

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [1-1-1]*

Key: SS - Sylvia Schneider [interviewee]  
EA - Eva Abraham [interviewer]  
Interview Date: August 8, 1989

*Tape one, side one:*

EA: [beginning of tape is very difficult to understand] Where were you born?

SS: I was born in Cologne. [tape off then on] --two sisters, an older sister Ruth, and a younger sister Yohanna. [whispers: What's going on here?]

EA: Were you always Sylvia?

SS: Sylvie. Zylvie.

EA: Zylvie, O.K.

SS: Sylvia being an English family name. Actually it was a very unusual name in Germany.

EA: Yes, I didn't...

SS: I...

EA: How did you spell that?

SS: The same way it was [unclear]...

EA: With a Y?

SS: With a Y. In fact one of my teachers always called me Zylvia.

EA: Yes, [unclear]. How did your parents find those names for you?

SS: I have no idea. I have no idea. Because my sister's name was Ruth, and Yohanna, which was more common then.

EA: Right. It's very interesting. Your parents also were from Cologne?

SS: My mother came from what was at the time Poland, a small town near Krakow. It was actually a spa.

EA: Oh!

SS: I have forgotten the name, but it might occur to me. My father came from Belgium, and before that from Russia.

EA: He was born in Belgium?

SS: I believe so. And his parents...

EA: Where did they meet?

SS: In Cologne.

EA: What was he doing...

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SS: I think the marriage was arranged. My grandfather was a very old-fashioned man, and their marriage was arranged.

EA: Your maternal grandfather?

SS: My maternal grandfather. My paternal grandparents I never knew. I once met my paternal grandmother. She came to visit from Belgium. And she was quite senile, so I really never got to know her.

EA: But your maternal grandfather heard about you father? How?

SS: And I think...

EA: Do you know?

SS: I don't remember. I know that he was at the time in Cologne. My father was at the time in Cologne.

EA: Doing what?

SS: He was a teacher.

EA: Hmm. Of what?

SS: Oh, languages.

EA: Oh!

SS: My father spoke many languages.

EA: Obviously Russian.

SS: Seven.

EA: Belgian? Flemish?

SS: Flemish, German, and I don't know how many other. I think seven all together I was told.

EA: Oh really.

SS: Yes.

EA: You don't remember him?

SS: I remember him very vaguely. I but, I remember him somewhat, yes. I remember him, I remember what he called me, "*Schäfchen*." He called me, "*Schäfchen*"...

EA: Oh, not little lamb?

SS: Which means, little lamb.

EA: Too complimentary.

SS: Little lamb. Little lamb. Yes. And, and also *zylbucha* [my pet Zylvie]. That was because I cried very easily. I was a cry baby.

EA: You were built near the water. [German idiom]

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SS: Near water. Yeah. And so I have strong memories of those two. [noise]

EA: Actually gaps are O.K. because it's a conversation of course.

SS: Yes. Yes.

EA: You know, everything is...

SS: Yes. Yes.

EA: So they were more or less the same age.

SS: Similar. [tape off then on] Similar in ages, yes. Very emotional! Requested to stop.

EA: How old roughly were they when they met, do you know?

SS: No. I just know how old, approximately how old they were when their children, when we were born. I think my mother and father both were born somewhere around the turn of the century. I don't know if it's a year or two before or after. I'm not sure. I think before.

EA: Did your mother already have a profession or...

SS: My mother was very artistic.

EA: Oh!

SS: Yes, she did dress designing and dress making, was very good with her hands, did needlework, art needlework. *Kunstgewerbe* it was called a dress.

EA: Indeed.

SS: Yes.

EA: Did you inherit that? Are you artistic?

SS: I think I probably am somewhat. I think I would have been had I had the training.

EA: You had the interest?

SS: Yes, I do a lot of needlework.

EA: Do you.

SS: And I have done some painting.

EA: How about your children?

SS: My daughter?

EA: Your daughter.

SS: No, she in that sense is more like her father. But, although she has done a little. She does needlework beautifully, actually. Beautifully, yes.

EA: How about that.

SS: Yes. I was wrong. She has inherited some of it, yes. Also, I think I inherited my love of music and literature from my mother. I don't know what I inherited...

EA: Was she a performer?

SS: No. No. But she was known never to go anywhere without a book under her arm when she was young. She was very studious.

EA: And your father of course taught. What kind of a system did he work in? In the school system or the university system or...

SS: I am not sure. I have so little recollection of my father, unfortunately, because I, he was, I knew him only until I was about five or six. And then he became ill with tuberculosis, and I only saw him once again, in Poland, some years later. So, at that part of my life I saw, I remember very little of him. Let's put it that way.

EA: But you must have some memories. He was young and [unclear].

SS: Yes, yes. They are isolated memories but, and they are quite strong.

EA: Yeah, sure.

SS: And I also know that he was a very affectionate man. Both my parents were affectionate.

EA: In what way?

SS: There was a lot of hugging and kissing going on in our family.

EA: There was?

SS: Yes.

EA: Oh!

SS: We were very, I felt very loved as a child, by both my parents.

EA: Now...

SS: And there was great affection between me and my older sister. My younger sister died as a small child.

EA: How small?

SS: I think she was under two. She died of pneumonia.

EA: Why?

SS: Yes. And my mother lived in constant fear of course of our being tubercular because of my father.

EA: And of course that was the time before antibiotics were...

SS: Yes, exactly, yes. And, but actually we were quite healthy, the two of us. My older sister, Ruth, and I, were quite healthy children.

EA: Yes. Good. Do you have that fear still now or...

SS: No. No, not at all.

EA: No.

SS: I don't remember having any such fear ever, actually.

EA: That's good. That's good. So what do you remember about your home life?

SS: I remember going to school. I remember being ill as a child actually. I remember being in the hospital.

EA: Oh? For what?

SS: Pneumonia.

EA: Oh, you also had it then.

SS: Yes. Yes. But I recovered. I was sent to the country to recover. I already...

EA: Where did you go?

SS: I went to *Bad Kreutznach* which...

EA: [chuckles]

SS: Is a spa I suppose you would call it.

EA: Mmm hmm.

SS: A resort. And there was...

EA: Yes?

SS: I was in a convalescent home there. And that was a...

EA: Did you like it?

SS: I loved it. Actually.

EA: Did you!?

SS: Yes, I thought it was lovely.

EA: With other children?

SS: I don't remember being with other children.

EA: You were away from home.

SS: I was away from home, after being in the hospital.

EA: Right, alone.

SS: Alone. My mother came to visit me at the hospital of course, but...

EA: In the hospital, but not in *Bad Kreutznach*.

SS: *Bad Kreutznach*, no. I wasn't there a great length of time. I think I was there four or five weeks.

EA: That's a long time for a little girl.

SS: Yes. But I wasn't, I was really well treated and I was not a, I don't remember being really unhappy.

EA: Hmm. So who did you play with or, how old were you?

SS: I was four, between four and five.

EA: Can you imagine now? A four-year-old being sent away for four to five weeks alone, to a convalescent home, with adults?

SS: Well, it apparently was considered necessary at the time I suppose.

EA: But you had no detrimental memories of it.

SS: I had no bad memories of it, because I think my home life was very secure at the time. So I didn't feel a, I knew my mother was there and she visited. And I knew I was going home.

EA: Sure.

SS: I had not started school yet. When I came home my sister was already in kindergarten. No, actually first grade. My sister was in first grade.

EA: Was that the public school?

SS: Public school. It was a Jewish school, not a public school.

EA: Oh, a Jewish school.

SS: A Jewish school. Yes, well at...

EA: Why?

SS: That point, well, it was 1933, '34. And it was 1933 or 1934.

EA: Why did you have to go to a Jewish school?

SS: Because it was, Hitler was already in power, and we were segregated. Jewish children were not to mix with Christian children.

EA: Was that a law?

SS: It was a law, yes [unclear]. The Christian children were not to be contaminated by us.

EA: Now, how much of that did you know?

SS: Oh, I was well aware of it.

EA: At that time?

SS: I was well aware of it. I was aware of everything.

EA: How?

SS: Because my mother was a very modern woman, and life went on, and very little was kept from us. She tried once, when I was shopping with her, and we saw an old Jewish man being arrested. And he was dragged, physically dragged out of his shop and pulled along

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the street shouting, "I haven't done anything!" And my mother tried to push me into a store. But it was too late. I had already heard, seen everything. She tried to hide me.

EA: To hide you.

SS: And it was too late. I had seen it, had heard. I was terribly, terribly shocked by it. It is a very vivid memory. It's my first vivid memory of the beginning.

EA: Did you ask?

SS: Yes.

EA: You...

SS: Yes.

EA: Were free to ask your mother...

SS: Oh yes, yes.

EA: What's going on?

SS: Yes.

EA: What did she say?

SS: Well, I was told to be quiet, bec--out of fear. I was told to be very, very quiet.

EA: Did you bring it up at home again?

SS: No. I don't remember bringing it up, but from then on I was aware. My sister and I were both aware.

EA: Do you remember talking about any of these things?

SS: I remember hearing my family talk.

EA: In hushed voices or loud so that you could hear it?

SS: No, it was hushed because it was dangerous. We were aware that one must talk quietly at home, and never outside the home about Hitler or anything to do with the regime.

EA: So you knew to be quiet.

SS: Yes, yes. I remember feeling, I suppose you would call it a split. There was one life at home, and another life outside the home. One was relatively safe behind our doors. But out in the world it was extremely dangerous. And this was 1935, 1936. It was very early in the...

EA: That's early all right.

SS: Yeah.

EA: What year were you born?

SS: I was born in 1928.

EA: So you were seven.

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SS: Yes. My sister was a year older. My sister Ruth was a year older. There was only about, there were fifteen months between our ages. She was fifteen months older than I. And very soon we were no longer able to go to school.

EA: Even to the Jewish school?

SS: To the Jewish school alone, we had to be accompanied.

EA: Well it wasn't safe there.

SS: Yes. We went for a while just the two of us. And then we picked up, on the way we picked up a distant cousin who then walked with us.

EA: What was her name?

SS: She was also our age. Her name was also Sylvia.

EA: Oh!

SS: Interestingly enough. And...

EA: So the three of you...

SS: The three of us would...

EA: Would go to school...

SS: Go to school and back. Then one day on the way home from school we had dropped off, the cousin had left, and we continued our way home. And there, it began, the Hitler Youth began to taunt us. And...

EA: Children or...

SS: Men, young children. I would say teenagers, early teenagers.

EA: In what way?

SS: They began to shout at me, "Don't go with a Jew!" I did not look Jewish, being fair, red headed, fair skinned. My sister was the opposite, very dark, and looked Jewish where I did not. And there was, in the beginning it, they said, "Get away from the Jew! Don't have anything to do with her!" And...

EA: But they only shouted. They didn't physically...

SS: At that point it was just shouting. And we became very, I became very frightened by that. My sister was much braver, at least I thought she was. And perhaps she was, actually.

EA: In what way? Did she answer them back or how did she react?

SS: No, no, it's, well I think it's, well the reason I thought she was braver is because I didn't know what she was feeling. I just knew what I was feeling, [chuckles] which perhaps explains that. Also she was an older sister, and I always thought of her...



EA: Fifteen months?

SS: I know, but she was always more serious, and I remember her as being the clever one. I was the cute one, and she was the clever one. This is the memory I have. I don't know how much truth there was. Probably quite true. And one day, on the way home, from, we were being chased by some of these Hitler Youth. And we just couldn't run fast enough. And my sister was hit on the head, and fell backwards, and hit the back of her head on the curb stone...

EA: Oh my.

SS: Of the sidewalk, and lay there bleeding.

EA: Were you...

SS: And I cou-...

EA: With her?

SS: I was. I couldn't find anyone to help her. And so when she was able to get up, I had to walk home with her, holding my handkerchief over her head. And my mother took her to the doctor. She was stitched up. And then we forgot about it, until...

EA: Could you go to any doctor at that time?

SS: Well, we went to Dr. Auerbach, who was a Jewish doctor and lived around the corner from us. I assume that he was our family doctor. I remember going to him ever since I could remember.

EA: Do you think you could have gone to any doctor, the nearest doctor?

SS: I...

EA: At that time?

SS: I don't think so. I don't think so.

EA: Why not?

SS: Again, Jews just didn't do that. Also...

EA: Was it a written law do you think or an unwritten?

SS: At that point I suspect it was unwritten. But of course within a very short time notices began to appear in shop windows. By this time, I think it was 1938.

EA: Like what?

SS: *Juden unerwünscht*, Jews Are Not Wanted Here, which meant not only that they were not wanted. It meant that they were not allowed, basically. I do know that some of our local shops did not want these signs in their windows, but they had no choice. Or they claimed they had no choice. And although they told my mother, "You can continue shopping

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here," my mother did not. I think not out of fear at that point, but out of pride. And I learned that she was a very proud person. Later on, it seemed that we were constantly being harassed by Gestapo, who would knock on the door morning, noon, night, any time, and when the door was opened would shout at my mother, "*Heil* Hitler!" And my mother would answer, "Good morning," or "Good afternoon," whatever the case would be. And they would repeat, "*Heil* Hitler!" And she would say, "Good morning," until I, cowering in the corner would say, "My God", I would say to myself, "Why doesn't she just say *Heil* Hitler so they'll stop?" And I was terribly frightened, and not very courageous at all, not like my mother. But she continued to say, "Good morning," and eventually at that point they just asked for her passport or what it all, whatever they came for.

EA: Is that what they wanted?

SS: They wanted to see her passport, papers of some kind.

EA: Why should she have a passport in 1936 or seven?

SS: I have no idea. I was not old enough to understand.

EA: Was your father home at that time?

SS: No, he was not.

EA: Were they asking for him?

SS: I don't know. I really don't know. I hid. I was terrified of the Gestapo. Then I remember in 19--early in 1938 I think it was now, and of course all of this is being said as I remember it. I...

EA: Sure.

SS: Time may be not, you know, the dates may be somewhat wrong when I say '37 it could be '38 or...

EA: I understand.

SS: I remember coming home from school and getting caught in a tremendous mob of people. And when we looked up in the distance, we saw very, very clearly a car, an open car. And in it was a standing figure, Adolf Hitler.

EA: Oh *really*?

SS: He was coming through Cologne, yes. And we tried of course to run away, but the crowd was so tremendous we could not, we were actually caught up in it. We couldn't move. It was a, really a mob scene. And the physical...

EA: Were you curious, like everybody else?

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SS: No. We were terrified, and wanted to get away and go home where it was safe, or relatively safe. No of course we weren't curious. We were far too terrified to be curious. We lived in a state of fear. And everyone was, their hands were up in the salute, shouting, "*Heil Hitler! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!*" And, my sister looked at me and I looked at her, and her hand came up and so mine came up with relief, and of course we raised our hands, because we were...

EA: [unclear]...

SS: [unclear] we were afraid not to. We would have been killed. I think we would have, I mean the mob was so frenzied that we didn't dare not. I think that, I would not have done it unless my sister had. I took my cue from her at all times. And once she did, I did too.

EA: Sure.

SS: And I remember feeling disloyalty and guilt, but we did it. We had to, actually. There was really no choice.

EA: You remember those feelings?

SS: I remember exactly what I felt, exactly what I felt.

EA: What a dilemma for a young child.

SS: Yes, it was, really it was. I remember we did not tell at home.

EA: You did not?

SS: No. That's the one thing I remember not telling. I think it's because my mother was so courageous, and I was ashamed.

EA: Oh, you didn't tell that you didn't put, that you...

SS: Had...

EA: Saluted.

SS: Yes.

EA: But you did tell her that the crowds were there...

SS: Yes.

EA: Before Hitler and so on.

SS: Yes. Yes. But we did not tell that we saluted. Because I remember how many times the Gestapo said, "*Heil Hitler*," and my mother did not say, "*Heil Hitler*." So how could I possibly admit that I raised my hand in such a salute? I didn't dare. I felt too ashamed. Both of us.

EA: Well, that's interesting, yes. Did you...

SS: I was in constant, constant fear. I mean we absolutely lived in fear.

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EA: Yes. And yet physically, except for that Hitler Youth incident with Ruth, you had not personally...

SS: No, except that we heard at home such and such happened to so and so. We knew what was happening, because we had friends who were taken to concentration camps. My father was missing.

EA: Oh? Missing how?

SS: He had gone to see his mother in Belgium.

EA: Regularly, with a regular ticket and so on.

SS: Yeah. And he did not return.

EA: What year was that, Sylvia?

SS: This was in 1938.

EA: Did not return?

SS: And my mother was sure that he was in a concentration camp or something had happened to him.

EA: There was no communication even? No letters? No phone? No nothing?

SS: Nothing. No. We did meet him again later, but I'll come to that.

EA: Yes. Oh my God and no phone call?

SS: Nothing. No. We could not find out where he was at the time.

EA: Now your grandmother was living in Belgium.

SS: My grandparents, my maternal grandmother, yes.

EA: Yes. Your maternal grandmother?

SS: My paternal, I'm sorry.

EA: Paternal, yeah, his mother.

SS: His mother...

EA: Yeah.

SS: Was living in Belgium. My grandparents, my grandmother had died in the meantime in 1933. But I remember her extremely well. I was five when she died. But my grandfather was still alive in '38.

EA: Then you...

SS: And they lived in Cologne, my maternal grandparents.

EA: That is your maternal grandparents.

SS: Yes. Yes.

EA: But we're now talking about your paternal, your father's...

SS: Mother.

EA: Mother.

SS: Yes.

EA: Was living in Belgium.

SS: In Belgium.

EA: What city?

SS: In Antwerpen.

EA: And he just went to see her, and was she living alone or...

SS: I think so. I think so. I'm not sure, but as far as I know she was living alone then.

EA: [unclear].

SS: And I don't remember what happened, I don't know what happened to her, actually. I don't know. So then we were existing in this way. And one day, in October of 1938, to be exact it was the 28th of October...

EA: What happened then?

SS: We went to school, oh, in the morning, first thing in the morning at about 6:00 the Gestapo came again, asking to see my mother's passport, and left. We went to school, where we began to hear terrible rumors of people being taken away. And finally we were told to go home immediately.

EA: This is amongst the children?

SS: Yes.

EA: They were telling about their relatives and...

SS: There were rumors that something was happening in the city.

EA: On the 28th of October already.

SS: I don't know where they, October, in 1938, yes. And we came home and we were told that we had to go to the police station.

EA: Now when you say, "We were told," do you remem-...

SS: Oh, the Gestapo came. One of, a Gestapo person came to the door and said that we were to come to the police station, and we would be going home, you know, coming back almost immediately.

EA: They did assure you of that.

SS: Uh huh, yes.

EA: Did you?

SS: No, of course. I've never been home since. That's the last time I ever left the house. I've never been back.

EA: There and then.

SS: There and then. No clothes, no suitcase, nothing. We were just asked to come to the police station.

EA: You went. You...

SS: My sister.

EA: And Ruth, and...

SS: And my mother.

EA: The three of you went there. As you were.

SS: As we were.

EA: How did you get to the police station, Sylvia?

SS: Do you know I cannot remember?

EA: I believe you.

SS: I remember walking out of my apartment, walking downstairs, and walking out. But the next thing I remember is being at the police station. And I remember being put in a-- some kind of conveyance. I suppose, it wasn't a bus. I don't know whether it was a truck or a...

EA: Was it green?

SS: Some kind of [unclear].

EA: What color was it?

SS: I don't remember. I don't remember.

EA: Probably the "Grüne Minna" [Green Maria]

SS: Could very well be.

EA: Does that mean anything to you?

SS: Like the black maria, huh? Something like that, yeah. Like a...

EA: A green, yes. A [unclear] and it's green...

SS: Yes.

EA: That was the famous [unclear].

SS: And the next thing I knew we were taken to the railway station.

EA: Wait a minute, no, no, no. You were at the police station.

SS: Yes.

EA: And then what happened?

SS: And then we were...

EA: Were you alone?

SS: With my parents. A lot of other people were there.

EA: With your mother.

SS: Yes, with my mother.

EA: Right? Mother and Ruth and you.

SS: Yes, my mother and sister, yes.

EA: O.K. So, and other people there?

SS: Yes. There were people there. That's when we went into the conveyance and were taken to the railway station.

EA: I beg your pardon?

SS: We were taken to the railway station.

EA: Right there and...

SS: Yes.

EA: Did you have winter clothes?

SS: No.

EA: My--you were taken to the railroad station by a police conveyance.

SS: By the police, yes.

EA: And then what?

SS: And we were put on a train.

EA: Do you know where?

SS: Where to, you mean?

EA: Yes.

SS: Well I just know where we ended up. I don't know where...

EA: You had no idea...

SS: I had no idea where we were going. I don't know where, I assume my mother might have had some idea. I don't know. I don't think she did.

EA: How did you feel?

SS: Thoroughly frightened. Very frightened. As time progressed I got more and more frightened, because we began to see more and more terrible things. We began to see, from a few people, it became hundreds of people. Every time we stopped, the train stopped, hundreds of people were put on the train.

EA: Oh, were you stopped a number of times?

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SS: We stopped constantly. After all, we were in the, in Cologne. And we crossed the whole of Germany. And, we ended up, I remember at one station, we ended up at the end of the day at a station where another train pulled in opposite our train. And there were a lot of people there who were very disturbed, and apparently had been travelling perhaps even longer, because they had had, well none of us had had any food all day. And there was a, some organization came with bread. And I think we ended up with a piece of bread.

EA: Were they German organizations?

SS: I have no idea.



*Tape one, side two:*

EA: Somebody gave you some food. You don't know who the people were?

SS: No, I don't. I have no idea who they were. I assume it was a Jewish organization. But by that time we became aware of talking to other passengers, that all of us had Polish passports, every one of us. So it seemed as if all Polish citizens were being deported to Poland. This is what we thought. And to some degree we were quite correct. Now, you have to realize that in Germany, when a child was born, it was not automatically German. You took on the nationality of the mother.

EA: Of the mother?

SS: Or the father, I don't know. It must have been the, well, I think it must have been the mother, because my mother had a Polish passport. And we were Polish, according to the Germans we were Polish, not according to the Polish, Poles. Of course they didn't agree with that at all.

EA: That's interesting, because you mentioned that your mother was from Krakow.

SS: Yes.

EA: And your father was born where?

SS: I believe my father was born in Belgium.

EA: O.K., that's interesting, isn't it? Because you would think it's a patriarchal system.

SS: Well, of course you have to realize my father wasn't there, my mother was. And here were two children. Do you follow me? I don't think the German cared very much, the German state cared very much about having two children left alone there. You know?

EA: That's correct.

SS: And so, there we were. I know that we were never considered German. Because birth didn't mean anything.

EA: Particularly if you were Jewish.

SS: Yes. You know. So, where was I?

EA: You traveled by train in...

SS: Train to the...

EA: To the Polish...

SS: [unclear]...

EA: And what were the Polish...

SS: To the, towards Poland.

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EA: To the Polish border.

SS: We arrived I think at night. And we were dumped at a place called Zbaszyn, which was a no-man's land. It was not German, and it was not Polish. It was on the border, as I recall. And there we were dumped at the railroad station and there were many people already there. And there were people still arriving. And this went on all night. It was bitterly cold. We had no place to even sit.

EA: What was there?

SS: There was a railroad station, a waiting room. You can imagine, there were...

EA: A waiting room.

SS: Thousands of people. And that night somebody covered me with an overcoat and I slept on a table in the waiting room, on top of a table. They asked people to let the children, some of the children, lie down. The following morning organization began. There was an old abandoned mill, and we were allotted where to put the bed. We had little areas, and to sleep on we had a bunch of straw, and our family was, you know, put together. We had, it was a very tiny amount of space.

EA: Men, women, children?

SS: Everybody together, yes, yes. They were, the...

EA: But you were together with your mom.

SS: Yes, for a while. Eventually the children were separated from the parents, in another building, I think a church. There were also some barracks there.

EA: What kind of barracks? Soldiers'?

SS: I'm not sure. I'm not sure whether they were for soldiers or whether they had been stables. It was that kind of very rough kind of thing. And we were getting some food. There was a convent nearby and I think we were getting some food from that source. I'm not too familiar, being so very young, and not concerned too much with that kind of organization. I haven't...

EA: Of course not. Of course not.

SS: I haven't got enough information.

EA: But there weren't, you don't remember nuns in uniform coming, you know, in their habits?

SS: Just vaguely, but only in the very beginning. After that, some other arrangements were made.

EA: What were, who were...

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-19]*

SS: What apparently happened was that the Germans deported us, and the Poles refused to let us in. And this became our home, these dreadful conditions. It was the beginning of November by then, and it was terribly cold in that area. Poland, after all, was freezing. We had inadequate everything.

EA: Did they have blankets?

SS: No, straw we had beneath us...

EA: And you...

SS: Eventually...

EA: Left in October, therefore...

SS: The end of October, by the time...

EA: You had no clothing with you.

SS: No, nothing. And the conditions were unbelievable, just unbelievable. On top of which, people were going mad. I remember one man went absolutely berserk. He was a doctor. He went completely berserk. People became violent.

EA: Towards each other?

SS: No, I think they became violent in terms, they were mentally ill. They became mentally ill. I remember one or two children, frozen to death, later. [weeping] It was just so terrible. It was absolute hell. And people constantly, in the middle of the night, having nightmares. People screaming for their parents. Crying, "I want to go home!" There were husbands separated from wives.

EA: How was your mom? Was she comforting towards you?

SS: Who?

EA: Your mom.

SS: Oh yes, of course. As supportive as she could be. I do remember feeling, "How can my mother manage? We have her, but who has she got? She's got no one."

EA: She had you. [unclear].

SS: No, for security, you see. We had her. I felt, I remember very strongly feeling, "Thank God I have my sister and my mother is with me. They are my security." We were children. "She'll take care of us. Who's going to take care of her?"

EA: Did you remember thinking that?

SS: Oh yes, yes. This was my constant worry.

EA: Interesting.

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-20]*

SS: I felt that we were, we had more safety than she did, because she was our emotional safety, but who did, she had no one. She did, however, have a sister in Krakow, who was married to a Polish Jew.

EA: Hmm.

SS: And she managed to get word by mail to her.

EA: Really?

SS: Yes. And, well we were in this place during the winter. There was no running water. One had to go to a pump and get water. And the conditions were so terrible. And we talked at first, you know, the talk was all about going back, going back home. But of course after a while that became impossible. We spent the entire winter there, in these dreadful conditions. All of '38...

EA: '38.

SS: End of '38 into 1939, my sister, who was born in January, her birthday was there. So I know we were there January. My birthday's on the 4th of May, and I remember my birthday there, my eleventh birthday I spent there.

EA: So you were there from October...

SS: Until...

EA: Until after May.

SS: Yes. May 4th was my birthday. I remember my mother somehow getting a birthday present for me there, an orange. I had no idea how she got it. I know it was the most precious thing, and that I hid it so that I wouldn't have to share it. Because I had not seen anything like it.

EA: Have you any idea where she got it from?

SS: I have no idea. It was just, it appeared by magic! And, this orange, I kept saying, "I'll eat it tomorrow. I'll eat it tomorrow." [crying]

EA: It's O.K.

SS: And in the end it was rotten and I couldn't eat it. I couldn't bear to eat it, because I wanted to save it. I saved it so long that I could no longer eat it. I don't know why this was so traumatic to me, but it was. I think it's pathetic. I think it hurts me more in retrospect...

EA: I'm sure of that. It did.

SS: Than it really did at the time.

EA: I'm sure.

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-21]*

SS: You know, I think that's why I'm so upset by it now. Because it seems so sad, that I could not even enjoy such a tremendous treat, something that I never saw again until I came to England. And even then, hardly.

EA: Sure.

SS: So it was really, it was awfully sad.

EA: In those days of course there wasn't the import and export like we have it here.

SS: No, no, an orange was a...

EA: [unclear]...

SS: Was a very precious thing...

EA: Yes.

SS: It was a [unclear], particularly when we ate basically potatoes and when, and we even saved the peels and cooked that when there was nothing else. I mean, everything was...

EA: Did you cook in Zbaszyn?

SS: There was a like a field kitchen set up.

EA: Who were the responsible people? Were the men? Women? Soldiers?

SS: I think men and women.

EA: Oh, of...

SS: We...

EA: Of these...

SS: You know Jews, they manage to organize everything. They were put to work, in other words.

EA: Yes, of course. Yes.

SS: So you'd keep some kind of order there and to, eventually even they tried to have some classes for the children and occupy them. But I remember long, long periods of inactivity and too much thinking and worrying and wondering, "Are we going to get out of here?" And rumors, and fear, terrible fear.

EA: Do you remember being with other children?

SS: Yes. Yes, there were other children. We were eventually put in a different area to sleep. I think it's because there was, we saw too much as children. I mean people lived as man and wife, and we were so in the middle of everything. We were not, there were no walls. Everything was visible. And you know, people when they are so insecure and so frightened and so worried, they, there is a great deal of comfort in sexual intercourse between husband

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-22]*

and wife. And these things did occur, and we as children were just, we shouldn't have been there. And so we were just...

EA: You were eleven years old.

SS: Yes.

EA: So you really had...

SS: Yes.

EA: Your sexual awareness very close.

SS: Absolutely, yes. And so the children were eventually put in a separate area. I think that there was an old, it had been a, it was an unused church.

EA: But you were with Ruth.

SS: Yes.

EA: Were the conditions a little better there for the children, or did you still sleep straw?

SS: No, we still slept on straw. My aunt sent us a package, which came through once, and I remember getting a toothbrush. Oh, it must have been in the parcel. And this toothbrush...

EA: Could you have gone to Krakow?

SS: No.

EA: Why not?

SS: The Poles wouldn't let us in. That's why we were on the border to begin with.

EA: So you did not...

SS: We did eventually get to Krakow though.

EA: Oh, all right. I'm sorry I interrupted.

SS: It's all right.

EA: You got a package?

SS: And I remember getting a toothbrush. And this toothbrush was my only possession. And it became my identity. [both chuckle] Yes. I remember I, every morning when I woke up, the first thing I looked for was my toothbrush. And one day, in the middle of, one day, one night, my mother came to where we were sleeping, which she never did, because the children were separate, and she woke us up. I think this was at the end, towards the middle or end of May. That's about as close as I can get it. Actually, it might have been the end of May, perhaps even the beginning of June. But I think it was the end of May.

EA: In '39.

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-23]*

SS: Yeah, '39, yes. My mother woke us up in the middle of the night and told us to be very, very quiet, that we were going to go out, and we were not to make any noise or wake anyone. Everyone was sleeping. And there was a man with her. He looked like an official. He had a uniform. I think he might have been a Polish policeman. I don't know. And I immediately groped, in my sleep, or in my still sleepy, I groped for my toothbrush. And I couldn't find it immediately. And my mother said, "Come quickly, quickly, and quietly." And I couldn't leave until I finally found my toothbrush. Then I was able to go with her. I couldn't leave my toothbrush behind. It would be like leaving part of myself behind. And we left. We were taken to the railroad station, just my mother and my sister and I. We went on a train. We were on the train during the night. And my mother told us we are going to *Tante Ghetti* in Krakow, but to be very, very quiet. I think, I don't know whether she told me, but I have a strong conviction that we were illegally. My mother somehow got someone to get her out of there. Or my aunt, perhaps, in Krakow, had managed it. But we did get out of Zbaszyn, at a time when no one had got out. And we went to Krakow to my aunt. And I remember arriving there. And I had three cousins, girls, three beautiful girls.

EA: Hmm.

SS: My aunt and uncle, my uncle was very religious. He did not get on with my mother, apparently, because she was, although we had come from a religious background and had a kosher home, my mother became suddenly very anti-religious.

EA: Really?

SS: Yes.

EA: You as a little girl remember a religious home?

SS: Oh yes.

EA: *Kashrut*?

SS: [unclear], yes, yes.

EA: And you went to synagogue?

SS: Very Orthodox. Every Saturday. Then from synagogue straight to my grandfather's house for lunch.

EA: Ah!

SS: And, yes, I know all about the orthodox life...

EA: Do you have warm memories of this?

SS: Yes, of course I do. Yes, yeah, very.

EA: That is beautiful.

SS: Yes.

EA: Because there was singing, your, you said there was music and your mother was somebody who would sing?

SS: My mother, yeah.

EA: The *shabbas* songs?

SS: Yes, she made *shabbas*, yes.

EA: Do you make *shabbas* now?

SS: No.

EA: Not at all.

SS: No. I also went away from it. But, [sighs] I'm lost. Oh yes...

EA: Your uncle, you were with your uncle, aunt and uncle.

SS: My aunt and uncle, yes, and my cousins. And we could not leave the house, because we didn't speak the language. For safety we were given three phrases to learn by heart, Polish phrases, in case anyone ever, by some accident we were discovered. And...

EA: Do you remember them?

SS: No.

EA: I bet you do if you think hard.

SS: Probably, yes.

EA: What were they? Do you know what they meant?

SS: I know what they meant. One meant if someone, we were, if someone said, "Where are you going?" I was to say where I'm going, "To my girlfriend's," or "my friend's." Although the thing is we never really left the house.

EA: Did it ever have to, did, what all right, "I'm going to my friend's." What else?

SS: That's all I remember.

EA: Did you have to use it at any time?

SS: No, no, because we never left the house.

EA: Because you didn't...

SS: Yes. And...

EA: How long for?

SS: How long were we there?

EA: Yes.

SS: Well, let's see, it was May, the end of May. In June, no, early July, my mother had been trying to get us on a *Kinder* transport.



EA: And, was that from Zbaszyn already?

SS: Oh...

EA: Oh, you mean from Krakow.

SS: [unclear] from Krakow.

EA: From Krakow.

SS: We had heard even in Zbaszyn about the *Kinder* transport. But she had to try again from Krakow because we were no longer in Zbaszyn, and if we were called, we would not be able to answer. So she continued trying to get us on from Krakow. And finally we were told we were going. My mother took us to the train station, took us to Warsaw, where we, from where we went to a place called Otwock [Otwock is near Warsaw], which was near Gdynia, and where these children were naturally awaiting a ship to Eng--to go to England.

EA: From Warsaw?

SS: Yes. Well, she went with us as far as Warsaw.

EA: O.K. Oh...

SS: There she put us on a train...

EA: That's what I...

SS: To Otwock, where we were going to be met. I remember being on the train with lots of other children, in Warsaw, whose parents were also putting them on the train. And I remember some of the mothers grabbing their children back. They couldn't let them go. And part of me wanted my mother to come and drag us back as well. Part of me wanted to go into safety. And part of me was rather upset because she wasn't crying. I thought, "What is this?" And then as the train began to go, my mother turned, and I saw the tears coming down the side of her face. And I felt relief. She did care. Now why I thought she wouldn't I don't know, but you know, children have strange thoughts, and fears.

EA: Isn't that interesting.

SS: And there was something about being put on a train which makes one question. I, perhaps I didn't realize how close the war was, or, it really was, or how really necessary it was. But I never felt, so many of my friends have told me they felt they were going on an adventure. I did not.

EA: You did not.

SS: No. I was terribly aware of what was happening in Germany, and in Poland. I was aware of all this dreadful antisemitism. And I was aware of the danger we were in. I was age 11. I was, and long before. I seemed always to have been so terribly aware of the danger,

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and full of fear, terribly full of fear. And so I knew it was important to get away. However, my mother continuously told us that she would come too. She was making every effort to come, and that she was going to start learning English. I think this was all done to...

EA: Release your...

SS: To comfort us.

EA: But do you know that she didn't make, or do you know that she didn't make inquiries about getting out?

SS: For herself?

EA: Did any adults...

SS: Yeah.

EA: Did any adults have a chance to get out, Sylvia?

SS: There was, no. No. Not at that point. At least my mother didn't. She had no opportunity to get out.

EA: And you knew nobody in America?

SS: My, my...

EA: In England?

SS: In England, no. No one.

EA: Did you have relatives anywhere in the world?

SS: My mother had an aunt in America who would not help.

EA: She tried?

SS: She wrote to them continuously, in 1937, 1938. And this woman wrote back and said, "It doesn't go with speed."

EA: I beg your pardon?

SS: "*Es gait nit mit.*" It doesn't go with speed. This all takes time.

EA: And she took all the time you didn't have.

SS: Took too much time. We didn't make it.

EA: And how about your father's family? Did they have any relatives in the...

SS: I, we...

EA: Anywhere?

SS: Knew nothing. I don't think so. I don't believe so.

EA: And at that time adults were not allowed out.

SS: No.

EA: There was no way.

SS: No, one needed someone to bring you out.

EA: O.K.

SS: By that time it was too late.

EA: I think maybe for the children we need to get something in there, because there were definite immigration laws, were there not?

SS: Yes, yes. I think that with my father being missing, my mother dared not go anywhere.

EA: She had, she wanted to find him.

SS: Yes. Yes.

EA: And the other thing is that you were on the Polish quota.

SS: Yes.

EA: Every country had a quota for emigration.

SS: But we weren't in the Polish quota.

EA: Why not?

SS: We were illegally in Poland, in Krakow, you see.

EA: You had no passport of your own, did you.

SS: No, not in...

EA: What sort of papers did you have?

SS: Well, when I came to England I had a Certificate of Identity.

EA: Proof?

SS: That I, proof that I was a human being. That's all. Really no proof of...

EA: Date of birth?

SS: Yes. It did give my date of birth.

EA: Did it have a place of birth?

SS: Yes.

EA: Who authorized that, or who wrote it out? Do you know?

SS: I think it was written out when I arrived. No, it was written out by the refugee committee that got us to England.

EA: Oh in these...

SS: And that was made out at...

EA: Certifi--in Krakow. That was only made out...

SS: In Warsaw.

EA: In Warsaw.

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SS: Yes. Where we...

EA: In Warsaw.

SS: Yes.

EA: So, all the time that you were between Köln [Cologne] and Zbaszyn and so on, you had no papers whatsoever?

SS: I didn't, no.

EA: You had no identity, did you.

SS: No identity at all. No. I didn't get an identity until many years later, in 1947, when I applied for American citizenship.

EA: No, you got your first identity...

SS: Five years later.

EA: I guess...

SS: It wasn't till 1951...

EA: In...

SS: When I became a citizen of the United States.

EA: Isn't that interesting. But then you were very aware of what was going on.

SS: Oh, I was more aware than any, than many of the friends that I had spoken to. I was really extremely aware, for such a small child.

EA: So you were on the train with Ruth.

SS: And we arrived at this place where we met some of the children that we knew in Zbaszyn, who had already from there been sent to this place, to this orphanage. It was an orphanage. It had been an orphanage. There were no orphans there. We were the only children there. And when the ship came in, to be, you know, to be loaded with these children, names were called. And in mid-July, the names, the list came. Everyone was terribly excited. There were, I don't know how many children were there, but more than would fill a ship. And this was in July of 1939. It was getting quite late. And the roll call came. And of course it started with the A's, and since we began with B, it didn't take long before we heard Balbira, Ruth. And then it went on. And it went on. And it went on. And I said, "My God, what about me?" And she said, "I'm not going without you." And I said, "But you must go." And it was horrible. We were going to be parted, and I was going to remain there all alone. And I was terrified. And that's exactly what happened. My sister went.

EA: Oh, you're kidding!

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-29]*

SS: Yes. And I remained there. Yes. I wrote to my mother, and she wrote back, and assured me that...

EA: Where did you write? To your aunt's...

SS: Yes.

EA: And uncle's house?

SS: Yes. And of course there was correspondence between my mother and the two of us in this orphanage. I have the letters that she wrote, and I have letters written to my sister that since, in England. Ruth arrived in England in July of 1939 and went straight into a Wyberlie [a hostel].

EA: To what?

SS: A hostel, a...

EA: Hostile?

SS: A hostel, called Wyberlie.

EA: Wyberlie?

SS: Yeah, that was the name of it, and it was at Burgess Hill, in Sussex. And she corresponded there with my mother and with me. And my mother continued to write me at, from Krakow, to the orphanage in Poland, where I was. And she told me not to worry, that there would be more transports, and that I would eventually get on a ship. And July came and went, August started. And it wasn't until the 25th of August that the second roll call came, and my name was on it. And I thought...

EA: Oh my God.

SS: "Thank God I'm going and I will be with my sister soon." And, I went on the ship, which ended up the last one to leave, because it was, it left five days before they came marching into Poland. And on the 29th of August...

EA: Hitler marched into Poland on...

SS: On September 1st. I left on the 25th of August, five days before, six days, no, five days.

EA: Oh my God. And you went by boat?

SS: Yes. And I arrived in London on the 29th of August, which again was four days, or three days before the war started, four days, before the war broke out in England, which was the, you know, which started on the 3rd of September. And we were taken to a restaurant in London. [unclear].

EA: Oh, you were...

SS: [unclear].

EA: You arrived in Dover?

SS: No, in London. We came straight to London.

EA: You came...

SS: Yes.

EA: Straight to London?

SS: They opened up the bridge, and we came into London.

EA: How about that.

SS: Yes. And...

EA: Who met you there?

SS: We were taken to a restaurant by a group.

*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?

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-31]*

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

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-32]*

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].

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-34]*

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!

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-35]*

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...

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-36]*

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

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-39]*

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.

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-40]*

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...



*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-41]*

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?

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [2-1-42]*

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.

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [1-2-46]*

SS: They absolutely had to. Of course when I got here and got a job I paid it 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?

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [1-2-48]*

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.



*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [1-2-49]*

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?

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [1-2-51]*

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.

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [1-2-55]*

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.

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [1-2-56]*

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.

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [1-2-59]*

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...

*Tape three, side one:*

EA: How do you think, Sylvia, your parenting has been affected through your experience, in retrospect?

SS: Well, as I said before, I think I was over cautious. I lived in fear of losing her. It seems I'm consciously, everyone I've loved, I've lost. Of course I, my husband I haven't lost, thank God.

EA: Are you overprotective of him too? Does he have to call when...

SS: No.

EA: He's going to be late?

SS: He does it anyway but that's his way. So I've never had that with him. If he doesn't call I worry. I tend to be a worrier about people I love. I can't help it. And, perhaps I'm not so unusual in that. We all worry about the people we love. It makes sense. But I think since my husband was an adult when I met him, there wasn't that feeling of protection that you feel for a newborn child. And from then on there was always this fear. I was always afraid of something happening to her, or, that would cause me to lose her.

EA: But she went to school and she went through school all right?

SS: Yes. And she went to college and she...

EA: Did she go to college in New York?

SS: She went to college in, she went away to college, in New York, but away from home, for one term.

EA: And how did mommy feel about that?

SS: Not too good, and of course daughter felt even worse. She ended up coming back, but this may not be, I think she had difficulties at school. I'm not sure whether they had to do with her being away from home. But she did come home after the first semester and went to school locally. And she had difficulty leaving home.

EA: Hmm. Do you think that was for her own reason or maybe because of you?

SS: No, I think that may have been because of me. I think that possibly I made her fearful, unknowingly, and not meaning to, but I believe I did.

EA: So, you think she came home again...

SS: In the end...

EA: For your sake rather than for her sake?

SS: No, not for my, no, no, not for my, in fact she quite resented that, I think she, that she was not able to stand on her own two feet away from home. And she probably felt it was my fault, somewhere. And

she's probably right. If that's what she felt I'm sure it...

EA: Have you talked about it?

SS: Some. Not a great deal. There was a time when it was not so easy for us to talk. Now it's, I don't have so much of a problem. It seems to me though that we had to help her to leave home. She wanted very much to be on her own when she got a job and she was earning money. She wanted her own apartment but was fearful. And we sort of helped her out of the nest. And...

EA: When you say, "We," you and your husband?

SS: Yes. But once it was accomplished, she loved it and was happy, and I think she's slept at home twice since. So...

EA: So you have adjusted to the empty nest routine as it were?

SS: Oh yes. Yes. And it wasn't easy, but I did adjust to it. She made it easy for us, because she welcomed us in her apartment, and we were there quite often and I saw her regularly. So it was really not as if she were far away.

EA: Oh, she got an apartment in New York.

SS: She, in New York. And she wanted me to go with her to choose furniture.

EA: Oh good.

SS: And...

EA: So you...

SS: We had fun together, you know?

EA: Great. What did she study?

SS: Anthropology.

EA: Huh!

SS: She was interested in Anthropology.

EA: And is she working in that field?

SS: No, she's in the advertising field. Apparently there is no job for her in the field. She was told when she studied it but she still wanted to do it, so she did. But then she got a job in the advertising field, and did very well, and decided she'd better get an MBA, which she did.

EA: Great!

SS: And now she's doing exceedingly well. She's got a marvelous job.

EA: Great!

SS: And I'm very...

EA: Do you see her often?

SS: Extremely proud of her. Yes, we have lunch, when we were both working in the city, when I was still working, we had lunch on a weekly basis. And now since I stopped working it's not quite as often but we talk on the phone and we do see each other. I expect to see her this week.

EA: Oh good.

SS: But...

EA: Is there something perhaps you find difficult to talk about directly and might like to give her a message with this? There are areas sometimes that face to face...

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

*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [1-2-61]*

EA: A message that you would like to give her on her way?

SS: No, I think what I really wanted to give her is this tape. I very, very much wanted to give her that, especially since she, when I told her I was going to do this she expressed such interest, which really made me feel so good, that she cared. Because I thought perhaps she just wanted to divorce herself from it. And just knowing that she was anxious to have this means a great deal to me.

EA: That's great.

SS: And so this is what I want her to have.

EA: And, you say she's married? How long has she been married?

SS: It's almost two years, nearly two years.

EA: Oh great. So, you're really living, leaving a legacy behind. And this is of course going to the archives as well. And this is great...

SS: Yes, I feel...

EA: That you've been able to talk about it.

SS: I feel very good about this. I feel I, it needed doing. I've wanted to do it for so long and didn't know how to go about it, obviously. Well, not obviously. But I know it would have been impossible for me to do it myself. And...

EA: It is, you needed somebody...

SS: And I'm very grateful to you.

EA: Tell me something, Sylvia, where is home?

SS: Where is home? Oh, home is where the heart is. Isn't it?

EA: And your heart is?

SS: My heart is with my family, with my, my own family, with my husband and with my child, and with my now my children. I have two children now. I have a son-in-law.

EA: That's wonderful! You've gained a son.

SS: I've gained a son, yes.

EA: Great.

SS: I feel that way.

EA: He's American?

SS: Yes.

EA: American born?

SS: Yes.

EA: What about his parents?

SS: His parents I believe are Amer--yes, his parents are American born. I'm not sure about his grandparents. I suspect they're not but I'm not sure.

EA: Did he have grandparents that he knew?

SS: Yes, he did.

EA: And so he was enriched by that experience.

SS: Oh yes, yes.

EA: Which of course your daughter missed out on.

SS: Unfortunately. Well, she had one set of grandparents--my husband's parents.

EA: And does he have brothers and sisters?  
SS: He has a brother.  
EA: Is there a close family relationship there?  
SS: I think so. I think so.  
EA: That's good. And you were included in that?  
SS: Oh yes! Yes.  
EA: Do you feel that you've gained a family, not only a son but also...  
SS: I think so. I'm very fond of him. And I'm fond of his parents. They're very nice people. I like them very much.  
EA: That's great.  
SS: Yes.  
EA: I wonder if they know your story. Have they ever asked?  
SS: No, we don't see that much of them. They...  
EA: They live in New York also?  
SS: No, they live in New Jersey.  
EA: Oh.  
SS: And while we see them, which I imagine they must know something about my background, because at the, dur--in any case during the wedding ceremony the rabbi referred to it. So they must have told him something about...  
EA: Your background.  
SS: The background, right.  
EA: They got married in the synagogue also?  
SS: No. They got married in a hotel, but under a *chupah* in a...  
EA: Oh, yes. Are they traditional in any way?  
SS: My daughter keeps a kosher home.  
EA: Does she really?  
SS: Yes. Yes. Her husband requested it. They are not religious. They are traditionalists, I think.  
EA: Right.  
SS: I think. And I'm very pleased. My daughter lights sabbath candles.  
EA: Oh that's wonderful.  
SS: It gives me great pleasure to know that.  
EA: I'm sure.  
SS: Her, yes.  
EA: I'm sure.  
SS: Yes.  
EA: So, has she drawn you back a little more towards Judaism?  
SS: No. I feel very Jewish. I mean, I never felt otherwise. It's just that I feel Jewish in a traditional way also, not in a religious, particularly in a religious way.  
EA: During their growing up did you join a temple?  
SS: No.

EA: You did not give her...

SS: No.

EA: Any kind of religious...

SS: No really, no.

EA: Schooling?

SS: No, no, I did not. No. I felt very estranged, because of my background.

EA: You mentioned that. But it makes your heart feel good that your daughter...

SS: Yes.

EA: Is traditionally Jewish.

SS: It does, yes. And I wish now that I had given her more. But it's too late.

EA: It's never too late.

SS: Well...

EA: Obviously she is...

SS: She is now...

EA: Being drawn into it...

SS: She is drawn into it...

EA: And hopefully there will be grandchildren.

SS: Yes. Yes.

EA: And, the traditions...

SS: I wish it had come from me. But it, since it didn't, I'm glad it came from her husband.

EA: Wonderful.

SS: Yes, I'm very pleased. It's, it means a lot to me. And I'm very grateful to him for this.

EA: Do you know we were, we met at the *Kinder* transport 50th reunion in London this June...

SS: Yes. Yes.

EA: And the main, there were two main themes at the conference. One of them is, "What is Our Identity?" Do you remember...

SS: Yes. [unclear]...

EA: I'm sure you attended that work--well, it wasn't a workshop. It was the address. And, how would you describe your identity?

SS: I would have difficulty with that, I'm afraid.

EA: Yes.

SS: It seems that my life has been directed toward doing, early in life, doing what is expedient, in terms of causing the least pain to myself.

EA: For survival's sake.

SS: For survival purposes. And beyond that, I really haven't given it too much thought. I don't think I have a lot of problem with identity. I'm, I have no conscious problems with identity.

EA: You mentioned that, well, for one thing, you have survived.

SS: Yes.

EA: And, by the looks of you, thank God, very, very well.

SS: I've done it fairly well, yes.

EA: You have a Jewish identity.

SS: Certainly a traditional one, yes.

EA: Jewish in whatever way we wish to interpret that.

SS: Exactly.

EA: And I think you have a feeling of belonging to the Jewish community at large, as being a Jew.

SS: Oh yes! Oh yes!

EA: So, you are a Jew.

SS: I certainly am very Jewish. I feel very Jewish.

EA: And, right. So that is your identity.

SS: Yes.

EA: I think that's a very, very...

SS: Oh yes, yes.

EA: Good identity. You're a mother. You're a wife.

SS: A wife. Yes. I don't have any problem really with that. You know, I'm an individual.

EA: That's it.

SS: But [unclear]...

EA: Can you accept that you now deserve to live, just for being Sylvia Schneider?

SS: Absolutely.

EA: Good.

SS: Oh yes. Absolutely.

EA: Can you, do you think you deserve...

SS: I do now. Yes, there was a time when I felt I was the one that should not have survived, that the others were better than I was and they should have survived. I think they, I still think they should have survived. Unfortunately, they didn't, and I did. I consider that an accident of fate, and that's all it is.

EA: But you deserve to live.

SS: Certainly! Certainly!

EA: Say it.

SS: I deserve to live as long as I can.

EA: That's right, to, deserve to live well.

SS: To live as well as I can, yes, certainly, certainly.

EA: Do you have difficulty treating yourself to things that you...

SS: No, not any more.

EA: Oh, that's good.

SS: No, no longer do I give away things that are given to me because they're too good for me. No more. I now enjoy things that are given to me. I enjoy buying things for myself when I can. And, I like myself, whether or not...

EA: That's great! My word, you've come a long way, baby!

SS: Yes.

EA: [laughs] You certainly have, and I wish you so well.



*SYLVIA SCHNEIDER [1-2-65]*

SS: Yes. Thank you.

EA: I'm delighted that...

SS: Thank you for helping me with this. You've made it...

EA: We've been, had a chance, I'm delighted that we met...

SS: You made it possible for me.

EA: In London...

SS: So am I.

EA: To make this possible.

SS: Yes. Let me give you a hug, Eva.

EA: All right.

SS: O.K.

EA: This is August the 8th, in Philadelphia, and Sylvia Schneider and Eva Abraham are sitting together having chatted, and I was delighted...

SS: So was I.

EA: To have the opportunity.

SS: Yes, it's been wonderful for me.

EA: Thank you, Sylvia.