

Interview with MARY ROUBEN

Holocaust Oral History Project

Date: Place: San Francisco, CA

Interviewer:

Transcriber: Gwenn Jones

Good afternoon, I am Alice Hamburg. I am here at Temple Beth Jacob to interview Mary Rouben who comes from Solonika. I am very privileged, I think, to be able to talk to Mary, to you, and to tell your story which I'm sure is a very interesting one. This is Tuesday, December 5. As I said before, this is Temple Beth Jacob and we are starting our interview. Beth Jacob is in Oakland.

Q. MARY, WOULD YOU TELL ME WHERE YOU WERE BORN?

A. I was born in Solonika in 1917 and I grew up there. I went to school, as a matter of fact I went to an Italian school because my parents were very friendly. And at this time it wasn't any restriction from the government. They ask the kids to go to a Greek school, but after they make a law and during time, I graduate high school. We were a family of five boys and myself, six.

Q. SO YOU WERE THE ONLY GIRL?

A. The only girl, yea.

Q. I WOULD LIKE TO GO BACK AND ASK YOU TO TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT SOLONIKA BECAUSE I UNDERSTAND THAT IT USED TO BELONG TO TURKEY.

A. This was the time of my parents. When I was born, already it was Greek.

Q. THAT WAS ABOUT WHAT YEAR, DO YOU RECALL?

A. The Greeks, they came in 1912.

Q. AND UP UNTIL THAT TIME IT WAS PART OF THE TURKISH EMPIRE RIGHT?

A. The Turkish Empire, yea. The Greek, they have a very nice life, with the Greek. Like they were their own city. But after, when the Greek came, they start to put different laws. Like the kids, they had to go to Greek school, the elementary. There they use, the Greek, they were so strong, Saturday many of them they didn't work.

Q. REALLY?

A. No. This, my father was telling me because I didn't see this. But after when the Greek came, they start to oblige to open on Saturday. And most of the Jewish left for Israel.

Q. IS THAT SO?

A. Yea.

Q. TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY THERE.

A. The Jewish community was very good. I mean just a nice organization and strong and everything. They were free in everything. We have like a, schools and it was also an orphanage for the children. It was very good jewish organization. Like Montinot la Vioni. It was a Hebrew organization taking care. And they were hospital. It was the hospital Hirsch, the family.

Q. IT WAS NAMED AFTER THAT?

A. Yea, the hospital Hirsch, it was white for the Jewish everything. And still the building is up there and I think the Greek took it after the German, after everything.

Q. WERE THE TURKS THEN, FROM YOUR RECOLLECTION OR FROM WHAT YOUR FAMILY TOLD YOU, OFFERED FREER CONDITIONS, THERE WAS MORE FREEDOM FOR THE JEWS, UNDER THE TURKS?

A. Absolutely yea.

Q. [Question from another interviewer.] WHAT WAS IT LIKE FOR YOU WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP THERE, WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE BEFORE THE WAR?

A. It was Ok. We were going with the *OSP* but it was anti-semitic.

Q. THERE WAS ANTI-SEMITISM?

A. Yea.

Q. I'D LIKE TO GO BACK TO YOUR FAMILY AGAIN, YOU STARTED TELLING US THAT YOU HAD FIVE BROTHERS?

A. Yes.

Q. WERE YOU THE YOUNGEST, OR WHERE WERE YOU?

A. No, I was in the middle.

Q. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO TELL US ABOUT YOUR EARLY LIFE BEFORE THE GERMANS CAME OR EVEN BEFORE THE THREAT?

A. When I recall, in 1917, it was a war with the English and they had a big fire in Solonika. I don't know if you know about that. But it's in the history because, I'll tell you. . .

Q. WAS THAT PART OF WORLD WAR I YOU ARE TELLING US ABOUT?

A. Yea, maybe the end.

Q. TOWARD THE END.

A. Because at this time, like I said, if you ask me for my birthday, I don't know when I was born. I'll tell you something to laugh. I was going to get married and they ask me on the birth certificate on the city of hall, I didn't know.

Q. WHAT WAS THAT, THE CITY OF....

A. The city hall in Greece.

Q. OH YES, YES.

A. Where to have our license. And I ask my father where I was born, when? He started to figure out, he says in 1917 you were six month old. It was the holidays, it always is in March. It was the Saturday before

Q. THAT'S WHEN YOU WERE BORN?

A. He figured out that the same year, we were then in 1941 I got married, it was March the 14th. But it wouldn't be the date, but because this year, it was March the 14th. He says, Ok let's put March the 14th, 1917.

Q. IN OTHER WORDS THEY DIDN'T HAVE TO REGISTER AT BIRTH AS WE DO HERE?

A. No, no. After the Greek government, everything was more stable. The Greek, they were there in 1917 but it was the big fire and the whole city of Solonika was burned and everybody start to move through the different...

Q. THEY MOVED AWAY FROM SOLONIKA?

A. Most of it were concentrated in the downtown of Solonika. But after the fire, people start to move in the farms. Like here what used to be the farm they built...

Q. YES, SUBURBS.

A. Suburbs, right the suburbs. Then we move over there.

Q. WAS YOUR FATHER IN BUSINESS?

A. Yes he was in business.

Q. WHAT KIND OF BUSINESS?

A. It was a family business from his father. It was like a factory of sweet, candy

factory. It's like, I remember now, like we see here candies, Sees candies with the picture of the lady, it was my grandfather's picture on the boxes. And I had a box, always keep it with me 'til the German came and they took the whole thing. Always we were keeping a box for 109 because he was a strong man, I mean big business with the Turk. You know, everything was his. After my father continue but with the Greek, there wasn't so much of, too many restrictions.

Q. IT WASN'T SO EASY FOR THE JEWS? THEN DID YOUR FATHER GO INTO A DIFFERENT LINE OF BUSINESS THEN?

A. No, no.

Q. HE REMAINED. WHEN DID YOU GET THE FIRST INKLING OF A THREAT TO YOU AND THE JEWS, GENERALLY?

A. No, we didn't have any threat. It was the World War II. Everybody was in war and my three brothers went to the Greek army to serve the war at the time. It was the war with the Italian in 1940, 1941. And that's when the Germans came, they defeat the Greek and the Italian and they come in Greece and they start. But in 1941 still we didn't have any threat but we were feeling something, it was because the Germans were organizing things.

Q. WAS THERE ANY RESISTANCE ON THE PART OF THE GREEKS TO TRY TO DEFEND THEIR JEWISH LEADERS?

A. No.

Q. NOTHING LIKE THAT?

A. No. No. The only thing the Greek, they were very 121 to rebelling against the German, they were going to the gorillas' war. One of my brother went with them.

Q. HE WAS IN THE UNDERGROUND?

A. Yes, one of my brother, he says I don't go with the German, I'm going to fight. He left ¹³³ He was 19 years old and he never come back.

Q. HE DID NOT RETURN?

A. No.

Q. COULD YOU TELL US WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FAMILY THEN AFTER THE GERMANS CAME? OR IS THERE ANYTHING THAT I HAVEN'T ASKED YOU ABOUT THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO TELL US SO THAT WE GET AN IDEA OR WHAT YOUR LIFE WAS LIKE BEFORE YOU HAD TO LEAVE?

A. From 1941, we were afraid, whatever it is, we didn't know what was going to be our future. The men went to the war with the Greek and after they got the defeat they came back and we didn't know what was going to be after when the Germans start ¹³⁴ Because in Solonika it was a big community. There were different suburbs. They were different neighbors like the poor, the middle one, the rich one. Every time the German, they were making a ghetto and for instance, this neighbor today. And the next week it would be another neighbor. This way, one by one. They knew some, they tried to escape through friends and the Germans sometime they cut them, they kill them. It was a lot of surprises you know.

Q. WERE THERE MANY DIFFERENT CONGREGATIONS OF JEWS, WERE THERE DIFFERENT, LIKE ORTHODOX AND REFORMED...

A. No, to tell the truth, this was surprise to me when we came here and we find the separation. There were too many synagogues but the synagogues were from every

neighbor. I go to my neighbor, you go to yours. There were different names. But, no I never see whatever I feel here 'cause the orthodox, the conservative and now the reform.

Q. HOW DID THE GERMANS HANDLE THE MATTER OF SEGREGATING, GETTING THE JEWS ALL TOGETHER IN GHETTOS? DID THEY HAVE MORE THAN ONE? DID THEY HAVE MANY GHETTOS?

A. No, no. It was one. It was the poor section of Solonika who was near the railroad station. These were big jewish people, labor workers. First when they came they took up the community. They went to the jewish community and they ask for names and everything. And first, some jewish people, they thought that they were going to help the German just to be comfortable. They were taking survey. They were taking some jobs to do. But after they find out it was...

Q. ABOUT HOW MANY JEWS WERE THERE IN SOLONIKA WHEN THE GERMANS CAME?

A. There were like 70,000.

Q. ABOUT 70,000. AND THE POPULATION OF THE CITY WAS WHAT? 200,000, SOMETHING LIKE THAT PERHAPS, I SEE.

A. Yea, or that.

Q. IF THERE ISN'T ANYTHING MORE THAT YOU THINK WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR FAMILY?

A. About what?

Q. THEN LET'S COME TO THE TIME THAT YOU FOUND OUT THAT THE JEWS WERE BEING ROUNDED UP.

A. We been rounded up and we thought we're going to work. They're taking us to

work. And everybody was buying work things, getting ready. They were buying boots and wool things because they were going to Poland that's what they were telling us and after they were telling us to change money. We were giving the money to them and they were giving us paper that have any value.

Q. WERE PEOPLE ABLE TO TAKE VALUABLE ITEMS? WERE THEY ABLE TO TAKE THEIR JEWELRY?

A. Well there were able but...

Q. NOT VERY MUCH?

A. They were able to take it for a while. They were taking, yea, but after when they were at the concentration camp they would make them, and take away.

Q. TAKE EVERYTHING AWAY.

A. And it was also a fact that the Germans, they didn't touch the Spanish people, the ones that were citizens. All these citizen people, they does Spanish, they get organized. They brought nice luggage, fancy, like they were going to go...

Q. WERE THEY BEING TAKEN ALSO?

A. Separately. Not with us. The Spanish was protecting them. And as a matter of fact, those people didn't even go to Auschwitz. It was a different camp and they were living there, the camp, without doing the hard work.

Q. THEY WERE TREATED DIFFERENTLY.

A. They were treated differently. But it was when the German concentrated on the Spanish and everybody came to the station with the luggage, they took all the luggage with them and they brought the luggage because they thought the Jews were hiding between the luggage. They took all the luggage, thousands of luggage. They took it and the poor people, they were making bundles with to take their things.

And this event, I was there.

Q. THEY TOOK THEIR LUGGAGE AWAY?

A. Yes with idea they would have... No clothes and just the money, I thought they were holding luggage but for themselves and they knew what they were going to put in between the lining of the luggage. Yea, this was also for the Spanish people.

Q. SO HOW DID YOUR FAMILY REACT THEN, DID YOU SAY THAT THERE WAS A CONVOY THAT WAS COMING?

A. Every time every neighbor was a convoy. We knew today is one Greek, they take all the Jewish. The next week they were telling us, the next week will be this...they took all one neighbor to this... not to the station. First they were put into the ghetto. And they were staying there for two or three days in the ghetto 'til the train will come. Those trains, I was there on the last ghetto, they come and took me at 3:00 in the morning to go and clean the trains and the trains were full of animals, because they were putting animals, dirty, everything. We were four or five girls. They took us, they call us, they come at the door and says come with us and clean the... We were doing this but people who would stay in the ghetto it was not our turn to go.

Q. SO THEN, DID ALL YOUR FAMILY GO?

A. Yea at the time I got married like I told you yesterday. When the German came and they broke the name with the Italian. Because in Solonika was the German and in Athens was the Italian and all the Jews who were in Athens, they were free. The Italians didn't touch anybody. But when they broke the alliance...

Q. YES, THEY BROKE THEIR ALLIANCE WITH THE ITALIANS.

A. Yea, yea, they start to go after the Jews there in Athens. But in the time we were in

Solonika and I told you my father says to my fiance you will not stay like that because the war might be a long time, you should get married. And we got married in 1941. And in Solonika it was beautiful temple they call Beth Shaoul, it was rich family. And this there were doing the most beautiful weddings there. And this time the Germans, they didn't let us go for, generally, to make the ceremony.

Q. THEY PERMITTED YOU TO HAVE THE CEREMONY?

A. No, no. I want to tell you. Most of the girls, because they were going to get married, they were going to the temple from the back door and take the wedding gown there just for ceremony and after I was one of these too. The funny thing was my husband had, with his brother a taxicab company, and when the German came one night they ask the key of the garage because they put the garage in and he had -- there is a standard 20 drivers, 10 for the days and 10 for the night shift. They threw everybody out and they took all our car and they didn't let us go up there anymore and we were without a pen. And the day we were married said, he was telling (Maje) we don't have a car to bring you up. Something now you think and what's happened.

Q. VERY, VERY DIFFICULT FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY.

A. Yea, oh, for the whole Jewish population. I don't see my family, all the Jewish population. Like I told you when they took us to the ghetto, after it was April, they took my family, my (los) and we went to the ghetto and they said you are going to stay four or five days and after the train will come.

Q. AND ALL OF YOU THOUGHT THAT YOU WERE GOING TO GO TO WORK.

A. Yea, to work, not a single idea. I tell you still, the liberation, what's happened in Athens when we start to -- somebody's coming back from Poland and we knew the

person, we went to the temple because it was a meeting and he says, "well I would like to talk to you what's happened there, but because it's Passover week we are going to leave for the next week," because he didn't want us to tell.

Q. EXCUSE ME, BUT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT ATHENS NOW, AND WE HAVE TO FINISH HOW YOU LEFT SOLONIKA AND WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FAMILY BEFORE YOU GET TO ATHENS.

A. We were in the ghetto and it was paper that says "this family, this family, tomorrow they have to leave." It was my parents and my in-laws included, but my name and my husband's name wasn't included. Because my husband, they needed him to fix the cars if something was wrong -- like a mechanic. And we saw our members -- this was at 3:00 in the morning my husband says, "get up, get dressed and we'll go with them." We were behind them and we stand in line because the train. They ask us, with a gun, come to me, he says, go.

Q. TO YOU?

A. Yea, and to my husband.

Q. THEY DIDN'T WANT YOU TO GO?

A. No, they didn't want my husband, Steve, to go. They took me and my husband. And in this ghetto it was like a Jewish hospital there and they make like prison there. Everything was bad what they were doing there. But they put us there without touching, they didn't hit us, but there were very -- memory from that. The train left and after, at night they told us you go to (Ukapa)

and we stay there 'til the next week it was the next convoy we have to go to.

Q. NOW, IT WAS IN APRIL THAT THEY STARTED...

A. No, no, in April 329

I mentioned April because it was my family. This time it was the last convoy.

Q. THIS WAS LATE IN SUMMER?

A. Late in summer, yea, in August. In the meantime my husband, because he was going in and out, he met this Italian officer, and this Italian officer was a friend of my husband's because they were living in Solonika. He told him, "if you can give me ten family, twelve family -- the names -- I will give you false identification like they are Italian and we are going to take them from the ghetto and send them to Athens." And there we were like 9, 10 couples, new married, we were young, and he says, "Ok." And they give us some names. The next day the Italian guy came, give to my husband different names and identifications, says, "you are going to tend to your work, she was born in (Levon) you are going to take to this lady she was born in Italy." Everybody will have new identification, this time couples. And says, "I'm going to go to Gestapo and ask for this to take them out because they are my people, they are Italians, we are friends." One of the couples, he was talking with a friend of her, one of the young girls was talking to a friend and says, "you know Thursday we are going out because the Italian officer did that for me." This girl was married to a German-Jewish was too much collaborating to the Germans. He told her husband those papers are false and her husband talked to the Gestapo and the Gestapo put a notice says, "Nobody's going to leave the ghetto today." And all our dream, you know. Says Ok, we'll go back. It was the next day at 3:00 the convoy was to ... and in this ghetto there were 3 gates and all these gates they were

with 2 Gestapo in iron gate. They didn't let go in and out, nobody. But this day, they says they have to come with us and they change and they put the Greek police in the doors, the gates. And my husband knew one of the Greeks. He says, listen we are going to leave in a half an hour, we need to buy something for the train to eat. Let us go. Says, I don't know, if you want to go, go and come back. Says there are 6, 7 couples to buy something for the train. Ok, says the Greek. But in the meantime the week before, those 10 couples find the place where they are going to go and live in the ghetto, they have friends, Greeks or something.

Q. BUT WHERE?

A. In Solonika. This is from the ghetto to Solonika, because we were still in Solonika. Everybody says Ok, once we can get out, officially, with the Italian, we'll do this way: and we have someplace to go. This lady someday, they come to us, the lady who was going to hide my husband, me says, I'm scared, I cannot.

Q. NOW THIS WAS A GREEK WOMAN WHO WAS GOING TO HIDE YOU...

A. A Greek woman, yea, all they were Greek now. There were some friends who compassion, but they were afraid. They were afraid because the German is not to know. All those 10 couples, one by one, they went to buy, think that they didn't come back and we were the last one. We were in the street and we didn't know where to go. My husband was very known in Solonika and he was afraid somebody will knock him out. It was August, it was heat, and we were walking and walking. Says, what we are going to do? My husband says, Ok let's walk and go to the Italian embassy because we saw this guy and let's take a train, like a cable, we'd have some of those, he says, no, no, no, my husband says somebody might recognize me. Let's walk ... and we're walking and walking, it was like a mile and

a half -- because then it was with kilometers. The minute we arrive at the door of the embassy a taxicab stop and the guy was there, in the taxicab, he saw us, he get out and says, "oh you come on time," because he didn't want the taxi driver to understand anything. He says, "oh you come on time, come in." And he put us in the embassy and says "don't worry now you are in Italy."

Q. WHERE DID YOUR HUSBAND MAKE THE CONTACT WITH HIS FRIEND?

A. It was a friend we knew in Solonika.

Q. HE KNEW THAT YOU WERE ABOUT TO BE DEPORTED?

A. Oh sure, everybody knew, everybody knew the Jews were deported. And the Italians, they did a lot for the Jewish, even if they were friends with a German. They were trying to help any way they could. This guy took us this night, says tonight you are going to stay here but tomorrow I have to find you a place to go because I cannot keep you. He was very nice and it was myself, my husband and my brothers, there were the three of them. The next day he took us in his car and he rent a place, said you will stay here 'til I will get a train to go to Athens and I'll come to pick up you and send it to Athens. We didn't have any money. He didn't make this for money but some people did that for money. After 2 or 3 days he came to pick us up and he put us in an Italian train to go in Athens. Then he told us to take some precaution because when the train was going from one village to another they were the Germans who were making, you know...But we arrive in Athens and it's goodness. And there in Athens, we call a friend of ours, because my husband says if I arrive in Athens I know this driver who used to work with him and he is going to find me a job right away he says, and we are going to start again, don't worry. We were young. We call this guy and somebody answer the phone

and says, "he's out of town, what can I do for you?" Says, "well I am so-and-so and I would like -- oh you are Sam Rouben -- oh I would like to know you because my brother-in-law thought so much about you, I would like to know you." Ok, he came to pick us up. He says how did you do, how you left, because you're a Jew. He says you stay over at my house and he went to the city of hall again and he took us some Greek identification because he was a big shot, him, there. And this guy, he didn't know us. He did a lot for us and not for money. We didn't have money, you know. That's the way we survived. But there were too many episodes in between...

Q. I HATE TO STOP YOU BUT I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FAMILY AT THIS TIME.

A. My father...

Q. YOU HAD A YOUNGER BROTHER WITH YOU?

A. No, no, my brother, yea, the middle one, he still is here with me.

Q. OH, IT WAS YOUR YOUNGEST BROTHER?

A. No, no, it wasn't the youngest. The youngest brother came back from Auschwitz. I have 5 brothers. Two brothers older than me, me, and another one, and the youngest one came back from Auschwitz. He survived.

Q. SO TWO OF YOUR BROTHERS SURVIVED?

A. Yea, the one from Auschwitz and this here. He -- the Auschwitz -- he lives in Israel.

Q. AND THE REST OF YOUR FAMILY PERISHED?

A. My parents, my husband family, no one, no.

Q. SO, LET'S GO TO ATHENS NOW AND TELL US ABOUT YOUR

EXPERIENCE...

A. Like I says, we stay there first in a friend, and after they start to capture the Jewish again. But we have the paper and we living in the house of this guy, who was a friend, we didn't know him. He says, don't worry I'll tell you are a French teacher for my kids and your husband is working because he had a factory of soaps and perfume and everything. Any my husband was there making transportation for him and I was at the house. One time, this is funny, this guy got some job to do for the Germans, and my husband says I'm not going anymore with you to work. I says. No, don't worry, I am here don't worry. The guy who I know is a very good young man, the German, "don't worry." Says, "no," my husband says, "I'll take my wife and we'll go and hide." And he was going every day with the truck.

Q. MAKING DELIVERIES?

A. Making deliveries, no loading and unloading, I mean just wasn't deliveries. One day he says I am going to bring Hans for dinner tonight and you are going to be,
500 won't be on the table, please, please. No, he says, don't worry, I have confidence in Hans. Ok, we couldn't do anything because we were staying at the house. And Hans sit down and to me he start to speak me French. Says, you know I was living in Solonika and I knew those guys and we were talking and talking in French and so-and-so, and I was -- oooooohh!

Q. YOU WERE CAREFUL.

A. You were careful.

Q. SURE, YOUR LIFE DEPENDED ON IT.

A. And we went in bed with my husband, I talk to him, you know you listened, I says, "I bet this Hans is Jewish." "Oh you are crazy," says, "Jews is going to work with

the German and so-and-so?" I says, "I bet this guy Jewish the way he was telling the things from Solonika." In the meantime he was working with him, my husband was a little bit more comfortable. One day they went again work, he was there, he says today don't work, sit down there because you have Passover. My husband says, he was looking at him and he start to sing in Hebrew.

Q. WAS THIS HIS HOUSE?

A. Not his house. They were working at, it was like a mine, they were carrying charcoal and my husband was doing this job -- and he says don't work, sit down there and let's go and they were walking through the hill there and they sit down. He says, you have Passover today. My husband, he didn't know, he started to sing some Hebrew songs. He says, "Hans, what is this?" What is this, says, I am Jewish. He was married with a German lady and this lady protected him, he was going to the Gestapo and pick paper and says, but we didn't know that. We thought it was -- and that's the story of this guy.

Q. YOU WERE VERY LUCKY IN MANY WAYS WEREN'T YOU?

A. In many way, yea, we were lucky in many way I can tell. But still we were hiding, I mean we couldn't go places.

Q. WHEN DID THE GERMANS OCCUPY ATHENS THEN?

A. In '43. I mean it was a short time they occupy. They come in for the one in Greece but they want to go to, they did anything wrong they put the star, just organizing, knowing what was going on.

Q. GETTING READY I SUPPOSE?

A. Yea, who are the rich people, who are not. That from Solonika to Athens was very fast. And in Athens, also their government was very good with the Jewish because

they knew they were going -- and most of the policemen they went house-to-houses and you live because the Germans...

Q. THEY WERE WARNING PEOPLE.

A. Yea, they were warning, most of them. But in Solonika no. The people of Athens and these are the people of Athens who hired us too.

Q. THESE ARE GREEK NATIONALS? PEOPLE FROM -- GREEKS?

A. Well Athens was --

Q. WHAT NATIONALITY?

A. The police Greek. Athens and Solonika and everything is Greece, but it's the north and the south.

Q. SO THINGS WENT SMOOTHLY FOR YOU IN ATHENS?

A. Smoothly? I tell now smoothly comparing with Auschwitz and everything.

Q. BUT YOU WERE ALWAYS APPREHENSIVE. YOU DIDN'T KNOW WHEN SOMETHING LIKE, COULD GO WRONG?

A. Yea, I want to tell you when the first Jewish came in Greece after the World War and he didn't want to talk.

Q. YEA, TELL US ABOUT THAT.

A. The next week after we went, everybody, to the temple and he start to tell us how worthless the convoy is and how in Auschwitz they were burning people. You know the impression of all the people who were in Greece when we were there, he lost his mind. What he's talking about, has he lost his mind, the poor guy, the poor guy. After people would start to come and this was the impression we have.

Q. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN ATHENS THEN?

A. Then, nothing, it grows. Now, they open...

Q. NO, I MEAN DURING THIS PERIOD, YOU WERE WARNED BY THE GREEK POLICE THAT THE GERMANS CAME AND TOOK THE...

A. Sure, sure.

Q. WAS THERE A LARGE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN ATHENS?

A. Oh yes, bigger was in Solonika. But most of the time the Jewish from Athens, you couldn't tell they were Jewish. They were speaking so fluently Greek and they were in the society, but only when the German went and took all the community. They would find out. Because the Jews from Greece, they didn't speak Spanish. In Solonika, most of the people were speaking Spanish from the people who let Spain native...

Q. BACK IN SOLONIKA DID THEY SPEAK LATINO?

A. Yes, they speak Latino because my parents were speaking Latino to me and my grandmother and everything. Still, Queen Elizabeth, still they were speaking Latino. And they were not speaking Greek. But in Athens because it was 673
it was different. The Greek of Athens.

Q. DO YOU WANT TO TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR LIFE IN ATHENS THEN, AND YOUR HUSBAND CONTINUED WORKING IN THIS FIRM?

A. No, after we were hiding. In Athens, he wasn't -- we were hiding. We were hiding in a village.

Q. TELL US HOW -- BECAUSE HERE YOU WERE LIVING WITH THIS FAMILY. YOUR HUSBAND WAS WORKING AND YOU WERE TEACHING THE CHILDREN FRENCH?

A. French, yea, but in the meantime I am telling you, it was a big raid of airplanes. Big air raid and his wife got so scared and was telling to her husband, I want to

leave and I know I cannot stay here, he is too little. And her husband went to find a house in the outskirts of the city. And says, Ok, if you want to go I'll stay here. No, no, no, I'm not going if you don't come. I'm not going if you don't come.

(Rele) she took us there. But her husband and my husband were commuted every day. And we stayed this village for one year hiding. And there it was a big influence of German because this village, according to, he says, it was a descendent from the German. And all the Greek they have German names there. Most of the Greek and when the German came they were 717

We were scared even to talk with them because we didn't know. We were just hiding, behind them.

Q. DID YOU TRY TO STAY INDOORS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE?

A. Oh, yes. This family was having always 7.7 Just always watching what we are doing, what we are going to do. She was coming...

End Tape 1, Side 1

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

A. We were there hiding and it was a family we knew there. They knew we were Jewish. They were Greek. And all the time, she said, in case you are lonely, afraid, you come to my house. Says, why she tells me this, I mean I don't know. One day we didn't have anything to eat, no bread nothing, we didn't have anything.

Q. WAS SHE THEN BEFORE YOU WENT TO THE GHETTO?

A. No. This is after. The Ghetto was in Solonika, we went in Athens. A friend who hired us, they rent for us a little room near there because they didn't have room...

Q. SEPARATE.

A. Separate, and this was like a little farm. They have a room where they were putting

all the tools and everything and when this friend of ours one day says, do you have to (rent a car?), my cousin from Bulgaria come here, I don't have where to put him. He says if you want Ok clean this room and he go out and the room in the middle of the farm. Every morning the old man, because here is some goats and chickens at 5:00 somewhere in the morning he was getting up

he was telling all, "God damn the Jews." But I says, what if they knew we are Jews what they are going to do. It was something like -- my husband and my brother, every morning they were going to get up and leave the house to make them believe they are going to work. Because they didn't want to stay there. They were going in the field just like the others did and coming back and just the way we were going. But I says, one day we didn't have anything to eat. This lady, I'm telling you, come knock at the door, the little girl did, oh my mommy make some bread and she wants to give it to you. I says, is this God. Sometimes you says, you believe him. But after we knew she knew we were Jewish and he was trying to help us but we were afraid.

Q. OH YOU MEAN THE WOMAN FROM THE FARM?

A. No.

Q. YOUR FRIEND. WE'LL SHE KNEW ALL THE TIME THOUGH.

A. No. It was another lady who was living in this village and she knew us through the other...And beside this, in the place we were staying, the guy who rented this little room, the two sons were working at the Gestapo. I mean it was -- if you think now how things were -- when this happened they were all friend of the Germans...if they knew. It was a miracle we survive, sometimes I said.

Q. WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOU WERE OUT LIVING IN THE SUBURBS THERE,

THE OUTSKIRTS OF ATHENS AND YOU SAY THERE WERE MANY GERMAN FAMILIES THAT SETTLED A LONG TIME AGO. SO WERE YOU ABLE TO GO OUT AT ALL?

A. No, no, no.

Q. DID YOU EVER ATTEND CHURCH?

A. It was Easter and my friend told me listen, Mary, here the village every day, especially Easter they go to church. And you have to come with me, they will see you there. It was a church for the orthodox Greek and this church for the German Greek. We went to the orthodox. Says, you come with me and do whatever I will do, you light a candle and the police come and think that everyone belong. And I did -- her husband was very nice he says, Mary don't worry, God is every place. You pray for your God, don't pray for our God. No, this guy who hide us...

Q. DID YOU HAVE ANY CLOSE CALLS OTHER THAN THIS OLD FARMER WHO WAS CURSING THE JEWS, DID YOU HAVE ANY OTHER CLOSE CALLS?

A. No, no, no, this old man, that was his every word

It was terrible. Our friend family, we didn't have any more money, and there the time, sometimes if you have money you couldn't buy anything because it was the war and it was very hard to find anything and when he rent this room for us, says how much you want? Says, I don't money I want 3 pounds oil and 3 pounds of soap. And every month the oil and the soap, price, inflation you know.

Q. SO THAT'S HOW HE PAID THE RENT?

A. He paid the rent for us in this way.

Q. AND YOUR HUSBAND WAS NOT ABLE TO WORK?

A. No, there, were not possible.

Q. THEY DIDN'T GO INTO THE CITY AND WORK?

A. No, no, no. We weren't safe.

Q. SO YOU LIVED THERE HOW LONG, IN ATHENS?

A. 'Til '45 we live, we were free after 1945.

Q. SO IS THERE ANYTHING THAT WE'VE LEFT OUT SO FAR. BECAUSE I DO WANT TO ASK YOU ABOUT HOW YOU CAME, WHERE YOU WENT, WHAT COUNTRY YOU EMIGRATED TO AND ALL THAT? IS THERE SOMETHING MORE THAN WE SHOULD KNOW?

A. Well there are so many little incident there.

Q. THEY'RE FASCINATING, AND EVEN TO RECALL, WE'D LIKE TO HEAR.

A. There were so many incident there.

Q. DID YOUR FRIEND, THE HUSBAND OR THE WIFE, EVER DISCUSS WITH YOU ANTI-SEMITISM AND...

A. Oh, those people no. No, these two people, he was, he had a family of four kids and he was telling I found 10 pounds of beans, 6 pounds for me, 2 pounds for you and 2 pounds for her sister. He was always around looking for food because it was very, very hard to find food, but to go to buy.

Q. THE SHORTAGE BECAUSE OF THE WAR.

A. Oh, shortage, oh you cannot believe what shortage it is, you cannot imagine. Sometimes we survive.

Q. AND YOU REMAINED HEALTHY, ALL OF YOU REMAINED HEALTHY?

A. Yes.

Q. YOU WERE VERY, VERY FORTUNATE WEREN'T YOU IN SPITE OF ALL THE HARDSHIPS YOU WERE BETTER OFF THAN YOUR BROTHER.

A. No, because we were living outdoor and I was working for them helping the lady with the pig, but no.

Q. BUT YOUR HUSBAND MUST HAVE HAD A VERY GOOD WAY OF GETTING ALONG WITH PEOPLE, THAT'S WHY HE HAD THESE FRIENDS AND EVERYBODY, THAT'S WHY YOU WERE SAFE.

A. Everybody talks about my husband, I don't talk about my husband. But, I miss him a lot. My friend over there says "numero uno." Sam was number one. But he's gone.

Q. SO ARE THERE ANY INCIDENTS YOU CAN THINK ABOUT BECAUSE WE HAVE TIME TO HEAR. THIS IS VERY...

A. One day still when we were in Athens, this was at 5:00 the sister of the lady knock on the door and says, you know the German are going house to house to look for guns. Because in this place we were living it was like a communist -- and the men were scoping out red thing -- when this guy was living there. It was most of the people were communist and the Germans this morning, we saw machine guns in the 7 and going from door to door to door to door. The husband says what we are going to do is he says, I have 3 guns because he had like a factory in the first floor and he was making soaps. He had a huge, vat and he drop the tank downstairs says I have 3 guns, I have 3 jews and I have gasoline. Gasoline, it was very hard to have.

Q. YES, YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO HAVE IT.

A. We weren't supposed. What we are going to do. We were upstairs and I says, well

don't worry for us I says in case they see us, I will tell what you are my French teacher for the children and so-and-so-and-so. And we went to the windows looking from one door, then they went to another and they come to our door. An officer with two soldiers. But at the door he had like it was a factory you know?

Q. YES, A SIGN.

A. A sign, yea, (berenda) ¹³⁷ they come for work from 6 in the morning to, they look, they look like that. It's close. And they went to the other door. They went to the next door, they went there and we were hiding in the house upstairs, they didn't come there. And the poor lady was, "Jesus Christ is that for me?" She says, "Graci." There were incident like that but this day they took hundred people there and they kill them.

Q. THEY SHOT THEM?

A. Yea, because they thought that they were communist. Because this place was not -- they are all communist. And they shot them.

Q. THEY WERE IN THE UNDERGROUND PROBABLY, OR AT LEAST THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE.

A. This day was...

Q. DID THEY TAKE THEM AWAY?

A. They went in the house and say something, and we see one man or two men, the one they come out, and were at another house. It's unbelievable what the Germans, it's nothing to, it's nothing to... but still I don't know how we survived.

Q. SO THEN HOW DID YOU HEAR THAT THE WAR WAS OVER?

A. When the war was over we were in this village, I told you about the German one, and the whole barrack of soldiers came on the hill and they put the cannon. They

were just defending from there and we were in the backyard. This was the last day.

Q. IS THIS THE GREEK RESISTANCE?

A. No, this was the German, German soldiers. They have some barracks...

Q. OH, RIGHT AROUND YOU?

A. Right around here. That was this place, this was, we were hiding at the first part, but we were better hiding. They couldn't imagine that we were there. And this day after they were fighting, the soldiers say to stop, they took them and they went. The next day we went to Athens, in his house.

Q. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND.

A. We were still in this village when there were German. And the last day, too many soldier, they came there to defend themselves, they have some cannon from the hill. There were 40. And we there hiding, said we'll see what this will be. But some of the people said, they are leaving, they are leaving. But we couldn't believe they are leaving because they were there fighting. But at 5:00 in the afternoon an officer came and said stop. And they took them with them and they left.

Q. SO, I DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND. THE GERMANS WERE THERE AND THEY HAD THEIR CAMP OR WHATEVER THERE, AND TOWARD THE END OF THE WAR, WHICH ARMY WAS APPROACHING, WHO WAS COMING?

A. It's not the army, the American. The Americans, oh yes, the Americans was there. Oh this day was something.

Q. SO THERE WAS SOME FIGHTING THERE?

A. Oh yes, there's some fighting the last minute, but were the Americans because they saw after all the...

Q. AND THEN THE GERMAN OFFICER CAME AND RETREATED?

A. They pick up in buses and they left.

Q. SO THAT WAS PRETTY MUCH THE END OF THE WAR FOR YOU?

A. For me? Oh yes, that's it. And the lady, the wife of the old man, when we told we were Jewish. You were Jewish? How you make your clothes?

Q. SHE FOUND OUT AFTERWARDS? YOU TOLD THEM?

A. You are, like that, you are Jewish, how you make your clothes? What way, I says, no way, we are Jewish.

Q. DO YOU KNOW WHETHER THERE WERE ANY OTHER JEWS THAT WERE BEING HIDDEN?

A. Over there, no. We were not out, going out.

Q. IF YOU EVER HEARD AFTERWARDS IF THERE WERE OTHER JEWS.

A. It was a friend of mine who was from Solonika went to Athens because Athens was free and she says, what I'm going to do, she become like a teacher again from a little girl in the house she was living. The family was Jewish when she was there. And when they start -- and the police went to house and to house telling, you know the German are picking up the Jewish, you go wherever you can hide, this girl was at the house and the lady and little girl, there were not they, knew, they didn't come back. And this girl start to cry, and says what I'm going to do here. And the policeman says come with me. He took her and he brought her to his mother, again in a village in Athens. He says to his mother, you keep this girl here she's going to help you in house. And she works there for one year and a half. Working as a...

Q. MAID OR ...

A. Yea. This is another story. Another one, everything were liberated. He told her you want to marry me?

Q. THEY MARRIED?

A. Yea, they got married. This girl has a sister in Italy. When he knew her sister was free and she marry a Greek policeman, he sent somebody from Italy to my house because he knew I knew, he says, you do whatever you can to take Mary from there and send her ²²³ I says, I'm not going to take Mary, this guy is an angel who save Mary. I said, if you want you take Mary. Mary says, no, no, no, I'm not going, says anyplace. Because he sent her, and when they get married, he says, now listen, Friday night you are going to let...candles. And Sunday I'm going to...And every Easter and Rosh Hashannah, they were coming for dinner over my house after ²³⁵ Every time, he says, we want to go Passover because Mary wants to meet her. So this is one story still...

Q. THAT IS A STORY, BUT I DIDN'T QUITE UNDERSTAND ABOUT ISRAEL. SO COULD YOU EXPLAIN THE STORY.

A. Is that this girl has a sister living in Israel. And I think she was a radio announcer, her sister. And she was so upset when she learned her sister marry a Greek policeman, that he sent two people in Athens to look for her and take her back, to bring her to Israel. Because we were in Athens. She got married when everything was...and the girl says no, I'm not going to Israel, this is my husband. But the sister was frightened to take her. But after when she understand.

Q. THEN THEY RECONCILED?

A. They reconcile.

Q. FASCINATING STORIES. SO WHEN DID YOU GET WORD ABOUT YOUR FAMILY? WHEN DID YOU KNOW THAT THEY WERE NOT COMING BACK?

A. Right away. When my younger brother came from Auschwitz he told me don't expect anybody.

Q. HOW DID HE GET AWAY?

A. He says, because he was the youngest one, he was 10 years old when they took him. But he was taught, he says one of the teaching helpers took her to the kitchen to clean and I was eating all the things. The other people, they didn't have enough to eat. I mean, he survived.

Q. BUT HE ESCAPED BEFORE THE WAR ENDED DIDN'T HE?

A. No, no, he was taken because he was young, he was taken with my mother, my brother. He survived Auschwitz.

Q. THEN HE FOUND OUT WHERE YOU WERE?

A. I found out where he was, when they start to come and I found out and I took him in Athens and he came in Athens and says, I'm not staying I'm going to Israel because in Athens there was a camp -- displaced people. And he went to the camp one day to visit some friends and they told him to go to Israel and he says, I'm going to Israel. Now he's a grandpa.

Q. NOW THAT'S YOUR YOUNGEST BROTHER.

A. My youngest brother, yea.

Q. WHERE DID YOU GO FROM ATHENS AFTER THE WAR ENDED?

A. We stay in Athens to organize ourselves and they says if you would like to come in America. I says, let's go because nobody we have anymore here. My husband didn't have anybody. We didn't have anybody except my brother. We decide to come here.

Q. DID YOU HAVE FAMILY HERE?

A. Family, I have two children.

Q. YES, BUT HOW DID YOU GET PAPERS TO COME TO THE UNITED STATES?

A. That was through the organization.

Q. TELL US ABOUT COMING TO THIS COUNTRY, WHEN YOU CAME...

A. I came in 1956.

Q. TELL US ABOUT THE YEARS BETWEEN THE TIME THE WAR ENDED AND WHEN YOU WERE LIBERATED.

A. We were in Athens just trying to put our feet together. Right away we said we would like to have a baby. We have my baby, my daughter who was born in 1946. After we didn't like anymore to stay in Greece and we came here because is a free country, free country, but we didn't find free country!

Q. IT ISN'T VERY FREE.

A. I was going to school for my English, night school here and there was a colored girl. This was surprise, I didn't know it was different. And I was friendly with. They took us to Sacramento, the school. I was sitting

I didn't know they were so much prejudice.

Q. YOU DIDN'T REALIZE SHE WAS PREJUDICE AGAINST THE NEGRO?

A. Yea, yea, I didn't know. I thought here's a free country..... I was so much friendly with this little girl.

Q. IN POLAND AND GERMANY THE GERMANS AND THE POLS TOOK OVER THE PROPERTY OF THE JEWS WHO WERE DEPORTED, WHAT HAPPENED IN GREECE?

A. They took it. The German took and maybe the Greek they took because I have my house when I went away it was on the ground. They took everything because we left, we leave the house.

Q. YOU LEFT EVERYTHING.

A. Everything, everything.

Q. WHEN YOU CAME BACK THERE WAS NOTHING.

A. No. There was no house, just the gates. Just the gates. We lost the people, we didn't care for the things. It's unbelievable.

Q. YOU GET ANY REPARATIONS?

A. No, no.

Q. BECAUSE GREECE IS SUPPOSED TO BE WITH THE ALLIES I GUESS FOR ONE THING.

A. It was sometimes the Germans ³²⁰ and the Greek government took everything they could get anybody to...

Q. WHAT WERE CONDITIONS LIKE AFTER THE WAR ENDED IN GREECE?

A. There are a few Jews because they have the job, the property. But some, they are not happy. Because in Greece the government is ups and downs.

Q. WE KNOW, WE KNOW, YES THAT'S TRUE.

A. After ³³⁴ now they are going to elect him, I don't know.

(Tape 1, Side 2 stops and starts here)

Because he'll have a nice job, why did you come here, I says I am here for the children to get a good education. For the children, he says, you come here. You lost your children. I'll tell you something, I says I have two children too, I come

here and when I come at night from work, I says, I saw my son lay down watching TV, my daughter in the other room. And I says, hi! Sshhhh, shhhh. I go to my daughter and says, "I want to finish this show." The minute I go in the backyard the dog jump to him and says, these are the children. I says, oh my husband was so much, says we are going to lose our children, let's go back. I says, no I'm not going back. It was very hard. Very, very, very hard. We struggle. We didn't know the language.

Q. WHERE DID YOU COME WHEN YOU CAME TO UNITED STATES, WHERE DID YOU FIRST COME?

A. We stop in New York.

Q. DID YOU HAVE FRIENDS THERE, RELATIVES?

A. Yea, yea. After, we came to California. We stay 20 days in New York. We came directly to Oakland because my husband, his cousin here. This was in Auschwitz, he was on the open, this guy.

Q. HE HAD A JOB?

A. I think they took 363 from him two or three times. He had a very bad job, and he survive.

Q. HAS THE LIBRARY GOTTEN HIS STORIES?

A. Oh yes. They interview him two, three times. Somebody who come from Israel, and they come here. I don't know the name, but they interview him.

Q. TELL US ABOUT YOUR LIFE HERE, WHAT YOU DO, HOW DO YOU OCCUPY YOURSELF?

A. My life here, we were struggling to find jobs where we came and we couldn't find, we didn't know the language. My husband had no tie. Wherever he was going to

find a job they would ask, "are you in the union?" No, we don't. They didn't hire him because he wasn't in the union. And he says what we are going to do now we cannot find a job. And a friend, he said, the only thing you can do is just open a little shop and sell by yourself. We open a little shop with a few things and we didn't know the language. He would come in the shop telling me, do you have glasses? I says no. Yea, yes, there in the window [giggling]. It's funny now but...

Q. YOU WERE A LINGUIST THOUGH.

A. Yea, when I speak French. What good here? I speak Spanish. Only Spanish a little bit, because we were on San Francisco Mission Street and there were too many Spanish people. I speak Greek. But hardly I learn the English and still my English is not good.

Q. I THINK YOU DO VERY WELL. ARE YOU RETIRED NOW? HOW ABOUT YOUR HUSBAND.

A. My husband passed away.

Q. HOW LONG AGO?

A. It's eight years. We were just like that [snaps her fingers].

Q. SON.

A. Son, my husband and me, we were never sick. Since we know each other, not a cold, nothing, nothing. He was a workaholic like they call now. He was active in everything. One night I had people at home playing card, very nice. They left, they told me, let's go to bed and tomorrow we'll clean the mess. I says, oh no, I cannot go to bed without clean. I clean the mess and I go. And he says, Ok I'll help you. And he help me with the living room and I was in the kitchen. He finished, he says, Ok. I says Ok. He went upstairs and says bring me the newspaper. Ok. I brought

the newspaper I went upstairs, says, you know I have a pain here. Says, maybe indigestion, you want a soda? I says, you want something. Says yes, yes, bring me a soda. I went downstairs to bring his soda and he was in terrible pain. Says, I don't know what to do. I dial 911 and driver came right away. They took him, they go to the hospital, he won't come.

Q. THAT QUICKLY.

A. That's it. I mean it was something unbelievable.

Q. MUST HAVE BEEN VERY, VERY DIFFICULT FOR YOU.

A. Like I says, he never smoke. He never drank. Some people, you don't smoke, you don't have to drink. He was strong and that's it.

Q. DO YOUR CHILDREN STILL LIVE NEARBY?

A. My daughter got married, she lives in New York. My son live in Los Angeles. But he's not married.

Q. SO YOU HAVE NO GRANDCHILDREN YET?

A. Yes, I have in New York.

Q. OH IN NEW YORK.

A. One, only one.

Q. DO YOU VISIT THERE OFTEN?

A. Oh every year. Now, I'm leaving the 15th. I'm leaving for the New Year and Christmas.

Q. IT HAS BEEN EXTREMELY INTERESTING. MAYBE YOU HAVE SOMETHING STILL TO TELL US?

A. There is so many things, when I there. [Sound of a camera snapping photos.]

Q. I'VE FORGOTTEN HOW TO TAKE PICTURES. I WANT TO THANK YOU

VERY MUCH FOR TELLING US YOUR STORY.

A. Your welcome.

Q. I THINK THIS IS REALLY VERY IMPORTANT FOR...

A. Auschwitz was so bad, my story doesn't have any.....you know....

Q. I KNOW, BUT EVERYBODY'S STORY IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE YOU CERTAINLY WENT THROUGH A GREAT DEAL OF ANXIETY AND CONCERN AND PROBABLY PLUS IF YOUR HUSBAND HADN'T UNDERGONE SO MUCH STRAIN DURING THOSE YEARS, HE MIGHT HAVE LIVED LONGER. ONE NEVER KNOWS.

A. We never know.

Q. WE CERTAINLY DON'T.

A. He was a wonderful person.

Q. I'M SURE YOU MISS HIM VERY MUCH. I'D LIKE TO TAKE A PICTURE BUT...ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH CAMERAS?

End Tape 1. End of Interview.