

audio

INTERVIEW OF NELLIE CSARNA

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CONTINUED INTERVIEW WITH NELLIE CSARNA

(May 13, 1989)

EVELYN: Do you have anything more you want to say in relationship with your stepfather before we go on to another subject -- or just start wherever you want.

SANDRA: You were in Richenbach?

NELLIE: Richenbach.

SANDRA: That's where you stopped physically being in Richenbach, right.

NELLIE: Yes.

SANDRA: Before you talked about your father. So that was what year?

(Brief pause).

NELLIE: I'd like to emphasize again about my relationship with my stepfather, that he was a real father to me. He couldn't have been more devoted to me and I was devoted to him too, but I had difficulty showing my love.

The period, the time that we lived in Dershonov during the five years, since 1945 to 1950 was a difficult time for me. Right after the war I didn't speak very well Polish any more. I spoke German better at that time and I didn't have any education, I didn't even know the alphabet. I'm not even sure I knew how to tell time because we never had a clock. And I was put in school, in a Polish school.

EVELYN: That was the first time you went to school then?

NELLIE: Very first time of my life. I didn't fit in first grade because I was a large kid and it would be terribly embarrassing for me to be with the little kids, so they had to put me right away in second grade and after classes I would stay and spend a little time in first grade to pick up the alphabet and so on.

Well, I made it through second grade and I went to the fourth grade. I skipped a grade in between. But it was a struggle. I had tutors and it was very difficult. I picked up the Polish language it seems like in a matter of months. I knew how to read and I knew how to write and I excelled in a few subjects, but I was failing in, especially in math and I had a mental block, I guess about math and when there was an interview with the teachers, my mother was told by my math teacher that I guess I'm dumb. She called me a little donkey and in Polish that means being dumb and that was very painful for me because I knew I was not dumb.

EVELYN: How did the other children treat you?

NELLIE: I felt out of place. I was a chubby child, I had an eating disorder, I became a compulsive eater. I was basically lonely, a little withdrawn and the children would tease me constantly.

I was surrounded only by Polish Christian children and they would pick on me for being Jewish. They would accuse me for everything, they would accuse me for the death of Jesus, that the Jews killed Jesus. I constantly heard about that, and when the time of Passover came, a Polish girlfriend wouldn't come to my house because she said my mother needed Christian blood for the matzos and of course, I didn't have any education in any religion and I just knew I'm Jewish but I didn't know exactly what that meant and I ran crying to my mother. But anti semitism was very strong.

EVELYN: The teachers too, did they treat you badly, the teachers?

NELLIE: No, the teachers didn't treat me badly but at first, the first few years after the war in the classroom they would say the prayers, Christian prayers, everybody would stand up, they would cross themselves and I was always the, the outsider, I would just stand there and I would always, the finger was always pointed at me.

SANDRA: Were there no other Jewish families in the town?

NELLIE: There were Jewish families, there were very few children. There were no children after the war. Later on I met a Jewish girl who came from Russia, she survived the war in Russia, my age.

SANDRA: In Russia?

NELLIE: In Russia, yes. She became my best girlfriend and there was another one later on that also he returned from Russia. So I would say I had about two Jewish girlfriends my age and --

EVELYN: How old were you then actually?

NELLIE: In '45 I was nine and a half.

SANDRA: Well, as you had said after the war there were very few Jews in Poland, period?

NELLIE: Yes, and the Jews who lived in that town, most of them were survivors that came back from Russia, many came back from Russia and some that survived the concentration camps and we never met anybody that survived the Warsaw ghetto, ever. And there were very few Jewish children, period.

SANDRA: When you were looking at the lists of people who survived, you were talking about that, did you ever find any relatives or people you knew?

NELLIE: Never. My mother looked and she never found anybody that she knew. Never. And she lived all her life in Warsaw. All her relatives, a very large family and friends and nobody, there was no one left.

Well, I was depressed, I guess, living the combination of the stress of my mother's marriage and just coping with trying to catch up in school and be like everybody else. I was depressed and I tried to commit suicide.

I never said that to anybody all my life. But

that was early on. I must have been ten.

SANDRA: What did you do?

NELLIE: I turned on the gas in the kitchen when nobody was around.

EVELYN: You were so close to your mother before, so you felt when she married, was that closeness taken away from you?

NELLIE: I think so, yes. She was still close to me but she would spend time with my father and they would go out. Many, many times they included me. Most of the time I would go with them but there were times when I was left alone in the house.

EVELYN: And you could not talk to your mother then as you did before, right?

NELLIE: I would never say those things to her. I would never say anything like that.

But I was thinking a lot about the war. I was thinking about my brother a lot and my father.

SANDRA: Did you ever go to the cemetery when you were --

NELLIE: Yes, I didn't mention that before. I wanted to say that when we came back from Berlin after the war we went to the cemetery right away and we found his grave. We found my brother's grave and we spent a whole day there. It was full of weeds and it was neglected and I cleaned it up and my mother sat and cried and she talked to my brother.

EVELYN: It was the Jewish cemetery?

NELLIE: No. He is buried at the Catholic cemetery called Pavolsky. That's I believe the only large cemetery in the city of Warsaw. It's a Catholic, Christian cemetery, and of course he has a false identity on the gravestone with a cross because as a Jew he would not be buried there. My mother was thinking later on, years later that maybe she should have changed the headstone and put his real name but she reached the conclusion that it wouldn't be a good idea because they would never put up with knowing that a Jew was buried there and they would demolish the grave.

Well, going back to Dershonev right after the war, as I said, I tried to commit suicide because I felt unhappy and lonely and I didn't fit anywhere and I felt just miserable, but --

SANDRA: Were you discovered when you put the gas on?

NELLIE: No. It started choking me. I got scared and I turned it off and I never tried anything like that again. But I had a lot of emotions inside me and I was very creative and I needed an outlet and it seems like at the age of eleven I started thinking about writing a book and I tried several times but it was so difficult. It was just painful to relive everything again. And I never completed anything. I never also talked to anybody about it. I was, I didn't share this with anybody, not even with my

mother.

But somehow things became a little better in school and as the communist influence became more visible they stopped praying in the classroom and we emphasized the wonderful communist philosophy and I started writing a lot in school and I was, apparently my compositions were outstanding because they, the teachers used to read them aloud to the whole class and I really, and it gave me great joy to write and also, I would read a lot. I became acquainted with the library and I would just read those books until it seems like I finished all of them. I read everything. I read French literature, I read Dostoyevsky, I read Victor Hugo, I just read everything I could put my hands on.

EVELYN: In the original language?

NELLIE: In Polish, in Polish, yes. It seems there were no more books left for me in that library to me. I read anatomy and physiology and that's how I learned about sex because I never talked about this to anybody, but I read an excellent book on it, The Perfect Marriage by some Dutch, Dutch gynecologist and I also learned the Russian language, we were taught Russian in school.

EVELYN: That was compulsory?

NELLIE: It was, yes, yes. And I loved that language and I enjoyed it tremendously because my mother was fluent and she was, she enjoyed also poetry



and she would, she would always say poems whenever it was appropriate, when something like that came up, she would always quote poems.

SANDRA: By then you must have spoken several languages?

NELLIE: Well, I spoke Polish and I spoke German and I picked up quite a lot of Russian.

SANDRA: Did you know Yiddish, too?

NELLIE: I didn't know any Yiddish at all but I started picking up Yiddish from the survivors because I used to communicate with my mother in Polish and even in Germany we spoke Polish to each other but since I saw so little of my mother in Germany, I was mostly on my own and spoke mostly German. That's why my Polish language suffered and when I came back I had some difficulties with Polish.

I remember also that at the very beginning in Dershonev they set up a little Hader (phonet) for some of the Jewish children that were around and I never knew what that was but my mother sent me there. I think it was at the very beginning, even before I started school, and she told me just to go there and she took me to that place, it was a large room and tables and benches, and there were a few kids, there were maybe six children and they was Hassidam and they were dressed in black and they had peias and I never saw people like that. I didn't remember people looking that way and there were teaching alef-bez and

alef-bez and gimmel-dallad and they were writing on a blackboard and I didn't know what it meant and what it was and after the class we would get soup and something to eat so it was fun to go there. And it didn't last very long. I think that most of them left town and tried to get to Israel. Of course all the borders were closed and there was no immigration to Israel but anyway, that stopped.

And I continued going to school and I was still, there was, I had difficulties, the kids would pick on me for being heavy and just for being different, I guess. And, but I made friends and I was doing okay and later on there were different youth groups emerging and there was a Zionist group from the organization called Ichyd and they had a youth group, Zionist youth. So I joined, I joined that group and it was wonderful. It was a lot of fun. Most of the young people were in their late teens. Maybe some of them 19 years old, some 20 and they were just maybe a few kids my age from 12 to 14, 15, maybe four children but we were all together and we wore uniforms and we were taught Hebrew songs and we would march in the streets and we would sing Hebrew songs and we felt so proud and the Hershalia would come from Israel and he would talk about Palestine at the time. It was before 1948 so -- and that we should all strive to go to Israel because that's where our future is and we were also, so we felt so strongly about it and that's what

everybody wanted. As a matter of fact, all the Jews we talked to, that's what they were waiting for, just to go to Israel.

SANDRA: Your parents too?

NELLIE: Of course, yes, yes. We applied for a visa to go to Israel as soon as it was possible. But we waited for five years, until 1950 before we got the permit to leave Poland.

SANDRA: What kind of business was your stepfather doing in Poland?

NELLIE: They had a factory of hydrolics and it was, I don't know, I forgot the name, a foundry where they were melting metals.

EVELYN: Iron foundry?

NELLIE: Iron foundry, right, and they would build small engines and parts for hydrolics they called it.

EVELYN: So they were fairly prosperous?

NELLIE: Yes, yes. My parents, my father was very, very smart in business and very knowledgeable and he was just self-educated but he knew how to manage. He was a very personable person, he was liked very much and he could get along with Jews and with Christians and he was just a nice person.

EVELYN: Was he Orthodox?

NELLIE: No, no. He wasn't and my mother wasn't.

SANDRA: Did they have a good marriage, do you think?

NELLIE: Well at the beginning in Poland he was, everybody was a little bit irrational. He started drinking and he wanted to relive the life that he missed and I think that most of the survivors went through a period that they were really irrational. They would party and get crazy. My mother was not part of it. She was always reserved and always would stay in the background. She never took part too much but there were a lot of parties going among the Jews and among the Christians and they would drink a lot and dance and sometimes my mother would go with my father and, that's when I was depressed, when I had to stay alone at home. And also they, I was studying piano at the time and my mother always said well, you stay home and you practice the piano.

EVELYN: Did you have a nice home?

NELLIE: It was a nice home. It was an old house. This was a house that used to belong to the Germans, very old and squeaky steps. It was two a story house but it was comfortable and everything was old. But it was very comfortable, yes. It's a real first home that I could remember. And the workshop in the factory was right in the backyard. It was -- and there was a pile of coal in the backyard and there were workers so they would pass on the ground floor. We were living upstairs and I would sit a lot by the

window, I remember I used to love to watch people, it was my passion. I would watch people and at that time, I remember started having feelings towards men and fantasize and I would be in love with somebody just without knowing him, a good looking man and I would fantasize about that. I guess I read too many romantic --

SANDRA: You read so much?

NELLIE: Yes, from the reading.

SANDRA: Did your parents ever think to have more children or were they past child-bearing age?

NELLIE: Not really, not yet. My father really wanted to have a child and my mother didn't so they never did.

I remember once we went to the synagogue. It was Simcha Torah, and the Jews gathered in the streets and they were dancing with the Torah and that was so, I have never seen anything like that. And my mother explained it to me, what it meant and that's how it used to be done before the war and, but I have very, very fond and happy memories from the experiences with the Zionist youth group. We would spend summers in camp and we would go on field trips and climb mountains and we would live in tents and they would say to prepare ourselves for the life in Israel and we'll go and wash in the stream and sit around the fireplace at night and singing Hebrew songs.

Eventually it all fell apart and most people

left, started leaving Poland toward the end of I guess '48, '49. Some went to other European countries. Everybody said they were going to Israel and our time came in 1950 and we received an exit permit from Poland and it was a very, very happy occasion. We were really looking forward to that. And we started preparing ourselves. They said that life in Israel is difficult, there's not enough food and it's just a difficult economic situation and everybody had suggestions what we should bring with us and the things that we could exchange later or sell. And they said they don't have salame in Israel so my father bought I don't know how many kilograms of salames. The whole living was filled to the ceilings with salames hanging drying for the trip and they designed a special, a special box lined with aluminum to store the salame.

Then they said that my mother couldn't bring her silver fox.

EVELYN: A silver fox?

NELLIE: That she wore.

EVELYN: A stole?

NELLIE: Right. They said if she would cut it up and make a collar out of it and cuffs and around the sleeves on her coat they would let her take it out from Poland. So --

SANDRA: Do you know why that was?

NELLIE: The Polish government would not

allow --

EVELYN: Export?

NELLIE: To take out of Poland expensive things like fur.

SANDRA: I see. But as a stole no, but as collar and cuffs, yes?

NELLIE: Well, they said if it was chopped up it would be okay. So she did go and have it, had it done by a tailor and nothing really helped. When we reached the Polish border there was a very, very strict inspection. They took away from us all electrical appliances, including an iron. They said no electrical appliances can leave Poland. No furs and they took off the silver fox from my mother's coat they ripped it out. They took away the salame -- yes, all the sausages had to stay in Poland. And they even wanted my father to take off his high boots. At that time men used to wear high boots like riding boots, that was the style and they thought that he shouldn't. So I guess he paid some money under the table to some people and they let him take the boots and we left Poland basically with whatever we wore, the clothes we had on and we didn't have anything. The money was worthless.

SANDRA: That's what I was going to ask about, the money?

NELLIE: Right, there was no money, Polish money was worthless and we didn't have anything. We

went to Italy, from Poland to Italy by train. We, I guess we traveled to Naples -- no. I'm sorry. We travelled to Venitzia -- Venice, and we stayed there for about a day or two waiting for the ship, and our ship arrived. It was called Gallilea and we were all put aboard the ship to go to Israel. It was a very old squeaky ship and was filled to the brim.

EVELYN: It was, what flag did it go under, what flag, was it Isreali?

NELLIE: I don't know, I think Isreali, yes, because it was already 1950 so the State of Israel was established and the ship had a Hebrew name, Gallilea, so it must have been under the Isreali flag. And it was very packed with people, it was a difficult trip but the spirits were high and everybody was happy and I remember that somehow cooks always had sympathy for me, I don't know, I was so fat but they would give me doubles portions of food always and it was the first time I was introduced to grapefruits, they had grapefruits on this ship and oranges.

EVELYN: They did not exist in Poland at the time.

NELLIE: And we made it to Israel. We arrived to Haifa and we were all taken to the, what is called in Hebrew, Mabara, which is a camp where --

EVELYN: Immigration camp?

NELLIE: Immigration, where all the immigrants.



EVELYN: Assemble?

NELLIE: Assemble together and they would live there until other arrangements could be made for them where to settle them. And we stayed for a few weeks there and we would live in barracks also and it was very crowded and I was in a state of shock because I have never seen such different people and different clothes and different colors of skins and dark people and from different countries and different languages that I never heard before and it was very hot and very humid and we stood in line for every, for every meal. But basically everybody was happy and it was just very interesting to me and I would have my eyes wide open always and observe and look at everything. I was so interested in everything but I didn't understand everything, I couldn't understand what kind of Jews they were. I thought always that all the Jews were in Poland.

EVELYN: You must have been fifteen by that time, about?

NELLIE: I was, I was fourteen and a half. It was, we arrived to Israel in 1950 in February -- no, excuse me, in April. And it was close to the independence, Isreal's independence day in April. And my father had some relatives from his first wife that lived already in Tel Aviv and they were survivors from the concentration camp, so he went to Tel Aviv to meet them and we didn't know what to do with ourselves, we

were just sitting there and my father was a very enterprising man and he hated the situation of just sitting and waiting. He wanted to do something, to be busy and be occupied and we didn't like the situation of standing in line every day for three meals.

So he was looking around and they had from the Jewish agency, the Sochnud, had programs for new immigrants to settle on farmland. They said whoever wanted to become a farmer the government would help them and they could right away leave those camps that we stayed in in Haifa.

So we decided well, my mother was experienced in raising livestock and working on a farm in Germany and he could learn and let's get out of this place and start living.

SANDRA: Was it a Kibbutz-type farm?

NELLIE: No, this would be collective farms, private. One farm would be, I don't know if it was a collective farm. No, everybody would get a piece of land and would get a cow from the government and a house and we would basically, you know, work on the land and later on when it was profitable we would pay back the government for what they spent on each family.

So in preparation of that, they sent us to another camp which was near the, it was called Mahane, Israel and it was near the Lud Airport. And we stayed there and we lived in tents over there and it was very

difficult. There were snakes and there were scorpions and I was very afraid of all of these creatures that I wasn't used to, the huge lizards that would sit around on walls and was very scared to me. And once I had an experience where a scorpion or some other thing crawled underneath my nightgown when I slept at night. So that was very scary.

Well, in the meantime, I was getting older. I was fourteen years old, almost fifteen years old. I had no school, nobody knew what to do with me. There was no program available for me, it seems like there was nobody that could help me out in anything. I just had no place to go. My parents said I could not go to school because I didn't speak Hebrew so I couldn't to high school and they couldn't afford it also because they would have to pay for it and I didn't speak any Hebrew at all.

SANDRA: No public school in Israel at the time?

NELLIE: I don't know. I think that --

EVELYN: Maybe in the city or in the Kibbutz?

NELLIE: I don't know. That's what I knew, I couldn't afford to go to high school. Anyway, how could I go, I didn't know a word of Hebrew, I didn't know the alphabet, read and write. There was no program for me anywhere. The time was terribly difficult in Israel. There was not enough food and

there was not enough housing and there was not enough, there were no jobs available and especially for the new immigrants we were just on the mercy, whatever the government was able to supply us with.

So, we stayed for a while in Mahane, Israel living in the tent, waiting for our farm to be available. Well finally they did send us to a place called Yakonah which was in the vicinity of Pehatikvah and they had, they built a new settlement for new immigrants there and at first we would live in, in barracks waiting for our house to be built and there were many families from different countries, mostly Romania and Hungaria and Poland.

EVELYN: Which part of Israel was it?

NELLIE: Pehatikvah, right in the heartland of Israel, about half an hour away from Tel Aviv. And we were, I guess it was not -- everywhere is a border and we were not far from that border with Jordan and many times at night the Arabs would attack, infiltrators would come across the border, would steal cattle and shoot people at night and I remember my father and other men would have to go and patrol at night with weapons and patrolling the whole area. We were settled next to an established settlement called Yakonah. Those were farmers who lived and some of them were born in Israel and well, these farmers and so it was under their, I guess, under their wing that this new settlement was being built and they were

supposed to teach us and supervise how to run a farm. In the meantime some of the new immigrants would get jobs with the old farmers and my mother would go and work a little bit in the vegetable garden or clean somebody's house and my father would pick oranges in an orange grove and I would also pick oranges or work in somebody's garden picking weeds and so on.

Well, finally our house was built. It was a little one room house with a bathroom, I guess, and on a piece of land and they brought, gave us a cow.

SANDRA: Do you remember about how much land?

NELLIE: Just a field and not a very large field. And we had to clear it from, there were old orange groves that didn't produce any more, so tractors came and the people had to clear the field of the trees and it was a tremendously difficult job. My father worked so hard. He lost so much weight at the time. They worked day and night. It was very hard labor.

EVELYN: Did you have enough to eat?

NELLIE: We were not hungry but there was not plenty of food. Everything was by coupons. You had to go to the market --

EVELYN: It was rationed?

NELLIE: Yes, rationed. Eggs were rationed and sugar was rationed and it was a very hard time in Israel in the 50s, very, very difficult.

SANDRA: What were you doing then?

NELLIE: Nothing, I was just hanging around and working whenever I could and there were not even kids my age. Again I was, always I stood out like a sore thumb it seemed to me, always.

EVELYN: No books?

NELLIE: No books, no education, nobody had time for me, nobody paid attention to me and I was a teenager and I felt pretty bad about myself. I would go, my mother would send me to the, to Yakonah which was a few, a couple of miles away, three or four miles away to the store to buy something and on the way, I would meet the Israeli teenagers and they seemed like from a foreign country to me. They were so beautiful and they were all wearing shorts and they were brown and I would wear my dress that I brought from Poland, an old fashioned dress with a little velvet ribbons and I felt --

EVELYN: Out of place?

NELLIE: Terribly out of place. I was so ashamed of myself. I was just miserable. I didn't want to be, I wanted to be like everybody else and I was afraid and I was, of course nobody would bother me, nobody would talk to me because they all knew I was an immigrant. I looked like an immigrant, I really did, and I didn't have any clothes so, I wore these awkward things that we brought from Poland.

There was a young lady that lived in the village

in Yakonah, a wealthy family. She had a baby and I think she befriended me once. She started talking to me and she said that she would give me private lessons, she would teach me a little Hebrew and other subjects if I would babysit for her. So I was very happy to do that. She had a one year old baby and once in a while I would go to her house and she would give me a Hebrew lesson. She asked me what I was studying in school in Poland and she would try and teach me a little bit of everything. But my parents were talking about sending me to a Kibbutz so I could get into some program to study Hebrew but it seems like there was nobody to, nobody that could take me around and sign me up and look for something. My parents didn't speak Hebrew, they were so busy with that farm they couldn't tear themselves away. A next door neighbor took me once. He was a young man who was in Israel already for a few years and he spoke Hebrew but he was also an immigrant from Rumania, I believe and he took me to Tel Aviv to look for those agencies that would place new immigrant kids on Kibbutzim or into programs and we went to different offices and everybody said no, there's nothing for me and I felt so bad. I felt like I was, I just didn't fit anywhere, I didn't belong anywhere, I felt terrible about myself.

But one time, he took me again to Tel Aviv, he didn't give up and they signed me up to join a

Kibbutz, a youth group and I was sent to that Kibbutz which was called Ain Shamir near Hadera, and I was sent on a bus, I guess by myself. They told me how to get there and I arrived there and was terribly unhappy. I was, I was introduced to a group of young kids who seemed to me again all looked like Sabras and I think they were. Many of them lived in the Kibbutz with their parents and I didn't see anybody like me, I didn't see anybody from Poland, I didn't see anybody that talked like me and some of the members of the Kibbutz spoke some Polish. They were I guess for 30, 40 years in Israel. So they introduced me and looked after me a little bit and I would work a few hours here and there in a laundry and in the dining hall and in the kitchen and once in a while we would go out and work in the fields around banana trees and we would work in the soil. But I couldn't, couldn't get acclimated, I couldn't, I felt very out of place and I was very lonely and I missed my mother and I wrote her letters. Every day I wrote her a letter crying get me out of here, I don't want to be here, I'm lonely, I don't want to be here and she would send letters back to me that this is my only chance, I have to learn Hebrew, I must stay there, they don't have other programs for me and I wrote back if she didn't take me out I would run away. So she came to visit me one day and I cried and I said I would definitely run away from this place I was so unhappy. I couldn't learn



anything. They put me in a class and everybody spoke Hebrew and I didn't understand anything. I didn't get any individual attention. Nobody taught me anything, they put me in a class with kids that already knew Hebrew and were advanced --

(Brief pause).

NELLIE: I didn't get any individual attention in that Kibbutz because it was just, everybody was struggling, the Kibbutzim had their problems and they had the influx of immigrants and there was just a difficult situation all around for everybody. There were not enough programs available and I was in the wrong place. I was put in the wrong Kibbutz where they didn't have a program for kids like me. And I suffered very much but my mother said, and she was very tough, and she said that I have no other choice, I can come back and become a peasant and not learn anything on the farm and she doesn't want this for me. I must get an education. This is the place I have to stick it out and learn the language and she left, I put her on the bus and when she left, I remember running after the bus and crying I'm getting out of here.

Well, eventually I was so unhappy that I did leave. I had to leave and I came back to the farm and my parents were struggling, they were working so hard to plantings and my mother succeeded in having a little small garden and vegetables were so expensive

and I remember bus drivers, Egged bus drivers would stop by and buy a couple of carrots and some, a cucumber. All of this was not available in the city and that's how we made our living.

SANDRA: How did you do for water?

NELLIE: They had some water supply. It was not an abundance but there was water and that cow that my parents had drove them crazy. They couldn't control this cow. She would take off and run to the neighbors' plots and demolish the fence and it was just such a struggle and my father was afraid to get close to the cow and he would send my mother, she was the only one that could milk the cow and she was scared to death. Every time she got close to the cow she was afraid she would kick her.

So somehow they were struggling very hard, working very, very hard and making, barely making a living and my father would have to go out and work on the outside to supplement and he would work on construction. He would build cement blocks and I remember going out with him and helping him, I would work also. I was very strong and I could lift and we would mix the cement together and put it in the forms and shake it up and make a block for building for construction and then when they dried we would water it so the cement would harden and --

Well, the young man from the village still had an interest in me, his name was Simcha. He was really

very nice and he knew that I should be enrolled in some programs, I should be going to school and we didn't know what to do. Then he heard about a nursing school opening up in a hospital nearby called Bellinson Hospital and I remember I went with my mother and we went to the head nurse and my mother told her that I would like to be a nurse, I would like to sign up. So she interviewed me and asked me how many grades did I finish. And when she heard about my background she says well, I think you have to go back to school and come back to us in about two or three years, you're still too young. I was fifteen and a half, sixteen, not even sixteen years old yet.

So that was a terrible rejection for me because I had my mind already made up that I would be a nurse and I cried and I said nobody wants me and nobody needs me and there's nothing for me to do. And again, I stayed there for another few months and then we heard about another program for nurses opening up and Simcha took me to Tel Aviv and signed me up. This was a program that was designed mainly for kids like me, young people like me who were new immigrants and didn't speak Hebrew well and that was a perfect program. And they sent us first of all to study Hebrew language. It was for an intense course of Hebrew and they send us to a Kibbutz in the north in Gallilea in the Kibbutz called Hulliot or Stanya Hammya and it was right on the border with Lebanon. I

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mean we would, it was right there, just a fence between us. And the whole group of young people gathered there from all over Israel and all new immigrants and most of them were a little older than me. I was the youngest one. It was at that time I think 1952 and -- no, maybe middle of 1951 and I was not sixteen years old yet. My birthday would have been in September and this was in maybe April-May of '51.

Well, we lived in tents and there was a large group of us and they were from Poland and Rumania and Hungary and Iraq and a couple of girls from Iran, from Egypt, from many countries and we all felt so close to each other, right away there was a bond between us and we studied Hebrew intensively and also the Bible and a little bit of history, Jewish history. It was my first encounter and we studied math and a little bit of physics and a little of chemistry. They prepared us for the education in the nursing school and they were mostly girls and a few young men also that were signing up for this class.

And have the most fond memories of that time. I stayed in that Kibbutz for six months and I can't remember a happier time in my life. It was so exiting and we had such a wonderful time. We would study and we would also work a few hours in different areas in the Kibbutz in the dining hall and we prepared the tables and served food and also in the kitchen we

would work on the farms in the fields and it was such a beautiful part of the country and we would go on field trips, climb mountains and play in the streams and eat the wonderful fruits from the trees, pomegranates and dates, fresh dates and figs. It was very happy. I was very, very happy there. I was so happy there that I wrote to my mother that I want to stay in the Kibbutz, I want to become a member of the Kibbutz and would she let me stay there and she says no, you have to do what we were planning, you went there just to get some education and sign up for the nursing school, that was the intention. Well, anyway, I listened to her and we stayed for about six months in this Kibbutz and then we were sent to the school for nursing. And the school was in Serefend, which is about half an hour by car south of Tel Aviv in a large hospital also by that name right now it's called Assaf Harafay. It was in the vicinity of a large military camp and we had beautiful housing, rooms for, there were two of us sharing a room and beautiful showers and everything. It was in such nice condition and fresh and we had classes every day with instructors and with doctors and it was so interesting and they took us around the hospital to get acquainted. We all wore uniforms, student uniforms and then we started working on the wards under supervision and we had a lot of intensive study, a lot of study.

EVELYN: What did you do for money, pocket

money?

NELLIE: I didn't have any pocket money. Whatever my parents gave me and we ate in the hospital, we slept there, we lived in the hospital. And it was a very happy time. On the weekends there were parties in the military camp and the soldiers would come over and invite the young girls and we would go dancing and it was very nice. And examinations, a lot of pressure. There was so much to learn, the course was a one year course, intensive course of study. Eventually my parents couldn't make it on the farm any more and they left and my father found a job as a manager in a cement factory in Ramla which is right next door to where I was in the, starting in a hospital, very close by.

So they bought a house they're called a shakun, those track homes that were built at the time in Israel and they settled down there and I continued going to school and on the weekends I would go visit my parents. And after one year of studying, I passed the test and I, and I became a nurse. But the diplomas were not given to us. We all had to work at least one year in the hospital and then after that year we would get our diplomas.

So it was a very happy occasion, we had a party and everybody was hugging and kissing that we made it. After all we started altogether from starting Hebrew and we, most of us stayed in the same hospital to

work. Some were transferred to other hospitals around the country and in a very, very short time, I had a very responsible position and I started working nights and I, it was very hard work with such sick people and dying people and we would do everything. There were no nurses aides at the time and a nurse would do everything, medical care and nursing care and we would clean and we would wash and we would just do everything. We would work very, very hard and there were many times that we would cry because it was so sad to see many people die and I was not used --

SANDRA: Was this --

NELLIE: So close by.

SANDRA: A hospital for people who say had natural illnesses or war injuries or --

NELLIE: It was an acute general hospital. So there were all kinds of people, all wards, pediatrics and orthopaedics and surgery, everything. And we worked on all the wards, everywhere. There were, there was a special department of, for tuberculosis and we just worked everywhere and also, there were many wounded soldiers that would come and I worked there for about one year. Then I was transferred to another hospital, the largest one in Israel called Tel Hashomel and it's not far from Tel Aviv. Also a general acute hospital, also next door to a large military camp. And there I became shift supervisor and it was a great responsibility. I would

be supervising a shift in the evening, afternoon from 3:00 to 11:00 or nighttime. And we would work very, very hard. There were not enough nurses and many patients and sometimes I would be on my own with 40, 45 patients at night and all kind of emergencies and I did a great job, I felt very proud of myself.

EVELYN: Then you made money, too?

NELLIE: Oh, yes.

EVELYN: You were paid?

NELLIE: Yes, I made very good money and I took the whole check I made and take it home to my parents.

Yes, I would never know what to do with the money so I gave it do my mother.

SANDRA: Were you basically living at home in this period too?

NELLIE: No, I was living in the hospital. Yes, we were living on premises and we shared the room. There were like four or three of us in a room and also large barracks and we had communal showers and --

SANDRA: Sounds like this was a period of contentment for you?

NELLIE: Yes, it was. I was very content, very happy. I remember that very, very hard work and the times very demanding and depressing and a lot of suffering to cope with. And war wounded and I remember the time in 1956 when the Sinai war broke out



and it was an alert, a great alert in the hospital. They would send home all the sick people who were not acutely sick and only the gravely sick would remain in the hospital in preparation for the war with Egypt. And we were all on alert and preparing ourselves and preparing bandages and just preparing all the supplies for an emergency, for a war. And I remember there was a whole ward, ward dedicated, not dedicated but opened up for the war prisoners and they filled it up with all war prisoners, Egyptian soldiers. There was more than one ward, maybe two or three and some of them were with me and they were very sick and wounded and dirty and hungry and we would take care of them just like if they were our own. They received the best treatment and they were cleaned and fed and medical care and they were so touched by the care that they received in a Jewish hospital that they would kiss our hands and when the time came for them to go back to Egypt they were picked up by ambulances and they would hug us and kiss us and say they would never forget us, the treatment they received.

EVELYN: Were there any shortages of medicines at that time in the hospital?

NELLIE: I was not aware of that, no. I was not aware of it. I believed that we received a lot of supplies from the United States.

Well, my nursing career lasted for eight years. I worked for seven years in the same hospital on the

same ward where it was infectuous diseases, terminal diseases. And I was content.

Do you want me to -- continue?

EVELYN: Yes, please, go ahead.

NELLIE: There were a few things that I forgot to mention way back. I don't know if I should.

SANDRA: Go ahead.

NELLIE: When we were living on the farm waiting for the lands to be cleared and receive the actually, and the house to be built, I remember one particular night there was an attack by Arab infiltrators that came across the border and it was in the middle of the night and we started hearing shooting and cries "Arabs, Arabs infiltrating" or something to that, of that sort, and what it turned out to be is that they were coming at night to steal cattle or kill and they came across a young couple that was just walking, they were on a date, and her name was Tamar and she was the daughter of one of the farmers that lived, of the Israelis that were established on the farm and she was dating the tractor driver who came to work to clear the land and they were out on a date and they were attacked and she was shot to death and he was gravely wounded and he lost an arm. And I remember they planted a tree in her memory in that spot, a date tree because dates, a date is in Hebrew Tamar.

Well, there were many, many incidents. We always

lived with the fear of being attacked everywhere. Even in the hospital when I was in the heart of Israel, the mode of transportation for young people at that time was mostly hitchhiking, I would hitchhike everywhere and we would go out on dates until late at night but we never had any fear, never. It would never even cross my mind that somebody might attack us or anything. Never feared anything.

SANDRA: What ended your nursing career?

NELLIE: Well, one beautiful day I was going to work for my evening shift. I was just coming back from a few days vacation and I was supposed to start a week of afternoon shifts from 3:00 to 11:00 and I was on a bus to the hospital with my girlfriend who was coming also back to work and a very close girlfriend Doris, she was a nurse, we went through school together and this bus was originated in Tel Aviv and picking up people all the way to the hospital, visitors and nurses that were going to work. And on the way, it stopped and I looked and this most handsome man I ever saw in my life boarded the bus and I looked into his eyes and that was it.

EVELYN: It ended your nursing career?

NELLIE: Just about. He was tall and dark and he had black curly hair and he wore a beautiful white jacket, very elegant, he didn't look like an Israeli at all. He looked like an Italian which he was. And he was so sharp looking and I just couldn't

take my eyes off him and I guess that I hypnotized him or something because he was drawn toward me too. And he came, I was sitting in the back of the bus and he came all the way to the back and there was standing room only so he kind of stood over me and I had a very low cut out dress and it was summer time so he had a great view, I guess.

Well, when we came to the hospital, he stopped me and asked me directions in English how to find ward number 32 and I spoke a little bit of English at the time because I was taking night classes, I wanted to learn that language so luckily I could communicate with him a little bit and it turned out that he was visiting his cousin who was sick in a hospital and he was visiting Israel at that time and he came from Italy. He used to work for the Jewish agency in Naples and when they closed the agency, he was planning to go to the United States but he stopped in Israel to visit his relatives and at that time, he was in Israel only for one month when I met him.

Well he visited his cousin and he never went back home. He waited for me to finish my shift at 11:00 o'clock and that was our first date. And we never missed one day of seeing each other from that point on. It was real love from first sight and I was just in heaven. I loved him so much that it was painful, it hurt almost. It was so strong. And after about two weeks we were making plans that we would get

married.

EVELYN: Fast work.

NELLIE: He stayed in Israel for ten months and we were dating and we got secretly engaged because my parents objected to it very, very much.

SANDRA: Why was that?

NELLIE: Well, he didn't speak Hebrew and he didn't speak Yiddish and he was born in North Africa in Libia. To them he was like an Arab but he was a Jew and they didn't really recognize it and they knew he was a Jew, of course. Even his grandfather was a Rabbi, but he, my parents, well all people at that age in Israel didn't really accept, you know, there was not much mixing of European Jews and North African Jews and there was a great division, but it didn't matter to me, I knew that I had to spend my life with this man no matter what.

SANDRA: What was his name?

NELLIE: His name Amadeo and his name is Csarna and that's my name now and he left for the United States but he had plans to marry me and he said he would send for me. He didn't want to marry me at that time in Israel because he was not established, didn't have a job and his goal was really to go to the United States.

I was not able to obtain a visa to go to the United States at the time, so he looked for other possibilities and he said that another possibility is

for him to join the American Army and ask to be sent to Europe. So that's exactly what happened. He joined the Army, he signed up for three years. They sent him to Germany. After about three months in Germany, he took leave, some vacation and he came to Israel and he sent me a telegram, I'm coming and we're getting married.

So he had a very short time, he had about ten days and my parents knew that that's it. So they accepted him warmly at that time because in the meantime, since he left Israel until the time he came back about three years elapsed. And we were constantly writing to each other and I had boxes full of letters from him and he would send packages and love was just burning. We were just so in love with each other that we couldn't wait to be together.

Well, he came back and my father made all the arrangements for a beautiful wedding in Tel Aviv and it was a very happy occasion and we spent our honeymoon in Haifa in the hills. Then he went back to Germany and I joined him two months later and I lived with him in Germany.

EVELYN: Where?

NELLIE: For one year we lived in a beautiful town called Eideroberstein and he was stationed at a military base nearby in Baumholder, just the most beautiful place.

EVELYN: Bavaria, was it?

NELLIE: No, that's not Bavaria. That's close, it is close to the French border, Mossel, toward Chartswell, Mossel. We would take weekend trips to, a small country -- what's that called --

EVELYN: Luxemborg.

NELLIE: Luxemborg, or we would take a weekend and go to Paris and just drive maybe 24 hours but we made it to Paris and it was just, I had mixed feelings about going to Germany and I didn't know how I would feel about it and I remembered that the first thing I did is I bought myself a Mogen David and said I would wear it with pride and I'm not going to hide that I'm Jewish and I come from Israel and I had nothing to fear. I was very welcomed and very, people were drawn to me and seeked my company because I spoke German in a matter of two or three weeks, I spoke perfectly again German. I forgot in the meantime but I picked it up immediately so we had a wonderful year in Germany.

SANDRA: Did you find you had any feelings towards the Germans coming as a young adult after your war experiences?

NELLIE: Well, I had mixed feelings but I didn't hate anybody. As a matter of fact, I became very close to my, our landlord with whom, from whom we were renting a small room, two rooms and they became very protective and they treated me really like their own relative. They were very close to me and they,

she taught me how to cook and how to shop and, because I didn't know how to do all of that. And they even, he would lend us his Mercedes once, he wouldn't anybody let touch that car but he would lend it to my husband because, but we were good to them too. My husband would bring supplies from the PX, you know, and drinks and coffee and so it was a very warm and happy year for me that we spent in Germany.

EVELYN: But you were not a citizen?

NELLIE: Oh, no, I traveled as a dependant, my husband"s --

EVELYN: But not as an American citizen?

NELLIE: No, I had an Isreali passport and I was an Isreali citizen, but a military dependant, my husband's. And the end, toward the end of that year I was pregnant and actually I was on leave of absence from my, the hospital, I didn't leave my job. So I decided to go back to Israel and finish my matters with the hospital, finalize everything and see my parents before going to America.

When I came back a short time afterwards my mother fell and she broke her hip bone and she was terribly sick. And I couldn't leave her. So I remained in Israel. My baby was born in Israel. My husband in the meantime went to the United States. And I remained in Israel for eight months so when the baby was three months old, I finally made the trip to the United States.



EVELYN: Your first trip?

NELLIE: Yes, first time, yes. And I was welcomed to the New York airport. My husband took us in his arms and the baby and his mother was there and his stepfather and he was still with the military, of course, and he was stationed in Atlanta, Georgia so we took off right away by car and we traveled to Atlanta. In Atlanta we lived for about two months and he was transferred to San Francisco to the Presidio. And we packed the baby in the car and all our belongings in the trunk and we made the trip from Atlanta, Georgia to San Francisco and we came to San Francisco late at night and he was not familiar with the city and we found, the first place we found an apartment for rent was on Turk Street.

EVELYN: What year was that?

NELLIE: This was 1963 -- yes, it was end of '63, maybe '64 already. And it wasn't the greatest neighborhood and my husband when he got up in the morning and he looked around, we saw the fire station across the building and he said well, I have to go to work but you stay here and don't you leave this place and don't walk the streets and if anybody knocks on the door, don't open the door.

Well, it didn't sound right to me. I came from Israel and I was not afraid of anything and anybody. And especially in America, I wouldn't -- so, the first thing I did when he left, I took my baby and I put him

in the stroller and I went out for a walk and I felt wonderful. It was a black neighborhood, all black stores and I felt, I felt at home. People were so friendly and I felt like in Tel Aviv walking maybe through Shoka Carmel. And there was hustle and bustle and I would go every day on walks all over town as far as I could. My husband didn't even know about it.

EVELYN: You didn't tell him?

NELLIE: No, I didn't tell him too much but at night it got a little bit rough in our neighborhood and there were bottles thrown and we looked out the window and there were prostitutes in the street and -- so after a while we moved out of there and moved to a neighborhood on Geary Street. And I became pregnant with my second child and at that time my husband received orders to go to Viet Nam. And it was devastating to both of us. I was not even a year in this country. I didn't drive yet. We had only one car and he was using it to go to work. And we just didn't know what to do but this was the time, war in Viet Nam and all young men, most young men. Anyway, he was sent to Viet Nam and I went to live with his brother and my sister-in-law who were at the time living in Hollywood. And I lived with them and my second son Adrian was born there in the Presbyterian Hospital.

SANDRA: I presume your English was pretty good by the time you got here?

NELLIE: Oh, yes, I spoke English fluently when I came to this country. Mainly because I learned my Hebrew mostly from writing letters to my husband.

SANDRA: English?

NELLIE: In English. We corresponded only in English. When I met him he didn't speak any Hebrew, only English and Italian. When he left Israel we corresponded for about three years. So I picked up English very fast.

SANDRA: Meanwhile how were your parents faring back in Israel?

NELLIE: They were doing fine. My father turned out to have a good job at the cement factory. He was a manager and he had a good salary and they were making a very good living. But of course, I was working for over eight years in a hospital and I contributed. This is the way, I didn't know any other way. That's the way I was raised. I made, every month I would bring my check to my father and I would get pocket money and I knew if I ever need anything they will provide for me and so it worked out fine.

Well, when my husband came back from Viet Nam, my baby was eight months old. Needless to say, I lived through hell for one year not knowing if he will ever come back and watching the news. We saw the war on television, as you know. Well, he came back, thank God, in good shape and we started a new life again. He found, eventually he left the Army. That was

already after six years of being in the Army. He left the Army, found a civilian job with an air freight company and in a very short time he rose to top. He became, he started as assistant manager, administrative manager in that office and in a short time within a year he became executive vice president. And he worked in that field for a few years until he established his own business and became very, very successful.

EVELYN: And your parents, when did they come over here?

NELLIE: My parents came to this country when the war broke out before, right before the war broke out in 1967. My mother's health was deteriorating and they were very lonely without me in Israel and they wanted to be together and when finally when the war broke out and my mother couldn't run and hide in the shelters again, she said she would never go in a shelter again. My father put her on a plane and sent her to me. So she came in '67 and about six months later to a year later my father joined me and they were living with us until the end except one year before their death, I had to put them in a home for Jewish parents. I didn't want to do it. I really didn't want to do it but I had no other choice. I was separated from my husband, going through, through a devastating time in my life. My parents, my mother especially had one crisis, health crisis after another

and my father was getting very ill and I just couldn't cope any more. I couldn't cope with my own life.

So, they both passed away a year later. My mother in 1984, my father in 1985.

But, they lived a long life and very many happy years. My father was, he was such a special person. He was active in the Jewish community. He became a volunteer for many, many years through the Jewish Center in San Francisco. He would visit sick people in nursing homes and he was a great singer and he had a wonderful personality. He would love to tell jokes and people liked him a lot and he was just everywhere giving of himself. And he received many certificates of honor and he was very proud of it. And I think one of his most proud accomplishments was when he received his American citizenship. He studied very hard toward it and first time he took it and failed and he went back and, I never met anybody else that knew so much about the government and the structure and who was doing what. He knew it and he learned English on his own from reading newspapers. My mother didn't. She was, she was homebound, she wouldn't want to go out at all. She was the happiest just to be at home and of course she always suffered from, she had a chronic pain condition since she broke her hip bone in Israel. It was never fixed properly. She could never walk well and she always suffered pains and as she became older there were more complications, she was sick, she

had diabetes and heart trouble and high blood pressure. Always health problems.

SANDRA: Do you think some of those problems or any other ones are related to her war time experiences?

(Brief pause).

SANDRA: Do you think that any of the health problems your mother had were related to her war expenses?

NELLIE: I'm convinced. As a matter of fact, I know that when we were in Germany and my mother received the letter about my brother's death, she cried so much and for so long that she, at one point she said she was getting blind she couldn't see any more. It was from crying and she couldn't see. For a long time she had blurred vision constantly and she always complained that her heart was aching and she would go to the pharmacy and buy drops. At that time they called it Valierarno and things like that, but she would always say my heart, my heart. Later on she developed diabetes and hypertension. But from the point on when she broke her hip bone in Israel, that's when really she started going down hill because, most of all because of the chronic pain. She was always in pain. And arthritis set in and so that was difficult, difficult. She suffered so much all her life pain. And the memories of my mother since that time when she received the news about my brother's death, she never

stopped crying. For many, many years in Israel, every time she talked to people, she talked about my brother and our experiences and that loss, she could never get over it.

SANDRA: What about you, do you feel like you've had any long terms effects from your war experiences?

NELLIE: Well, I always had a feeling of being cheated out of my childhood. I never was a child and I was very aware of it. It was very painful and I wanted to be a child. I felt that I didn't really live as a teenager. I was thrown into hard work with a lot of responsibilities, depressing work and at a very young age. When I started nursing school, it was 1951, January, and in September, I would have been sixteen years old. So it was a tender age to be exposed to this type of work. I became a full fledged nurse at sixteen. It was January of '52, I was not even seventeen years old yet and immediately the hard labor and taking care of very sick people and so I felt I never really lived.

And even after I was married, my husband became everything to me. My lover, and I wanted him to be my father and we were very, very close and I remember once the subject was brought up about a fairytale, he was telling me a fairytale and I never heard a fairytale in my life. I never knew what fairytales were. When I learned how to read, I told you I read

literature. So I was never a child and that is something that I think affected all my life.

EVELYN: How did you feel bringing up your own children, did you find yourself being over protective with them or to give them that what you didn't have?

NELLIE: I think I was, I had a lot of common sense basically and I feel I was a good mother, very good, not as protective as my children but not overly. Not overly.

EVELYN: Did you discuss --

NELLIE: But I felt all my life, I felt there was something missing because in my background that I didn't have, that limited me in some ways, there was something that I could have been more and I wasn't.

SANDRA: Can you name that?

NELLIE: Well, I always had that feeling that I should have been very well educated, that I had the abilities and I should have been a doctor, I had fantasies of being a doctor, of being a musician. I was very talented playing the piano. I still do. I felt I just was cheated and it was, still is a pain, pain inside my heart.

SANDRA: Well, you were.

EVELYN: That you never reached your potential, right?

NELLIE: Well, I wouldn't put it that way.



But I didn't have the opportunities that I should have had and I wasn't given, just the most painful thing is the childhood that was taken away. And throughout my life, always, you know, I felt that it was so hard not to have an uncle, not to have an aunt, not to to have anybody and when I met my husband and I knew we were getting married, that was my greatest joy to know that he has a mother and he has two brothers and a sister and I was looking forward so much to having a new family.

SANDRA: Did you discuss your childhood experiences with your husband?

NELLIE: Yes. He knew everything, most, not everything, not everything, but he knew most.

SANDRA: How about with your children as they were growing up?

NELLIE: They knew also, they knew. Maybe not in such a detail like I went through, but they knew a lot.

SANDRA: To what do you ascribe your mother's strength that carried her through that period in the Warsaw ghetto and afterwards going to Germany?

NELLIE: Just, just instinct to survive and to save your child. My mother was an extraordinary mother, dedicated and she would have given up her life to save me. There were instances where mothers would abandon their children but I always felt protected by my mother. She was very caring and very -- and I

think she had that need, that instinct to make me survive. Even though when we were in Germany and again and at the time of the news that my brother was killed, she tried to commit suicide.

SANDRA: She tried to commit suicide?

NELLIE: Yes, she did, in Germany, she says she doesn't want to live if my brother's is dead, she has no one to live for, who would take care of her, who would help her live and there's nobody in the world and I promised her that I would, that I would take care of her.

EVELYN: You were so small then?

NELLIE: I told her I would take care of you. And many times it was real hard later on in life when I had the conflict with my husband about my parents living with me and my mother was very dependant on me later on in life. She couldn't, she wouldn't want too live on her own. She wouldn't want to be by herself. She didn't speak English and she felt strange in this country and she wanted to be under my wings and she reminded me that I promised her to take care of her, yes, and I did, I did until the end when I couldn't any more.

SANDRA: Did she actually try to commit suicide?

NELLIE: She was completely crazed with pain and grief and she was going to drown and sometimes I would fight with her physically and I would cry and

would beg her, don't kill yourself.

EVELYN: But your husband became good friends with your parents when they lived here?

NELLIE: No, good friends, no. There was tension. He liked my father but he didn't like the situation that we were living together. He was very generous, he would give them anything, material things, he was protective but he didn't like the situation that we were living together. He was willing to provide for them everything, a house and nursing care, everything, and this was a very, very sore spot in our marriage. I could not bring myself to separate from my mother. I sometimes discussed it with them and I said that they would live in another house and I would come and they would have everything. My mother didn't want to hear about it. She said she cannot live on her own. She can't even answer the phone. And she didn't want to live by herself. She wanted to be with me. And so at one point I gave up already and my husband gave up too, but we paid the price for that. It was terrible conflict for many, many years in my life. I could not separate from my mother. I couldn't and it affected our marriage, it affected the children in many ways.

SANDRA: It was a terrible dilemma, you had given her a vow?

NELLIE: Yes, he knew that too, so we gave up at one point. He wouldn't, he was a very gentle

person and a very good character, extremely generous man. I guess he did the best he could and so did I. At one point he stopped caring, his life was in the office and my life was at home with my mother, my father and my children.

EVELYN: And your father, did you ever approach your father, would he have lived on his own?

NELLIE: Yes.

EVELYN: And taken care of your mother?

NELLIE: Yes, he wanted, she didn't want.

He wanted.

EVELYN: She wanted you really?

NELLIE: She wanted to be with me.

EVELYN: That's understandable.

NELLIE: She didn't want to leave me.

EVELYN: After all these years.

SANDRA: Did any of you ever have any differences in your religious point of view all these years later?

NELLIE: Never.

SANDRA: More religious, less religious?

NELLIE: No, never, we would never have a conflict like that, no. We were basically following tradition. My father would go to the synagogue and he knew how to pray by heart and he enjoyed that very much to be with other Jewish people and at home we would celebrate the holidays and the kids had the Jewish education. No, we never had a conflict from

that.

EVELYN: Your husband's parents, did they stay in Tripoli or did they come over to the States?

NELLIE: Oh no, no. His mother has been in this country from before I met my my husband, yes. She met an American man and she came to this country. His father died when he was a child.

SANDRA: Did you ever or your parents have, have any reparations from --

NELLIE: Yes, when they were in Israel, we received something, I don't know for what period, I think for a very short period. It was very little. I think maybe just a time when we were in Germany for two years.

EVELYN: From Germany?

NELLIE: Yeah, yeah.

EVELYN: Because the Polish did not nothing?

NELLIE: No, nothing. It was a very small amount of money. It wasn't very much.

SANDRA: Did you ever return to Poland?

NELLIE: Never. No, not never, since 1950. I have never been in Poland.

SANDRA: Do you have other thoughts or feelings you would like to add?

NELLIE: Well, I have such mixed feelings about my life. I have, my children wouldn't understand me, I'm sure they wouldn't. I wish many things were, would turn out differently. But whatever

I did in life I did the best I could.

SANDRA: I don't think anybody can say anything better than that.

NELLIE: I don't have anything else to say.

SANDRA: That's your message.

NELLIE: I did the best I could.

SANDRA: Thank you for doing this interview.

EVELYN: Thank you very much, Nellie.

(Brief recess)

SANDRA: Well, what it occurs to me that I really want to ask is whether you believe in God now or then or has your feeling changed at all?

NELLIE: Then I didn't know anything about God or religion, anything, I was just too young, I didn't have any background. All I know is I, during the war my mother would say how could there be a God, how could he witness all of this and not do something. Well, I didn't know anything about religion, about God for a very, very long time until maybe I came to Israel, until I was maybe in my late teens. I didn't really have any education or any opportunity to learn and I didn't, my mind wasn't too occupied with that, except when I was in school right after the war and then I was sort of pushed against the wall with all these questions that Jews killed Jesus and you're to blame and that was a very painful issue for me to deal with and I didn't know how to handle it. But later on, I guess I believe in God now. When I think back

about my life, I always get the feeling that something, a higher power was guiding us. It was not all a coincidence that, in this situation that we were, my mother and I, that there must have been a higher power protecting us and that was a plan for us to survive.

SANDRA: Do you have any thoughts or feelings about that situation that people call survivor guilt?

NELLIE: I don't know what you mean by that.

SANDRA: Well, the idea that those people that survived somehow had a strange feeling of almost guilt for living in the face of so many who died?

NELLIE: I didn't have that feeling. I don't think my mother did either. Even though she would cry a long time -- why did I live,, why did my son die, why did my son die. This, you know, about my brother, this is something she could never get out of, ever, and yes, maybe it was something she couldn't deal with but I never had these feelings.

EVELYN: That's why she cried, wasn't it, after your brother died, isn't that what you told us?

NELLIE: Yes, well I think I think she wanted to die at that time, she couldn't cope with the pain, it was so devastating and it was like the final straw, everything was lost and the only hope that she was living for is to go back and be with my brother and she had dreams that, you know, we would be a

family again and he would help her and support her and guide her and when that was taken away, she lost everything, there was nothing to live for any more and she felt helpless even to support me.

EVELYN: But when she said there was nothing to live for, didn't that make you feel very sad because after all, you were her child, she had to live for you?

NELLIE: Well, I was just afraid to be left alone. I was just afraid to lose my mother. I knew that I was so attached to her and I couldn't imagine not to have my mother and it was inconceivable and so I just had to cope with that fear not to lose my mother and I think it's something that stayed with me all my life. I always feared about her health and later on in later years, I would, in Israel, I would every time she had to go see the doctor, I would, I would travel for a couple of hours just to be with her, I felt so protective of her and especially after my education and nursing, I felt responsible for her health and to look after her and --

EVELYN: So your roles became completely reversed and you did for her in her old age what she did for you when you were a child?

NELLIE: Yes.

EVELYN: It was the same --

NELLIE: Right, I did everything for my mother. I, she, I helped her dress, I would sew her



dresses, I would cut her hair, when she couldn't take care of herself, I would do everything, I gave her baths.

EVELYN: You have been a wonderful daughter to her really, that must be a source of satisfaction to you.

NELLIE: Yes, I have, it's a painful spot that, to know that at one point I had to put her in the home, that I had to do that and she didn't want, she didn't want at the last moment and --

EVELYN: Did your father go with her in the home?

NELLIE: Oh, yes, yes. Together in the same room and it cost us a fortune to keep them there, and at times I feel that I didn't do enough for them.

SANDRA: Again, you did the best you could.

EVELYN: And they were together.

NELLIE: They were in the same room, they were together and it was devastating for my father after he lost my mother, even though for a while she became a burden on him because she started depending on him and he would have to do things for her that I used to do when she was living at home. But after her death and after the Shiva, a few months went by, it seemed that his life became hopeless, he felt there was no reason to live any more and he went into a deep depression and that was, I have never seen him depressed, this man was always cheerful and always

joking and always singing and was just full of life always.

EVELYN: How old was he?

NELLIE: When he died he was 85 but he was full of life always, always, and then he fell into this deep depression and he was saying he didn't want to live any more and he would repeat and repeat he didn't want to live any more and he wanted to come back home with me and I couldn't cope with that any more. I started establishing my independence, I knew I have to be independent, I have to be free, and I couldn't take him home with me and he became like a child, he was saying he would not cause any problems and you can cook, once a week is enough for me and I will take care of the house and I didn't want him back at home because I wanted to be free.

EVELYN: He probably willed himself to die?

NELLIE: Well, I don't think he died a natural death in the home for Jewish parents. He was so depressed and would talk to the doctor and nurses about it and he had a visit with a psychiatrist, nothing helped, anything; and then he was complaining of really being sick, that he cannot be on his own and he was living in the ambulatory section and he was asking to be put in the acute section in the nursing home and they wouldn't put him there, and one morning at 5:00 o'clock in the morning, I received a phone call that your father is dead and I just saw him the

night before, I knew he was depressed but he was still joking around with me. I said, and I screamed and I yelled what do you mean, I said how could he die. Well, she said we found him dead in the bathtub, he drowned himself.

SANDRA: He had drowned himself?

NELLIE: Yes. That's what we believe because he says he has to die, I will not live, I must die and they found him with his watch on and if he was -- yes, that was determined that it was a suicide, and that's very hard for me to carry that around too but just that whole period that I had to put them in the home, I didn't want to do that, I never wanted to do that. I was forced into it. It was maybe a last chance, the last attempt to save my marriage. I thought it would, but it didn't.

SANDRA: So you didn't really even have that benefit that your marriage was --

NELLIE: No.

SANDRA: But still you did the best you could under very, very difficult circumstances.

NELLIE: Yes, yes. I thought about dying myself many times during that period.

SANDRA: I guess your strength came out once again.

NELLIE: Yes.

SANDRA: How did you keep going with all those burdens?

NELLIE: The children, my older son was a great support. He always assumed the role like I did with my mother, he did with me, he was there for me always, he lived at home at the time. Then he was giving me moral support, love and encouragement and he was just, just wonderful.

SANDRA: Well, he must have learned it from you.

NELLIE: Yes, I'm very proud of both of my sons.

EVELYN: He comes to visit you?

NELLIE: Oh, yes, we talk on the phone too, ten times every day, we're very close, very close, yes. And he works with his father which makes me very happy and actually we're all close, all of us. I have a special bond with my husband. He's dedicated, he's a good father, he has a new live, a new wife, a new child. But I know that if, if I'm in need or pain I can come to him.

EVELYN: That is very comforting.

NELLIE: Yes, we never, we have never hated each other through all these things we went through, I never stopped loving him because he is a special human being.

EVELYN: I keep thinking how you met him, what a wonderful story, fell in love right away.

NELLIE: And I loved him, I still do, I always will.

SANDRA: Do you have any message for your children or anybody after all this?

NELLIE: I just have hope in my heart, I hope that they will find Jewish girls to marry, I hope very much, I don't want this to be the end of the link with the Jewish background, with all the things that I had to go through just because I was born Jewish. I think it's important. So I hope they find Jewish wives and I hope there will keep a link with the Jewish nation, the Jewish traditions. Always, I hope, I just hope for them, for health and happiness and I'm so grateful that they live in this country.

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