

Interview with ZDENKA LEVY  
Holocaust Oral History Project  
Date:3/25/90  
Place: San Francisco, CA  
Interviewer:  
Transcriber: Tami Newnham

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Q: WE ARE WITH THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA HOLOCAUST CENTER. WE HAVE MARCH 25th TODAY. WE ARE IN BERKELEY. I AM INTERVIEWING ZDENKA LEVY. GOOD AFTERNOON ZDENKA.

A: Good afternoon

Q: WHERE WERE YOU BORN AND WHAT YEAR WERE YOU BORN?

A: I was born in Zagrab, Yugoslavia, in September of 1925.

Q: I SEE, YOUR PARENTS LIVE THERE IN ZAGRAB?

A: My parents lived in Zagrab at the time of my birth although my mother came from Budapest, Hungary. My father was born in Yugoslavia and my maiden name was Zdenka Baum-B-A-U-M.

Q: THAT SOUNDS RATHER GERMAN.

A: Yes.

Q: SO WERE BOTH YOUR PARENTS JEWISH?

A: Both my parents were Jewish.

Q: I SEE. DID YOU HAVE ANY SISTERS OR BROTHERS?

A: I have one older brother named Freddie, Freddie Baum.

Q: DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL IN ZAGRAB?

A: Yes as a matter of fact when you asked me for this interview, it occurred to me very interesting point that the Jewish children went to Jewish school...

Q: IN ZAGRAB?

- A: ...elementary school. In Zagrab, after four years of elementary school we then joined the general population and went to regular junior high and go on to high school.
- Q: INTERESTING.
- A: And then we didn't... it wasn't strictly a Jewish oriented.
- Q: WERE THERE A LOT OF JEWISH CHILDREN IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?
- A: Yes we had a very large Jewish population in Yugoslavia and in Zagrab in particular.
- Q: DO YOU REMEMBER ENCOUNTERING ANY ANTI-SEMITISM AT THE TIME YOU WENT TO SCHOOL?
- A: No. I can say that I have personally never encountered anti-semitism.
- Q: WHAT DID YOUR FATHER DO?
- A: My father was owner of a factory. He was a small industrialist. And the fact that he owned the factory with one hundred or so workers producing metal furniture, baby carriages, baby bed, hospital beds, played a very important part in our later escape from Yugoslavia.
- Q: WERE YOUR PARENTS ORTHODOX IN ANY WAY?
- A: No. My parents were not Orthodox. I would call us conservative even though the one temple in Zagrab, Yugoslavia was an Orthodox temple.
- Q: were there a lot of JEWISH TEMPLES IN ZAGRAB?
- A: In Zagrab where I was born, there was only this one large temple which was later destroyed by the Germans. But I

remember as a child going to service and singing in the choir. And of course the women were separated from the men. They were upstairs and the men were downstairs. And we enjoyed the Jewish holidays although we were not strictly Orthodox. We did not keep a kosher home. And yet, I must say, the Jewish community sort of did stick to themselves. I had no Jewish friends in school but mainly my friends were all Jewish.

Q: SO YOUR PARENTS ASSOCIATED WITH WHAT YOU SAY MORE WITH OTHER JEWISH PEOPLE OR WERE THEY VERY INTEGRATED INTO..

A: We were not that integrated. We were integrated to some degree in the life of Yugoslavia but socially we were mainly in the Jewish community.

Q: SO HOW LONG DID YOU LIVE IN ZAGRAB THEN?

A: Well we lived very comfortable lives until 1941 when Germany invaded Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941 to be exact. First there was a bombardment of the city and then later the German troupes marched in . And I remember very incongruously the fact that when the Germans came in the first few weeks until they decided how they 're going to handle the occupation; we even housed German officers and German officers came to our house for meals.

Q: EXTRAORDINARY.

A: That was extraordinary. I'm trying to recall the past..

Q: YES, RIGHT.

A: ...and this came to my mind. And shortly after the

occupation, a month or two later, the decrees started to appear in newspapers. First the decree for the Jewish community for the Jews to appear at the certain gathering place to be given the yellow stars which we had to wear from then on on our clothing. A week later, another decree in the newspapers where all the children, Jewish children, had to leave school and not return no matter what grade they were in. We were thrown out of school. And the next decree, another week or two later, where all the Jews who lived in the certain parts of the city had to move to the northern part of the city into sort of a ghetto. And we had to leave within a few days, abandon our homes, take just enough furniture that would fit into small apartments and we went and lived in those apartments for the next few weeks.

Q: THAT WAS IN ZAGRAB?

A: In Zagrab. All in Zagrab.

Q: IN A SPECIAL NEIGHBORHOOD LIKE A GHETTO?

A: Like a ghetto. Not necessarily known but it was because all the Jews could not live beyond a certain street. Just about that certain street.

Q: DID IT EVER OCCUR TO YOUR PARENTS TO FLEE BEFORE THAT-  
TO LEAVE YUGOSLAVIA?

A: No. Even though German Jews in '39 and '40 started trick-  
ling into Yugoslavia. And I met some young women, tenn-  
agers, my age, who with their parents, came to Yugoslavia

to flee Hitler and told us what is happening and nobody believed at least in my circle of friends or my parents circle of friends that Germany would invade Yugoslavia or that anything could happen to us and so it never occurred to my father to give up his factory and flee.

Q: HOW MUCH DID YOU HEAR WHAT HAPPENED IN GERMANY AT THE TIME? POLAND. GERMANY. ALL THAT.

A: Being that you known teenagers in those years were not as mature I think aware of political situations that even though I remember asking my mother and father how much did you hear. We did not know of any atrocities. I don't remember hearing anything about Krestalnacht for instance. And so that the..the tragedy did not impress us enough for us to flee. Although there were some Jewish families..Jewish families in Zagrab who left for Palestine at that time.

Q: WOULD YOUR PARENTS , IF THEY HAD A CHANCE, WOULD THEY HAVE GONE TO PALESTINE? WERE THEY ZIONISTS DO YOU THINK?

A: My mother.. ya, both of them were Zionists. My mother more so than my father. But now I think my father was quite integrated into the life of Yugoslavia to leave for Palestine at that time. My mother was a very active member of WIZO, W-I-Z-O, Women's International Zionist Organization. We called it WIZO. And I remember as a child, as a young girl, I danced and performed in their programs for them. And, yes,

I attended , with my mother, parties and lectures on Isreal, on Palestine at that time, so that I know we were quite aware of Palestine. But no, we would not have gone to Palestine.

Q: DID YOU HAVE LARGE FAMILY, LIKE UNCLES, AUNTS, GRAND-MOTHERS?

A: We had large family. I had a grandfather who was in his seventies at that time on my father's side. My grandmother died still in 1936. My mother had brothers, sisters. I had cousins, both boys and girls. And until '41 our lives were very comfortable and pleasant. Lots of family life.

Q: YOU SAID YOUR MOTHER CAME FROM...

A: My mother was born in Hungary.

Q: IN HUNGARY, SO HER BROTHERS AND SISTERS WERE THEY ALL IN YUGOSLAVIA OR UH...

A: Everyone was in Yugoslavia because her parents came to Yugoslavia at the turn of the century and settled there.

Q: I SEE UH...SO LETS GET BACK TO WHERE YOU HAD TO LIVE, YOU HAD TO LIVE IN A SMALL APARTMENT?

A: Well, we were moved to that smaller apartment. Again it's dreadful to think of the fact that we were so naive that we, knowing something is going to happen, that perhaps the Germans are going to knock on our door and take us to labor camps, we would sleep with napsacks next to our beds, ready to go with the German soldiers when they knock on our doors, ready to go. And then a terrible

thing happen, the first, again a decree for all Jewish teenage boys to come to a gathering place on a certain day at the certain time. My cousins, my brother's friends, never my brother, my brother's friends. They all appeared that day at that gathering place...never to be heard of again. We thought they were going to a labor camp; they thought they were going to the labor camp. That's what the decree, the notice, said; all Jewish boys from this certain age are to appear this day at this particular place to be sent for a short period of time to a labor camp.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER IF IT OCCURRED TO ANY OF THESE YOUNG PEOPLE NOT TO FOLLOW THAT ORDER?

A: There were some...who then escaped, yes, there were some. But the majority did go...like lamb...like sheep. And then we only heard year later that they were very shortly after, they were transported to the town of (Jacobo), Yugoslavia. They were shot...very shortly after arriving there. I don't know exactly how many days.

Q: HOW DID YOU HEAR THAT?

A: Rumors. And it was documented that it really happened. And then one day not too long after that, a knock came on our door and... two German officers appeared and asked my father and myself and my mother to come with them. My brother, who was six years older, was an invalid. He had one wooden leg because he had an accident as a

youngster, a boy scout accident. He lost a leg. And so he had an artificial leg. And we think that maybe, maybe saved his life, and saved him from all these experiences the rest of us went through. And the German soldiers took us to this gathering place again. My father was a member of B'nai B'rith and the B'nai B'rith group was the first group of families that was gathered and deported. I remember being taken to this gathering place...sleeping on straw just one night... and the next morning miraculously my brought and one of my aunts came to this gathering place. I remember my aunt waving a sheet of paper. And I happen to be standing some place at the doorway and seeing them approach, my brother and my aunt, and this sheet of paper was a release form for us to be released from this gathering place, my father, my mother and myself. Why the workers in my father's factory petitioned for him to be released because they needed him for production of these hospital beds that were being made in (            ). And this saved us because the group of neighbors, people, never also returned. And we still did not flee.

Q: BUT THE FACTORY STILL BELONGED TO YOUR FATHER?

A: The factory, well he ran the factory, uh, I can not recall whether there was actually a takeover of the factory. I cannot recall that. But he was needed there...as the director. And this saved him...once, because three weeks later a knock came on the door again...I mean,

I can't believe that we were so foolish as to remain. He thought "Oh well, now that I was asked to come back to the factory and continue producing the metal furniture, nobody's going to touch me." So he stayed on until one night, as I say a few weeks later, the German soldiers came again and asked only for him to follow them.

Q: YOU WENT BACK TO YOUR OLD APARTMENT?

A: We went back to the old apartment...where my brother lived all along. And my father was gone, we found out the next day, desperately, when looking to find out where he was led to. And he was taken to the worst concentration camp in Yugoslavia, called(Yascenowitz.)

Q: (YASCENOWITZ? )

A: (Yascenowitz. ) Where very few people came back alive. And would you believe it that three weeks later my father was freed again from this ( Yascenowitz ). Eighty pounds lighter, with three frozen fingers, with a horrible look in his eyes because he saw his friends die around him. Most of the people never returned from Yascenowitz. They died of starvation; they died of cold; they died of sicknesses. It was the worst camp. they were not gassed. They just...they were shot and, or they died from exposure. And he came back. I remember nursing his frozen fingers which he lost at the last ( )of his fingers.

Q: WAS THIS CAMP RUN BY YUGOSLAVIAN PEOPLE OR GERMANS?

A: The camp was run by Yugoslavian people. A man called Antepovolich was put in charge of that part of Yugoslavia, of Croatia where I was born. And he actually, he's the one who signed those releases for us personally. But he ran that section of Yugoslavia. And he knew of these decrees where the Jews were taken away.

Q: BUT YOU NEVER KNEW HIM PERSONALLY?

A: No. I did not know him personally. My father did not know him personally. He ended up in America. He died some years ago in California.

Q: HE WAS NEVER BROUGHT TO TRIAL?

A: Never put to trial. And only then when my father came back from this horrible camp did they wake up to the reality and this is the time for us to flee. And only then were they able to find connections that will smuggle us out of that city towards the Italian border. And I remember going on a train to a village outside of the Italian border, northern Italy, near Trieste, and staying in that village until connections were made again with the Italian smugglers that will smuggle us into Italy.

Q: IT'S LIKE THE UNDERGROUND AND THE PARTISANS?

A: Exactly, yes, well not these were not Partisans. These were really opportunists who took advantage of that time and the situation and they knew they could make some money and...

Q: YEH- THE QUESTION OF MONEY, DID, WERE YOU ABLE TO TAKE

ANY MONEY OR VALUABLES WITH YOU?

A: Only, the only valuables was jewelry that my mother had. We could not take any money, nothing what we could carry on our backs or in our hands. And I believe only the jewelry saved us through those difficult times where my parents slowly sold what they had when we needed money to buy food.

Q: AND FOR BEING SMUGGLED YOUR SAID...

A: For being smuggled.

Q: THESE PEOPLE, THEY ALSO ASKED FOR MONEY?

A: They asked for money. So I supposed my parents turned fold bracelets or rings into money and payed with that for the false papers.

Q: HOW MANY OF YOU WERE THERE? YOUR FATHER, YOUR MOTHER, YOU?

A: Just the four of us.

Q: AND YOUR BROTHER, AND YOUR BROTHER MANAGED TO GO?

A: This time my brother went with us, managed to go with us. But the rest of our family perished. They were all taken to concentration camps in Germany. After that they did not take families to Yascenowitz or any camps in Yugoslavia, at least our family. I know that my mother's brother his...my mother's brother, my uncle, his wife, two daughters, my mother's sister with her husband and a daughter and other members of their family, and my seventy plus old grandfather perished, never to be heard of again either...one aunt remained...two aunts

remained, one who was waving that piece of paper the first time we were taken, and another aunt whose husband died in that camp where my father spent three horrible weeks. He died in front of him so we knew he was gone. This one aunt somehow escaped and joined the Partisans. And she was saved until after the war.

Q: WHAT AGE GROUP WAS SHE IN?

A: She was in the forties, in her forties. and the other aunt, again I will call her Aunt Shalota, who waived that sheet of paper, she was never taken...she was never touched. She was never deported. And she's still alive today at the age of ninetytwo in Zagrav, Yugoslavia, still alive. We don't know the reason for her not being, we think, perhaps, because...she was not listed as an active Jewess. She was married to a non-Jew to whom she was later divorced, but for some reason, maybe she was not on the list of the Germans. So that one aunt remained and my aunt, my other aunt who was member of the Partisans, she later died of natural causes. The rest of the family and my lovely, beautiful little cousin and, and my boy cousin, he died in that group of young people who had to be deported first.

Q: SO HOW MANY MEMBERS DO YOU THINK OF YOUR FAMILY PERISHED ALL TOGETHER?

A: Eleven. Eleven members of my family never found out where they were taken, when they died. But they were all

taken away. We never could find any contact after the war or during the war with them.

Q: YOU NEVER MET ANYBODY WHO HAD SEEN THEM IN ANY CAMP OR ANYTHING LIKE THIS?

A: No, no we have not.

Q: IT'S VERY TRAGIC.

A: So then we were actually very fortunate. By the time we came to the Italian border and my parents were able to get the false identification cards. They sent my brother and me first across the border...my parents did.

Q: YOUR PARENTS SENT YOU?

A: My parents sent my brother and myself first across the border. Perhaps it worked out better that way, smaller groups could be smuggled easier. And I remember putting on some peasant outfit. And the picture on the little passport for me looked entirely different than I did. And I think even the border guards were bribed for us to cross into Italy.

Q: NOW WHO DID ALL THIS FOR YOU? HOW DID...

A: This my parents strictly did for us.

Q: YES BUT HOW COULD THEY GET THE FALSE IDENTIFICATION?

A: From the smugglers who then went into big business.

Q: WENT INTO BUSINESS?

A: Right. They went into business.

Q: THEY WERE YUGOSLAVS?

A: Right. They were Yugoslavs. I don't know who they were.

I was still fourteen of fifteen years old, fourteen years old. I did not go into these details with my parents. And my brother and I got into Trieste, in Italy. And somehow we must have the address of the Jewish community because we went to the Jewish Community Center. And I remember the center being in a building and a large assembly hall. And apparently refugees from all over came there because they were sleeping on mattresses and straw and we slept one night there. But my parents gave us some money and my brother said let's find a room someplace. We don't want to sleep here in this community center. We have a little money; let's find a pension. And he was able to find a pension with a lady. And the Jewish community, I remember telling us be very careful because the authorities do check on pensions to see if there are some illegally entered refugees and we of course said, "Oh nothing is going to happen to us. We know how to hide." Well, I think we were in that pension three or four days and they found us.

Q: WHO IS THEY?

A: The Italian authorities. And took us and sent me to jail for twelve days and my brother to another jail. I went to the women's prison and my brother went to a man's prison. But we were able somehow to communicate from the prison. I remember being there twelve days.

Q: WHAT ABOUT YOUR PARENTS?

A: My parents were not in Trieste yet. But the Jewish community, to whom we gave the address of the pension where we stayed; worked on getting us out of the jail. and they did succeed because they came twelve days later to the prison; members of the Jewish community came. And got us out of prison and took us back to the Jewish community. And I remember arriving there and my brother also coming from his prison and our parents waiting for us there in the Jewish Community Center. That's how we were reunited.

Q: WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE WERE IN THAT PRISON? ONLY JEWISH PEOPLE?

A: Not at all. There was only one other Jewish lady there. I remember very well that the other women in the Jewish prisons were families of Partisans from Yugoslavia, Yugoslav Partisans. They shared the, my prison cell. There were six of us I believe in it. One was a mother of a Partisan; one was a wife of a Partisan; there was this other lady, a Jewish lady, who escaped Germany and I cannot recall other faces at this time and who they were. So I...but then...there were some criminal, criminals. I remember watching from the window and they were walking in the court yard there for daily walks. I don't remember being allowed out of the prison cell for twelve days.

Q: WERE YOU AFRAID, I MEAN AFTER ALL MUSSOLINI WAS...?

A: In power.

Q: IN POWER. AND YOU MUST HAVE KNOWN ALL THIS, THAT HE WAS ALLIED WITH HITLER?

A: We knew he was allied with Hitler but we must have known that the Italian people, the Italian government, actually took in the refugees from other countries.. And do you know that but for them we would not be alive. They saved our lives. And I ..uh..that Yugoslavian community in New York sent..uh..what would I call it, a letter of recognition signed by all of us who were saved, I don't know how many hundreds, to the Italian government. Now, recently, maybe five or six years ago, thanking them for saving our lives which they did. Even though after being freed from prison and reunited with my parents, the four of us, my parents, my brother, myself, were sent to the only concentration camp in Italy called Feremonte.

Q: WHERE WAS THAT?

A: That was in southern Italy, towards the boot.

Q: THAT WAS QUITE A WAYS AWAY.

A: All the way, all the way down, all the way down. I remember traveling a day and a half, stopping in Rome, with two Italian agents, police agents, and being sent to that camp in Feramonte, and spending eighteen months in that camp.

Q: WERE YOU IN A GROUP, BEING SENT DOWN THERE?

A: No just the four of us.

Q: JUST THE FOUR OF YOU.

A: But refugees are displaced people from different parts of Italy were sent to that concentration camp.

Q: AND THAT WAS RUN BY ITALIANS?

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A: That was run by Italians. Actually we had an Italian director of the camp. We had the Italian police which is called the (Carabenieri) standing guard but we ran ourselves. And the only connection with the Italian director or administration of the concentration camp was a daily role call. After we stood in line outside the barracks where we lived, in the morning and gave our names...Yes we are here... we were left alone the rest of the day or the rest of the time because I remember setting up schools; we had a synagogue; we had weddings; we had bar mitzvahs in that camp for a year and a half.

Q: CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE PHYSICAL LAYOUT OF THE CAMP A LITTLE BIT?

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A: Yes. Picture and American army fort with barracks but wire, barbed wire around it. There were barracks, maybe twenty, thirty barracks, and there were a few houses for the director and his family and the (Carabenieri). And maybe every twenty five feet there was a post for one of the soldiers on the corner or the center of the barbed wire. And that was all; there was a gate that was closed at most times. But if we were ill, we were allowed to be taken to the closest city and taken care of in the hospital.

Q: OUTSIDE OF THE CAMP?

A: Outside of the camp. We did not have much food. But again

with the jewelry, peasants knew that we were interned, and they came to the wire, the fence, and would sell us turkeys through the fence or vegetables or little fruit, and my parents and other people would buy it. And that's how we supplemented the food that we received from the Italian government.

Q: WERE THE WOMEN SEPARATED FROM THE MEN?

A: No, we each got little apartments in the barracks. They divided the barracks. I remember we had two bedrooms and a little kitchen which was, the kitchenette was maybe five feet, five by two, with a little..burning..what do you call..

Q: LIKE A STOVE WHERE YOU COOKED?

A: Not a stove.

Q: AN OVEN WHERE YOU KEPT WARM?

A: No, no a little stove yes, but a little portable.

Q: OH YES A WOOD BURNING?

A: No, It was electrical stove. Be that as it may, we did have a little kitchen and two bedrooms. And my brother and I slept in one room and my parents slept in another room, and so did all the other families. And outside the barracks were basins for washing laundry. We did hand laundry, water, cold water, not, we didn't have hot water; there was not hot water, and there wasn't much food.

Q: How many people were there?

A: At that camp, several thousand people, not only Jewish people.

Q: A LOT OF YUGOSLAV PEOPLE OF COURSE?

A: Quite a bit of Yugoslav people. But there was Russians; there were Poles; there were Germans, Czech. I remember the young men setting up soccer teams, playing soccer. I remember us as youngsters playing volleyball; I have pictures of that. As I say there were weddings held there were birth; there were death. And then the allied forces started bombarding Italy and started slowly winning the war and coming from Cicicly up the boot into Italy. And in fortythree they freed us from the camp.

Q: SO YOU WERE THERE TWO YEAR ALMOST?

467 A: Almost two years. They actually came into the camp and we were free. We saw the Germans evacuating that area and we were free. The allied forces, mainly British forces, opened the door, sent in trucks, and moved us all into the city of (Tarento and Bari) a little north of that concentration camp. And they gave us food and they gave us means of surviving another few months. By that time it was nineteen-fortyfour.

Q: WAS THAT THE ONLY CONCENTRATION CAMP IN ITALY THAT YOU KNOW OF?

463 A: That I am aware of. Because most of the other Jewish people who saved their lives in Italy were put into liberal confinement they called it (confino libero) which means they were placed in little villages. And they could live there as long as they also reported everyday to a certain..

Q: ALMOST LIKE HOUSE ARREST.

- A: Almost like house arrest, but they were free to move around in those villages. And many of my friends, and my husband, were spending their time during the war thus in little villages in Italy.
- Q: IT CERTAINLY IS RECEIVED VERY LITTLE PUBLICITY. ONE DID NOT READ MUCH ABOUT ITALIAN CAMPS OR ANYTHING.
- A: That's true.
- Q: WHEN YOU WERE TAKEN FROM YUGOSLAVIA FROM THE BORDER TO THAT CAMP, HOW DID THEY TAKE YOU BY TRAIN OR TRUCK OR..
- A: From Trieste?
- Q: FROM TRIESTE, YES.
- A: They took us by train. We stopped over night or maybe not<sup>even</sup> over night in Rome I remember. And two agents from the Italian government took down to that camp by train, treated us very politely, very nicely. I suppose if we had been adventurous, we could have escaped at one of the stations and ran away. But we were not, it wasn't in us to..
- Q: IT DIDN'T OCCUR TO YOU?
- A: No. Unfortunately. And yet this is how we saved our lives.
- Q: AND DURING THAT TIME YOU WERE A TEENAGER THEN, RIGHT?
- A: Yes.
- Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY SCHOOLING AT ALL?
- A: As a matter of fact, I remember in that concentration camp, my mother of course wanted me to continue with my schooling, and among the people interned was an Italian

professor, and he gave me daily lessons in Italian, geography, I think just these two subjects. I'm trying to remember if he taught me anything else. I believe not.

Q: ARITHMETIC?

A: Not arithmetic would not have been my favorite subject.

Q: YOUR MOTHER-TONGUE WAS SERBO-CROATIAN?

A: Serbo-Croatian. And yet my first language was German because I had a nanny when I was two years old, my father being in the factory; my mother worked in the retail store of our factory. She sold baby carriages and those metal beds and so on. So she did not have time to be at home and she hired a nanny for me. And that nanny, who is still alive, spoke to me in German first so that I would become bi-lingual. And I did become bilingual.

Q: SO YOU STARTED OFF WITH GERMAN. AT HOME, TO YOUR PARENTS, HOW YOU SPEAK?

A: We spoke Serbo-Croatian.

Q: RIGHT. THEN ITALIAN OF COURSE.

A: And then Italian. And then I learned Italian.

Q: DID YOU EVER SPEAK YIDDISH? WAS THAT AT ALL DONE THERE?

A: No. We were in the part of Yugoslavia, where I was living, nobody that I knew spoke Yiddish. There were not enough Jews from Poland or Russia came who would teach us or, in fact, I did not hear Yiddish until I came to the United States. And I was thrilled to realize that I

could understand some of it being that I knew some German. But that was my first acquaintance with the Yiddish language, in this country, not in Europe. They spoke, the parents spoke other languages of course. My mother spoke Hungarian and now my father's sister lived in Vienna and she married in Vienna, and my cousin was from Vienna. But they parished too. But Yiddish was not spoken.

Q: SO LET'S GET BACK TO FREEDOM WHEN THE BRITISH CAME.

A: The British came. But I have to go back just a few months to camp because in the camp many of us somehow formed our futures and met our future husbands. My brother dated a young lady from Belgrade, Yugoslavia, who has her own story to tell. And he later married her. And I met this gentleman in the camp who then became my husband, my first husband. And he was a Russian Jew who escaped from Russia with his family, first to Yugoslavia and then his family remained; and he escaped to Italy; and he was brought to that camp too. He was a doctor. His name was Dr. Abraham (Ruchwager). WE married shortly after being freed by the British in (Bari) Italy we married. I remember sending invitations to the Italian officers and some of them attended our wedding.

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Q: WHO MARRIED YOU?

A: One of the rabbis who was in the group of refugees married us. We had a beautiful wedding for those

circumstances. I remember borrowing a white dress from one friend and a veil from another friend and white stockings from a third person. I had not much, and so it worked out fine. And my husband borrowed a hat from someone and a dark suit. And the peasants in the village brought me flowers for my bouquet. And the wedding was attended by the villagers and all the refugees that were in our group. And my future sister-in-law set up the reception. And it was a lovely little wedding.

Q: THAT WAS WHAT YEAR?

A: That was in nineteen-fortyfour. In June.

Q: YOUR WERE WHAT TWENTY YEARS OLD?

A: No I was eighteen. In nineteen-fortyfour. And then, interestingly enough we heard the United States will permit a thousand displaced people to come to the United States - we should put ourselves on the list. And we did put ourselves on the list and said with our fingers crossed that perhaps we could enter into the United States. And we were on the list of a thousand refugees. And I was just thinking that I omitted saying that my husband, who was a physician, worked for the British forces those few months, in Italy, as a physician. I remember helping and I suddenly became a nurse. I remember inoculating children against, I think either chicken poxs or TB or..

Q: WHOOPING COUGH.

- A: ...whooping cough. Lines and lines of children and this was my beginning of my training in the medical profession where I stayed to this day. So this happened just before we found out we would be permitted to go to the United States.
- Q: DID YOU STILL HAVE YOUR IDENTIFICATION PAPERS? YOUR ORIGINAL ONES OR YOUR FORGED ONES? WHAT DID YOU HAVE?
- A: The forged ones were discarded. But I think the foresight of my mother- she was able to take most of our identification papers from yugoslavia, that she packed, like my birth certificate and her's and my brother's birth certificate and some school pertinent papers. My mother saved those.
- Q: IT'S INTERESTING YOU SHOULD TELL ME ABOUT YOUR MOTHER. I'VE NOTICED SO MANY TIMES THAT CHILDREN ALWAYS REMEMBER THE MOTHER BEING THE DRIVING FORCE.
- A: My mother, in our family, was definitely the driving force.
- Q: THAT'S INTERESTING. I'VE HEARD THAT SO MANY TIMES.
- A: She lived to be eighty two and until the last day of her life she was an amazing woman, amazing woman, strong, resourceful, dedicated, reliable, fantastic person.
- Q: MAYBE WE OUR THE STRONGER SEX, WHO KNOWS. BUT IT'S SO INTERESTING I'VE NOTICED THAT ALL THE WOMEN WERE THE ONES WHO..VERY INTERESTING..
- A: Very often, very often, yes.
- Q: SO YOU MANAGED TO GET ON THE LIST?

A: We managed to get on the list. Instead of a thousand people, there were nine hundred and eightytwo. I don't know why. The few that were admitted, I don't know why. And we were again sent to a gathering place, only this time with the prospect of a bright future. However, we had to sign a paper stating that at the end of the war we'll return back to Europe. President Roosevelt made a token gesture and we could come to the United States. We did not know what will happen once we get to the United States. But with the knowledge we are to return back to Europe. We didn't know where. We didn't know where to because our homes were taken, our livelihood was taken. We were sent to Naples. In Naples we boarded boat that was part of a...it was a medical ship returning wounded soldiers.

Q: BY WHOM? UNITED STATES?

A: United States. Henry Gibbons was the name of the boat. It was in a convoy actually there were several boats. And we were given part of the boat. I was of course now a doctor's wife. And there were four other doctors with their wives. But somehow the captain of the boat designated my husband to the ship's doctor for the refugees. And we were given a cabin, my husband and I, were given a cabin where everybody else had to sleep in..

Q: BUNKS.

A: Community bunks. It wasn't a very pleasant trip to say the least because we were..the Germans tried to bombard

the boat.

Q: YOU MUST HAVE GONE IN CONVOY THOUGH?

A: We did go in a convoy. But I remember one night very distinctly having to hide and not only to hide we blacked out the boat and we went under to the lowest level of the boat in case of torpedoes or bombs. But fortunately we escaped the bombs. And nothing happened. And we were on the sea about fourteen, fifteen days and then we came to New York.

Q: THAT WAS NOW IN NINETEEN..

A: We are still in August of nineteen forty~~four~~. And we arrived in New York on the fourth of August of nineteen forty-four. I just remembered that I forgot to bring; there's a Life magazine that I just discovered not too long ago where our story was photographed because the reporters were waiting at the docks and took pictures of us. And accompanied us to where ever we were going to be shipped to. We did not know where we are going.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY RELATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES?

A: No

Q: THAT'S VERY UNUSUAL.

A: Very unusual because most of the other people on the boat, many of them, many of them, not most, had relatives and friends. We had no one. We got off the boat and the ( hius ) took over. The ( hius ) had a train waiting for us, some place in either New Jersey or New York--I don't recall that any more. And we were put on

the train and we were taken over night to up state New York to an army camp, called Oswego and the camp was called fort Ontario.

BREAK

Q: SO THERE WERE HOW MANY ON THAT BOAT?

A: There were nine-hundred-eighty-two of us on the boat. My husband, being a physician, was put in charge in case anybody needed help. And again I could help. And we were given the ship's clinic to see patients or anybody that needed help. But we were also very fortunate to have a cabin to ourselves. It wasn't the most comfortable ride. We were all very crowded. The food was fair but the sweet thing was that the second part of the boat that was occupied by the American wounded--they would come to the edge of their-where-ever they could of their deck. And they would wave to us and throw candy and chocolates to the children. And they were adorable; they were sweet. I remember how pleasant they were. And so somehow the time passed. And we arrived in New York. And the reporters were waiting at the dock. Then the ( hius ) took over and put us on train. And we were taken to camp in northern New York state; the city was called Oswego, the town. And the camp was called Fort Ontario. It was an army camp which was emptied for the purpose of placing these nine-hundred-eighty-two refugees into. It was called the Fort Ontario Refugee Shelter. With wire around it.

We were not permitted to go out. We were behind the wirre fence.

Q: ACTUALLY YOU WERE LEGALLY ENEMY ALIENS IN A WAY?

A: We were in limbo there. We were here for the duration of the war. And somehow we again made the best of it. We had a director of the camp called Smart, Mr. Smart. He ran the camp. We had a chief physician in the hospital, there was a hospital where all the refugee doctors were now permitted to work. We were given eighteen dollars a month salary those who worked. The doctors were getting eighteen dollars a month and the chef in the kitchen was getting eighteen dollars a month and I happen to be a gym teacher to the children; I was getting eighteen dollars a month. And the young people could not go to school. But we governed ourselves again. We ran the camp so to speak. Our volunteers were cooks for the nine-hundred and odd people. And again we had marriages. And youngsters had parties. I was a married lady that time, right, I worked in the hospital with my husband. My mother was a cook. My father was on the board of directors. Our people had their own board of directors. They decided how the camp would be run within..

Q: GOVERNED.

A: Governed. In fact two books was written about us, one of which I have here.

Q: WHO IS RUTH GRUBER?

A: Ruth Gruber is a journalist who, during the Roosevelt administration, was a secretary to (Icas ). She was the..I called her..she was a social worker..we called her social worker..she came and accompanied us on that boat from Naples to America.

Q: SHE WAS AN AMERICAN?

A: She was an American. She was sent by the United States government to accompany the refugees. She then wrote our story. And another lady wrote another book. She made it her thesis. Her name is Shirley Lowenstein. And the book is called Token Refuge. So there are two books written about this group of refugees who were in this refugee shelter in up state New York. And a film was made about us called "Safe Haven". And this film is shown once a year during the Holocaust week. The film you can see once a year. It's an hour long, very interesting film with some members of that group being interviewed, among them my brother, because my brother spoke quite a fluent English at the time of our arrival.

Q: I MEANT TO ASK YOU THAT BEFORE.

A: And he was the camp interpreter. He was the assistant to the American director. In fact Mrs. Roosevelt came to visit our camp. She came to visit our camp and she was instrumental in getting the children to go to school in the near by city and getting the young people go to college in the near by city, town of Oswego the state

teacher's college they could attend, thanks to Mrs. Roosevelt.

Q: HOW WAS YOUR ENGLISH WHEN YOU ARRIVED?

A: My English was passable but the (hus ) sent English teachers into the camp and we were taking daily lessons in the evening in English. This was the beginning of my intensive English learning.

Q: HOW DID YOUR HEALTH HOLD OUR DURING ALL THAT TIME AND YOUR PARENTS, HOW DID THEY FEEL?

A: Well, my father started failing. He started failing soon after that release from that horrible camp. The rest of our health.. my family fortunately.. my mother lived to to be eighty-two, in good health, hardworking. My brother was fine. I was well. My husband was well. there were some people who not quite well in the camp and we had one or two deaths there. But on the whole as I say if somebody was seriously ill, he was sent outside of the camp to the nearby city of Syracuse, New York to the hospital and taken care of there. We were handled quite well in the camp but we did not know what our future was. In fact we were becoming quite desperate. In nineteen-forty-five the war ended. And we knew we had no place to go. So the Jewish community outside petitioned President Truman at that time for this group of refugees to remain in this country. Fortunately, Congress passed a bill and we permitted to remain in this country. We were sent outside of the camp by buses. We were taken over

the Niagra into Canada to sign some papers and re-enter the United States as legal..

Q: FOR LEGAL RE-ENTRY.

A: For legal re-entry. From that day on it counted toward our naturalization.

Q: YOU FILED FIRST PAPERS?

A: That's right; we filed first papers. This is how then we became legal..

Q: IMMIGRANTS.

A: Immigrants, legal immigrants, thank you.

Q: AND YOU WERE ALWAYS TOGETHER THOUGH, YOUR FATHER, MOTHER..

A: We were always together, my brother, my husband and I.

Q: SO WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOU LEGALLY ENTERED THE UNITED STATES?

670 A: Interestingly enough, again (hias ) came and interviewed most of us and asked where we wanted to go. And many people had relatives or friends and they knew where they would go. While we were still in camp, and a list of our names were printed in various American newspapers, many Americans started writing to us. Many American people started sending clothes, donations of clothes, which we were very grateful for and used because we had nothing by that time. My married name was (R )  
 276 We received a letter from Dr. Michael (R ) from Newark, New Jersey. He was an optometrist, and said, "Are we related." And we answered, "No, we are not related."

He answers, "I don't care if we are not related; I'm coming to visit you." He and his wife came to visit us. And he was instrumental in getting a job for my husband after the camp, the first job in the hospital. And so it happens that I separated from my parents, went to New York City. I happened to have gone with my husband to Newark, New Jersey where my husband got this first job, in the hospital, as a resident, very small salary. Soon after I had a baby girl. And then we moved on. My husband was sent to a larger hospital. And we moved to Maryland. And my husband, who was a surgeon by specialty, specialized in surgery in Europe, would have had to go back to school for six years to get specialty in surgery which we could not afford at that time, to wait six years to earn some money, but he could work as a psychiatrist in a mental institution. And so we took a job in the mental institution in Maryland where we lived for seven years, where our son was born. After that we moved to Washington D.C. where my husband worked in one of the largest government mental institutions; had his private practice; my children went to school. And that was that part of our lives.

Q: DID YOU CONTINUE WITH YOUR NURSING?

A: I continued, not while we were in Maryland and the children were small, but yes, when he had the private practice, I was the secretary at that time. My husband's family

settled in.. escaped from Yugoslavia to Israel, most of his family. His parents died of natural causes. Two brothers and two sisters went to Israel, and we corresponded with them. And my husband's heart was set to live in Israel and one day save enough money to go and move to Israel. And we started visiting his family and we would go every couple of years to Israel. And his heart was there. Then he became quite ill with a heart condition. He had to stop working. He said now it's time for us to go and see if we want to live in Israel. We did go for one year. We closed our house. We happened to have bought a house in nineteen-sixty, and lived in that house for six years, And then in nineteen-sixty-six, we took our children, sent them to university in Israel. My daughter went to Hebrew University for a year. My son was finishing high school in an American school in Israel. And my husband and I were trying to find a way to resettle and go to Israel. And we lived there for a year. In the meantime, my daughter in Israel met a young man who then she latter married. She was to return to the United States. My son finished high school in Israel.

End Tape 1, Side 1

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

A: Well, and he was to return to the United States, and I was very torn. How am I going to live in Israel and not have my children here? But what happened is that my daughter got married in the United States, so we left Israel to attend the wedding and perhaps sell the house and return to Israel. So we attended the wedding but three weeks after the wedding my husband died of a heart attack. And I took his body to Israel and buried him there.

Q: HOW OLD WAS HE?

A: Fifty-five.

Q: TOO YOUNG.

A: Yes. So that part of my life was over then. My daughter was married by that time already for several weeks. My was eighteen and he was of course quite shaken up by the death of his father. He did not know what to do. He was a brilliant student but he left the university and he went to Israel. He thought maybe that's where he should be. He studied there for awhile and he taught for awhile. In fact, he came..no that didn't happen then. He taught for awhile and then he returned and went back to college in the United States.

Q: YOUR CHILDREN WERE CITIZENS OF WHAT COUNTRY?

A: They were American citizens. They were both born in the United States.

Q: DID YOU EVER TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN WHEN THEY WERE SMALLER...DID THEY ASK YOU WHAT YOUR PAST WAS LIKE?

A: We told them the story I'm telling you now, this was the story that I was telling them always. We were very close with the grandma and grandpa while my father was still alive. All our family and friends, we always openly talked about our experiences so that they are quite aware of what our lives and what happened to us. In fact, my son made a study of the Holocaust, had an immense library. He lived and worked at Berkeley later on my son. And so he is quite versed in Holocaust history.

Q: DID YOU HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT YOUR CHILDREN EVER FELT DIFFERENT FROM OTHER CHILDREN WHEN THEY WENT TO SCHOOL?

A: No, they did not even though their parents had this background. They did not feel different because we somehow managed to integrate into the American lives. And yet preserve our background and history. And we thought for some reason they'll be richer for it.

Q: I THINK YOU'RE QUITE RIGHT. YOU'VE SEEM TO HAVE DONE THE RIGHT THING IN THAT CASE. SO YOU STAYED...YOU WENT BACK TO ISRAEL DID YOU SAY, AT THE TIME?

A: My husband died and I buried him in Israel and I came back alone. And tried to continue with my life. Soon later I found a job again in the doctor's office and I started working as a...I managed a doctor's office.

Q: ON THE EAST COAST?

A: On the east coast, in Washington D.C.

Q: HOW DID YOU COME OUT HERE?

A: My daughter settled with her husband in San Francisco. My son was going to Berkeley in San Francisco. After awhile, after visiting my grandsons twice a year and yearning for them, I thought it's time that I move here. But I did remarry shortly after..

Q: COMING HERE?

A: No I remarried still on the east coast and then came to the west coast because my husband also has two children who live in this part of the country. And the obvious place for us to be was near our children. But the wonderful thing is that I married the man who was on that boat coming from Italy to America.

Q: SO YOU ACTUALLY HAD KNOWN HIM?

A: Not really. He was a young man in that group. I was a married woman. I did not know everybody on the boat. But he knew me because he was a patient of my husband's and he was ill in the hospital, so he remembers I was a nurse in the clinic in the hospital. And he definitely remembered my first husband who was his doctor. He married after we were freed from the camp in Oswego. He went to Cleveland, Ohio where he studied, and married and had a family, but he got a divorce. He heard of me that I was a widow, looked me up and somehow then the second part of my life.

Q: VERY ROMANTIC STORY.

- A: Again, our fortune is that we have this similar background so that it makes this so much more wonderful association. And so now we have four children between the two of us and two grandsons with one child on the way by my husband's daughter. And so we are very fortunate. But I'm very sad because my mother died in the meantime and my brother just died not to long ago.
- Q: HOW OLD WAS YOUR BROTHER?
- A: My brother was sixty-nine. And he made a wonderful career with his life, wonderful career. He became a business man. But he made a... had a wonderful life, family, children. It's a big loss for me.
- Q: IN A WAY YOU WERE VERY FORTUNATE TO HAVE HIM WITH YOU ALL THESE YEARS.
- A: Yes, yes and my mother up to ten or so years ago. We were in close touch. So compared to many other stories, as I told you before, ours is not so terribly tragic, because we are here today.
- Q: YOU CANNOT COMPARE. EVERYBODY HAS HIS OR HER OWN STORIES. I MEAN, IT'S A STORY RIGHT? YOU WENT THROUGH SO MUCH. IT'S A MIRACLE THAT YOU CAME THROUGH. YOU MUST OF HAD A REAL SPECIAL STAR WATCHING OVER YOU.
- A: Yes I always feel that way. As many other people told probably told you, there was a period of time shortly after the war when the atrocities became known where I personally would ask myself; how come that I was that

lucky to be alive? Why was I spared? To this day I don't know what to attribute it to.

Q: DO YOU HAVE EVER ANY GUILT FEELINGS ABOUT THAT?

A: I did. I certainly did. Not anymore. I somehow accepted this. But there was a period of time when I couldn't understand why I was left alive. And so many of my friends and family perished.

Q: WELL, IT CERTAINLY WAS A VERY INTERESTING STORY AND IF ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD TO THIS? YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO TELL US, ANY ADVICE TO GIVE TO PEOPLE FOR THE FUTURE?

A: I think that we should not take our freedoms for granted. I just recently told someone how very, very fortunate we are to live in this country. There may be things we don't agree with, the government and the administration, but to always be wary of the fact that history could repeat itself. I am very worried about it. I'm not a very optimistic person by nature and I'm very often frightened that the masses of people could be easily influenced again if a personality such as Hitler would come on the scene and could influence a population. Even with the possible re-unification of Germany, I'm quite frightened of what may happen. And I believe there is latent anti-semitism everywhere, everywhere.

Q: DO YOU FEEL CLOSER TO JUDAISM NOW THAN WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER?

A: I've always felt very close to Judaism. I always felt. I left out the fact that I was president of Haddasa for many years, that I went to Israel twelve times, twelve times. I worked in a kibbutz. My heart is in Israel. Unfortunately the last decade we were not able to visit Israel for one reason or another, hoping to go this year again. Perhaps as a child of ten or twelve, I was not as aware. We did not as I said earlier, go to Palestine. Although the JNF, the blue box, was always there in my home. And every Shabbat we were putting money in the little blue box. And I recall, possibly as a little child of four, dropping pennies into the box. So we were quite aware of Palestine. And I attended, as a child, many functions about Palestine. And I know my parents supported and sent money and what they could. So that I was aware of the Jewish side in us, the Zionist side in us. Perhaps I have become a stronger Zionist, but the Jewish awareness was always there.

Q: YOU ALWAYS BELIEVED IN GOD?

A: I believe in the supreme being.

Q: HAS THAT EVER CHANGED WHILE YOU WERE IN DANGER, WHILE YOU WENT THROUGH ALL THIS?

A: Yes, in some desperate moments I believe there was no God who is watching over us. How can anybody let this happen; How can this be happening? What frightens me

very often and what upsets me very often is the stories rather the occasional..how would I put it.. the fact that there are some people who would propagate that there was no such thing as the Holocaust. And then there would be people who would believe maybe that is true are foolish enough to go along with that. So that is why I'm...my advice to the future generations is to preserve the Jewishness. And our culture is so rich in history and in deeds that we should be proud to be Jews. We have never hidden that we are Jews. And I remember when we had to wear the Star of David on our clothing, we paraded proudly there. And it was sad to see our friends crossing the street, but I think they were more embarrassed than we were, wearing the Stars of David.

Q: IT NEVER OCCURRED TO YOU TO HIDE IT?

A: Never. Never. Never. I was looking for a picture at home, but I could not find it, but I know I have a picture we took, the family, the four of us, with the Star of David.

Q: YOU STILL HAVE THE STAR?

A: I do not have the star. I know some people have saved it. We somehow...I don't know what happened to it.

Q: WELL, YOU CAN'T SAVE EVERYTHING.

A: No. We did not.

Q: ZDENKA, THAT WAS A PLEASURE TALKING TO YOU, REALLY.

A: I appreciate being asked.

Q: AND I'M REALLY HAPPY I MET YOU.

A: So am I. Thank you very, very much.

Q: THANK YOU.

