS: No, she has light eyes. So does my husband.

EA: Oh, he has light eyes also.

SS: Yes, they both have hazel eyes. And, but he's very good looking and so is she. So that's fine.

EA: That's great.
SS: Yeah, it's wonderful.
EA: So are you.
SS: [chuckles] And...
EA: She couldn't go too far wrong.
SS: No, I don't suppose so, yes. And this...
EA: Did you [unclear].
SS: Child was the apple of my eye, and is still, of course, naturally.
EA: You never had any more children?
SS: No. I couldn't have any more. Within four years I had to have a hysterectomy, and I couldn't have any more children. But I don't really feel any regret. I'm quite happy. I feel so grateful that I have one.
EA: Surely.
SS: Yes. And as I say, this was a very important, the most important thing in my life, this child. And I have unfortunately lived in fear of losing her, having lost everyone else. I lived in a terrible fear of losing her, and clung to her far too much. I finally had to get help, many, many years later, to let go. And I, fortunately for both of us I've been able to do that. I don't love her any less, but I am able to feel comfortable about her having her own life.
EA: When you say you had to get help...
SS: This happened after she was married, that I was...
EA: Now wait a minute. You had to have help. Did you get help when she went to school? Did you have difficulty taking her to school?
SS: No, no, I had, no, I didn't have any difficulty with any of it.
EA: Did she have difficulty?
SS: No. I had difficulty in terms of, when I say letting her go I meant emotionally letting her go, when she had, when she grew up.
EA: But the schooling and so on...
SS: I over protected her.
EA: You're overprotective.
SS: Of course, yes. Yes.
EA: We all are.
SS: I don't think that there's any question about that.
EA: Have you talked to her about it? What did you call her, your daughter.
SS: Melanie.
EA: Melanie. That's a beautiful name.
SS: After my mother, who was Mela. And my sister, her middle name is Ruth.
EA: Is Ruth, after your sister. Beautiful names. Does she like the names?
SS: Yes, she does.
EA: Well that's good.

SS: Yes she does.

EA: Many children don't.

SS: And she seems to have felt over the years an affinity for my sister, which I find interesting. Because I see so much of my sister in her, not only in looks, but in personality as well.

EA: Really.

SS: Yes.

EA: Did you talk to Melanie over the years about Ruth?

SS: Yes, I have. Yes. And I talked to her about my background as well, up to a certain time. Then I, she had difficulty with it, I felt. And I couldn't talk to her about it any more. It became uncomfortable.

EA: You felt that she had difficulty or did she say so?

SS: She didn't say so, but I felt that she cut me off when I spoke about it.

EA: When was that roughly, would you say?

SS: I think when she became about 12, 13, 14, somewhere around there.

EA: Well, well she was too busy growing up herself then.

SS: Yes, probably.

EA: Do you feel that in retrospect maybe you talked a lot about your childhood to her?

SS: Perhaps I did too much. I don't know. I'm not sure.

EA: Did you manage to talk to your husband about it?

SS: Very little. Very little.

EA: Did he ask you a lot?

SS: No, not at all. During the years...

EA: Of courtship.

SS: I think that he, the reason he didn't ask, I think was the fear of my being upset.

EA: When you were courting...

SS: We didn't discuss it at all.

EA: You didn't...

SS: We hardly discussed it. I told him what my background was, but I didn't go into any emotional details. I just...

EA: Like we are talking now...

SS: No, not at all.

EA: Would this now be new to your husband...

SS: No.

EA: Even after all these years, do you think?

SS: I don't think so, no.

EA: O.K., so it came out in dribs and drabs.

SS: Bits and pieces, yes.

EA: O.K. How about with Melanie?
SS: He was very protective of me, and he can't bear to see me hurting, so part of this is my protection of him in a way.
EA: Well it's mutual.
SS: It's mutual, yes.
EA: Do you think he...
SS: But Melanie too is, has difficulty with giving me pain, by talking about this. I'm quite sure.
EA: Are you finding it painful now, talking?
SS: No, not any more. Well, at moments it is, yes.
EA: And is it very...
SS: Of course. It's a highly emotional subject for me.
EA: Of course, it's a very, very...
SS: To be honest with you, I've been having great difficulty even in the last few days, before I came to you.
EA: With anxiety of talking about it.
SS: Terrible anxiety. I have a rash! I'm itching from it! Yes, I've been taking medication.
EA: Did you ever have psoriasis before...
SS: I had it...
EA: As a young child?
SS: Since I am five years old. I remember my mother taking me to the doctor with it first.
EA: But that was the time that your daddy and mommy were talking about the unrest...
SS: Oh yes.
EA: And your father going to Belgium.
SS: Yes.
EA: And then you developed a skin rash.
SS: Well, I think it was before that.
EA: Oh well...
SS: I really do, yes. I seem to have had this many, many years.
EA: Mainly when you're upset?
SS: No.
EA: No.
SS: Not really. No, I don't see any correlation. I'm not saying there isn't, but I'm not saying there is. I don't really know enough, I don't think enough is known about psoriasis really.
EA: Right. Well I was thinking...
SS: I, many studies are being done.

EA: That you are now, you know, obviously feeling some stress.
SS: [unclear] it's in my family by the way.
EA: Oh, it is.
SS: One of my uncles had it, and I think my grandfather I'm told had it, and my daughter has it.
EA: Does she?
SS: Yes. Unfortunately.
EA: And she could have chosen something else from you, couldn't she?
SS: Yes. I [chuckles] often think that she, as much as she looks like her father I wish she had his nature. It's a much easier nature than mine. Her life would have been much easier.
EA: We don't inherit what we want to give them...
SS: No. Her life would have been much...
EA: [unclear] they take what they need.
SS: Exactly.
EA: That's what Kahil Gibran said in *The Prophet*.
SS: Is that right?
EA: You should really hear it.
SS: I've read it.
EA: Listen to it again. Maybe we'll listen to it tonight. I have it on the record.
SS: I have the book. Yes, [unclear]...
EA: So, this is not going to be new to either Melanie...
SS: No.
EA: Or your son-in-law or to your...
SS: Well my son-in-law perhaps.
EA: Husband.
SS: Because I have not talked about it with him. I don't know what or if anything my daughter has told him. But I know that he's interested, and, which is one of the reasons I'm here. And, oh, another reason is, I think my main reason of course is that I want my children to have this. And if I...