

OK. Basically, I have very painful memories from Poland, especially right after the war, because when I started attending school, I didn't know the alphabet. All the Polish children were up to the grade level. And here I was, this 10-year-old girl that looked maybe 12, who was big and tall, and I felt stupid.

They would send me up in second grade. And after classes, I would have to stay in first grade with the little kids and learn the alphabet. And there were no resources and no help. And I felt so miserable. And I felt so inadequate. And there was nobody to help me out.

But somehow, I managed. My mother hired tutors. And I was given private lessons. And I graduated from second grade to fourth grade. And by that time, I already knew how to read and write perfectly. And I raided the local library.

By fifth grade, I read half of the books in that library. And I mean read. I read everything from Tolstoy to anything I could find. I read about the perfect marriage, and about Russian literature, and French literature, Balzac, and de Maupassant. And I just-- I read everything I could. I love to read.

And from reading, I learned, really, how to speak very well and how to write very well. And I enjoyed writing very much. So basically, I was skipping a grade each year. But I had difficulty with math. And I was not given the right help. And this was a problem for most of my life.

But school in Poland was difficult, very difficult for me, because at the beginning, right after the war-- at the beginning of the school day, the children would stand up and say a prayer. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

And these two Jewish kids, or myself, would stick out, you know. And we would just stand. And we wouldn't. So everybody looked at us. So we were the outsiders. And after class, how come you don't say the prayer? Well, because I'm Jewish.

But oh, you're Jewish. So that means your people killed Jesus. And they did this. And they did that. And every day, I would come home with a heartache. And I would discuss religion when all my life, I never knew about religion. But I got involved into these discussions with the kids for about couple years, maybe.

I think later on, Poland became more communist. And they cut out the religion. They didn't have a classes on religion. And they didn't say the prayers. So things were a little bit better. But antisemitism was very strong. And the kids just picked on me and I think on the other, because we were different. We were not the same.

From this point of view in time, looking back, do you feel like you have made it a life that you would have wanted since liberation? I mean, do you feel now, all these years gone by, that you have been able to rebuild your life?

I feel that I had a very fragmented life. I feel that there were many holes in my life. I missed a lot. I feel that I missed a whole childhood. I feel I didn't. And this is something that I felt for as long as I could remember. I was never really a child. And that never went away.

And I wanted to be a child, but I couldn't. And this is something that you cannot recapture. And it is painful. It is really very painful. At the same time, I feel-- I always felt the loss, not having relatives, not having a brother, not having an aunt, not having a grandmother, not having just what other people have, that I didn't have that. I felt that loss always.

And I felt the loss of not having a normal education. It was all my life. And I still do. I never got over that because I never had any education. I had my basic education was in Poland, the five years that we lived in Poland. And I had to compact many, many years into those five years. And those were not normal years in Poland after the war, the educational system and the whole society, the way it was set up.

And finally, when we left Poland and came to Israel, it was another very difficult adjustment on a different level. I felt, for the first, when I came to Israel, for the first time in my life, I felt at home.

Even though it was a little strange home, there were people-- different people, all kind of dark people, and the kind of people that I was-- never saw in my life. But I felt free. First time in my life, I really felt free. I never felt that way anywhere in the world like I felt in Israel.

So we lived in Poland until 1950. We were waiting all these years to get a visa to go to Israel.

And how was life in that town?

Well, the people settled in. And business became successful. My stepfather was very enterprising, very bright, and capable man. He was such a sharp businessman. And he knew how to manage in life. And he was very devoted to me and my mother. He was a real family man, a wonderful man.

And they became prosperous. I mean, he was able to buy my mother a fur and, you know, nice clothes for me. And the business, he was managing well. But Poland became so difficult with the communism. We never wanted to stay there. But we couldn't get out.

So we applied for that visa to go to Israel. And it took five years. And when we finally were ready to go to Israel, all the few possessions that we acquired after the war, they took away from us at the border.

You were not allowed to take any jewelry, not no money, no electrical appliances. And even they took out the fur from my mother's coat because they had to stay in Poland. So we came to Israel, again, penniless and poor. And 1950 in Israel was a very difficult time.

Was it difficult to leave the relationships you had made in that town?

No.

No?

No, because everybody was going to leave. Nobody was going to stay there. Everybody was waiting to go someplace, basically to Israel, everyone. But I should have mentioned that toward the end, about 1948, that they set up-- they sent some representatives from Israel to meet with the young people in Poland and teach them about Zionism, and teach them about pride, and being Jewish, and all of that.

And they formed a group of the Zionist group. And I joined. And this was the proudest time in my life as a kid. So we wore uniforms. And we were singing Hebrew songs. They taught us Hebrew songs. We didn't understand a word, but everybody was singing.

And it was wonderful. We had that organization and purpose. And I went to summer camps with the Jewish youth groups. And so everybody just was waiting to go to Israel.

Had did your parents-- did you have any knowledge-- had your parents had any sense of Zionism back when you were small?

Well, my father would mention once in a while, because he had relatives in Israel, that he wanted to go to Israel. But it was so difficult to go and settle down there. But he wanted to go. My mother didn't know anything about it, no. Before the war broke out, life-- that was the only life they knew.

And so they didn't have any sense of even fleeing Europe?

No. There was no-- no, this was the only home they knew. They were born there. They grew up there. And they had no relatives anywhere else. And there was no place to go. This was it. Poland was it. But my father was thinking about Israel, yeah.

He had some relatives that went many years earlier. And he was mentioning. But he told my mother that he would have to go by himself and settle down. And then she would. And she just was afraid to stay alone.

And did your stepfather ever find any relatives who survived?

He found, after the war, just relatives of his wife, a sister-in-law and brother-in-law. But we became family. And we met them in Israel. And we were living. We considered each other family for years until now, once in a while, I write to them. Yeah.

How was your trip to Israel?

The trip to Israel was interesting. We were on the train to Italy. We went to Venice. And it was a long train trip. And everybody was happy. The spirits were high. And you know, we were going all to Israel. Everybody was happy. But you know, it was a bummer on the border when they took everything away from us.

And when we arrived to Venice, and whatever we had, people had, they would exchange with the merchants and buy apples, big, beautiful crates of apples from Venice. And they said that this in Israel was worth a lot of money. You could sell one apple and have food for a week, maybe. So people were buying some apples there.

And we boarded the ship in Venice called [? Galilea. ?] And it was jam-packed, like sardines. But we were-- everybody was happy. We were going to Israel. And they were feeding us well. And everybody-- wherever I went, they always wanted to feed me well, even though I wasn't skinny at the time. But there were no kids around among the survivors. So if there was a young child, you received special attention.

And so it was just a happy time on the ship. We were excited, a little seasick, but very excited. And we arrived to Haifa. And it was difficult. But people were not complaining. We knew that times were difficult in Israel, that it's not going to be easy. And the spirits were high.

We were living in this camp there in Haifa, absorption camp. We were there, get used to the new people, and to communicate with them. There were people from every country and all languages. You could hear Arabic, and Romanian, and Hungarian, and Polish, and Yiddish, and anything you can imagine.

It was just unreal, like in a movie or something, and some people, strange-looking people in the costumes that I have never seen before. And the climate, again, is so hot that we were not used to-- and things that I paid always attention to, the different nature, and the animals, and this.

They had a stone wall. And you look. And you think it's a rock, but no, it was not a rock. It is-- it moved. It was one of these lizards, all kind of lizards that I've never seen in my life. And I didn't know what they would do, if they bite, or they don't bite, or should I be careful, or-- it was scary for me.

And then the food was a little different. With the Israeli food, we were served olives, which we never saw before, never in my life-- and grapefruits and oranges. And so it was an adjustment. And it was difficult in the '50s.

You were about 15 when you got there, a teenager.

Yeah, in April, again, I was 14 and 1/2. I felt like a child. I didn't know what a teenager was then. That definition is, I think, only American. I felt very attached to my mother.

You hadn't developed an interest in boys?

Not at all, no. I was really shy and was really a child. And that's why I had a very hard time also adjusting, another time adjusting, to the Israeli society where boys and girls that age, 14, they were free, and independent, and they were in love, and relationships. And the language was very frustrating, difficult to learn the language.

We lived in tents for about six months. There were scorpions on the ground and all kinds of other creatures climbing up under my nightgown. And so there were some scary situations.

And not only that, you had to be very aware and careful, because terrorists were attacking all the time, Arab terrorists. So it was a difficult life and difficult adjustment. There was not enough food. Food was also with coupons in 1950-- no eggs and no meat, only rations.

Did you go hungry?

No. We were not really hungry. But you know, you ate oranges. We were laughing it off and would say, so we would eat oranges instead of potatoes or something else. But it was with difficulty you could obtain some milk, because some days, there were just things missing. They were not available.

And the work was not available. And then again, decisions-- what am I going to do with my life? Here, I'm almost 15. I can't go to school. I don't know the language.

Is that why you couldn't go to school, because you didn't know the language?

That's right. There was nothing for me for somebody my age. Maybe there was, but I didn't have the-- I didn't know where to go.

And they had no agencies that would help you in that?

No, no, no. In those times, were very difficult. You had to, I don't know, have connections or have some money at the time to be able to get into some program or something. We didn't have no connections and no money.

How much schooling had you had at that point?

Five years-- less than five years, because we left in April. School would be over in September-- 4 and 1/2 years. But I was pretty well educated.

You did well what that.

Yeah, I did well. Yeah, those few years, I educated myself. Yeah. And by that time, I already-- of course, I spoke perfect German. And then my Polish was very good. And Russian-- I picked up some Russian also because I took one year of Russian in school. So I knew pretty well Russian too and could read also.

So my father couldn't find work, didn't know what to do, where to settle down. And you could stay only so long in the absorption center and live in a tent. And so there was a government program that if you wanted to become a farmer, subsidized by the government, they would give you a piece of land, build a house, and give you a cow, and become a farmer.

And your mother certainly knew that work growing up.

Yeah. So they decided they would do that. There was no other option. You know, my father worked a few hours here on construction work, or picking oranges, or things like that. But this was not an income we could live on.

Do you know if your parents ever thought to have another child?

My mother told me that in Poland, my father wanted very much to have a child after they got together. He wanted very much. And she decided not to. She didn't want one. And then she regretted later. She said, she should have had another child. But she couldn't just face all of that then, after the war.

How were her spirits after the war?

Well, after the war in Poland, they formed all the friendships. And after a few years that we were living in that town, there, that town really became Jewish. And they had the Jewish theater. And so we would go to the Yiddish theater and a social life. You were invited. And there were weddings. And there were-- people were inviting each other. And so it was a new life, a new beginning. Yeah, it was a new life and a new beginning, yeah.

Then in Israel, I think the spirits were also pretty high, but it was very difficult. Yeah, but I didn't see my parents desperate, crying, or saying what did we do? We should have stayed in Poland-- never, no regrets. They were very happy that came to Israel. They felt at home. We needed to be among Jewish people. We needed that security. After what we went through, we needed to be there. Yeah.

So they signed me up in one kibbutz so I could learn the language. And it was not the right kind, because I was the only immigrant girl. The other kids were Israeli. So they were already speaking Hebrew. And I didn't fit in. I always had a hard time fitting in.

And that was so difficult for me, especially in Israel, where I love to be. And I liked Israel. But still, I could not fit in with the Israelis, because I didn't know the language.

And I was so different. I was so close to my mother. I was not that free spirit like the Israelis were. And they went through a difficult time. It was hard. And I lived-- every time I think I had some kind of difficulties, I would withdraw, and just be by myself, and read. And that's it.

So that's how you coped with it--

Yeah, yeah.

--to help yourself?

Right, yeah. And somebody noticed me on that farm where my parents settled down, that I really didn't fit in on the farm. I had no interest. And then I would babysit here and there a little bit. So that young man took me to Tel Aviv to some different agencies. And he says, well, I find you some agency where you can go. Maybe they can set you some place up to get an education, or learn a profession, or a trade, or something.

And so they said that there was a need for nurses in Israel at the time. This was a growing field. And they needed nurses very badly with all the wounded that they had, all this from the terrorist attacks.

So they were planning to open a school for nurses, and gather immigrant young people, and train them, and teach them Hebrew, and educate them a little bit, and then send them to the school. And so he signed me up into that program.

That took a while. It didn't start right away. So I still stayed on the farm. And my parents were struggling. They didn't make enough to feed the cow. They had to borrow money just to feed the cow. At night, my father had to go on patrol. Every man, they took turns going on patrols against the terrorists, because we were close to the border. Every place was the border. Wherever you turned around was a border.

Well, eventually, the time came to go to that kibbutz. And they put me on a bus. And they sent me all the way to North Tel Aviv, there in the Galilee, in Kibbutz [Galuyot. ?] And that was a new life for me. I met all these young people. I was what, 15 and 1/2? This was 1950-- oh, I can't count anymore. I don't know, '51, I think.

Yes.

'51, yeah-- beginning of '51. So that means I wasn't even 16 years old yet. And most of the kids were little older. I was always the youngest. They were 19, 18, some were 20. And they were young people from Romania, from Hungary, from Egypt, from Iraq.

And we were all in the same boat. We all spoke broken Hebrew. And we, all of them, we loved each other. We formed a bond. And we were attending classes together. And then we were working in the fields, and all four hours of school, four hours of work. And we were working in the laundry, and the dining hall, and everything, doing all.

And I liked it very much. I liked it so much that I wanted to stay as a member in the kibbutz. But my parents didn't let me. They said, no, you're going to become a nurse.

So we stayed in that kibbutz. And they taught us about Jewish history, and the Tanakh, and opened my eyes a little bit to everything. And finally, we were all ready. We graduated.

And we were all shipped out to the school for nurses, which was set up in a hospital in-- it's a little bit south of Tel Aviv, called [PLACE NAME] That hospital, next to a military base, that hospital is still there. As a matter of fact, my son, Joseph, was born in that hospital later. Yeah. So it was wonderful.

By that time, my parents couldn't make it on the farm. And they sold that farm. And my father found a job in a cement factory, became a manager in the cement factory. And they bought a little house not far from there. It was not far from that hospital where I was studying.

Now, this was, we were living in the hospital, and working there, and attending classes. It took a year. And then we had the graduation. We all became vocational nurses. And we started working in the hospital and doing shifts. And I've been working ever since.

Oh, really?

No, actually, I was working as a nurse since '52 until '61, until I got married.

Were you pleased that you had this trade, this skill?

Very much, but frustrated. It was a very good field for me. I was a very good nurse. And I liked the profession. But I was frustrated because I didn't go far enough. I wanted to be a registered nurse. And I think I should have been a registered nurse. And because of the circumstances, I-- Buy you couldn't afford to with work?

Well, I would have gone to school another two years. And I don't know if I had enough schooling at the time to pass the entrance exams. I probably could have, because there were other people like me.

And again, at the time, in Israel was that if you had a little money or connections, you could do it. And I was thinking about it for many, many years. I always said, well, maybe. But then my parents needed my help. And everything I earned went to my parents to pay for the house and so on.

Was your mother working?

No, no. She stayed home. She worked very hard at home.

Oh, I'm sure.

And we had a beautiful garden, and fruit trees that she maintained, and chickens for a while, and turkeys for a while. Yeah. But I was very happy that I chose that field, somehow, because at that time, I really didn't know. But all my life, I felt that I should have been college graduated. I should have had a profession. I would have been a wonderful doctor--

Yes.

--and a physician, a healer. And I didn't have the opportunities.

Well, that's one of the big losses, as you said.

Yeah. And somehow, all these changes in my life, and all this adjustment that I had to go through, and sometimes, I feel guilty that maybe I wasn't strong enough, not pursuing hard enough to go after what I wanted. But somehow, things have worked out.

So then you begin your nursing. And just as you said, you gave all the money to your parents.

Yes.

You needed a home?

I was the-- no, basically, I lived in a hospital. That's how it was set up in those days. If your parents were in another town, you wouldn't commute every day. So we had rooms at the hospital where I worked. I was transferred to another, to Tel Hashomer, one of the largest hospitals in Israel, outside of Tel Aviv.

It used to be in a British military base during the British occupation. Then it became an Israeli military base and a hospital. So there were barracks there with little rooms.

And the nurses would each-- two or three nurses would share a room, communal showers, like living in a kibbutz. The hospital would provide the uniforms. And there was a dining hall. So basically, we lived. We had some clothes with us. Everybody had a couple things just to change.

And we would run home once or twice a week, take the bus, and just go home, and eat a good meal, and come back to the hospital. And that was the lifestyle.

What did you do for fun?

For fun? Oh, I used to love going swimming, to the beach a lot, or to a swimming pool. I loved dancing. Oh, dancing was my passion and still is my passion, all my life-- dancing and music. And movies, not too many-- very, very few-- and just being with friends.

Yeah, so your social life improved a lot?

Oh, yeah. Yes. Yeah, at that time, yes. Yeah. I was dating here and there and had a lot of girlfriends. And we would go out with a whole group of girls, and go to Tel Aviv, and walk in the street. And boys would pick us up. Or we would pick them up and things like that, you know, make friends, new friends. And dancing was big part, big part. We loved it. Yeah.

And during that time, when I was working, I always, in the back of my mind that you know, you should really do something for your education. So I signed up in a school for languages. I decided that it would be a good idea to learn English.

And I signed up for the evening classes at that school in Tel Aviv. And then shortly afterwards, I met my husband-to-be, who spoke only Italian and English. So English became quite useful.

How did you meet him?

How did I meet him? I met him on a bus. I was going to work to the-- I was coming from my parents' house from a few days off and going back to the hospital. And I met my girlfriend on a bus. She was also coming back, because we worked night shifts, a whole week, and then we would get three days off, something like that.

And so we met in Tel Aviv on the bus going to the hospital-- number 70, that was the line. And he picked the bus up on the way. He was going to the hospital to visit his sick cousin. He was, at the time, visiting in Israel. He came from Italy just for a visit. And he was going to continue to go to the United States. So he was just visiting in Israel. And love at

first sight.

Really?

Yeah. I saw this man. And I told my girlfriends, that's the man I want.

What did you do about it?

Oh, I-- he noticed me immediately. We made eye contact. And there was chemistry immediately, without ever speaking a word. I was just-- and then so we rode on the bus, arrived to the hospital. And we came down. And he started talking to me in English and asking some directions. And I gave him the direction.

And that was it. And I was devastated. I told them, my god, what am I going to do? I'll never see him again. How can I? But so I knew where he was going, which ward. And I didn't have the guts to tell him, too, that I'm interested. So I sent my girlfriend.

And she followed him. And she went to him. And she says, you know, my girlfriend, the one that gave you direction, she would like to meet you very much. And oh, he said, yeah, I would like to meet her too. And she told him, she's very embarrassed. She's never done this before.

And so he came. He met me. And I told him, too, I have never done this before. And I felt very embarrassed. This was not my nature. And he says, I admire this in a woman.

And everything clicked. We never separated since that moment. I had to work my eight-hour shift. And he stayed for eight hours and waited for me. And we went out on a date that same night. And we went out every day for the next 10 months, as long as he stayed in Israel. And we knew that we wanted to get married.

What's his name?

Amadeo.

Amadeo Cesana?

Cesana.

Cesana.

Yes.

Was he a Jew in Italy during the war?

Actually, he was born in Libya, in Tripoli. And he was educated in Italy. But he lived during his childhood in Tripoli. His mother was from Tripoli. His father was from Greece. And yeah, this was a Jewish family. His father was a rabbi. And they lived during the war in Tripoli.

I can't believe they weren't affected by the Holocaust during that.

Not really, no. And there was some, but not-- after the war, he went to Italy. And he was for a while in an orphanage in Italy. And then he attended school in Italy. And then he found, when he was teenager, a job with the Jewish Agency in Naples, where the immigrants used to go by it, through the Jewish Agency. So they are the ones that sent him to Israel.

But his intention was always to come to the States. His mother was in the States. And his brother was already here and his sister. So he wanted in. He had just one brother left in Italy. So he wanted to join his family in the states he always liked the United States.

He worked for Americans. And he worked for English. There were English bases in Tripoli. And so he knew the language very well, and the culture, and the customs. And he knew what he wanted in life.

And so since he left Israel, and since I met him, it took about three years until we finally got together. And we met. He left for the United States. The plan was for me to join him. I was not able to do that. In the '60s, it was very hard to get a visa-- in the late '50s and '60s.

And so he said he would join the American Army. And he would ask to be sent to Europe. And then he will come to Israel. And we'll get married. And that's exactly what he did. He joined the army.

They sent him to Germany. And he took time off. And he came to Israel. He sent me a telegram that he was coming in a few days. And we are getting married.

So my father prepared the wedding. He bought him a suit. And he rented a hall, and musicians. And it was a lovely wedding, over 100 people waiting-- all our neighbors, of course, and his family. He has a large family in Israel. And that's it. And the marriage lasted 25 years.

That's a long time.

Yes, it is, yeah. Now, we are happily divorced. And we are friends. Yeah, we are friends. We are like family.

Yes, yes.

Yeah.

And so after your marriage, then, what did you do?

After I was married, I joined my husband in Germany, because he had another year to serve there. And I had very mixed feelings about going to Germany. And so I remember, I decided, I will go to Germany. I'll be a proud Jew. And I will not be afraid to show anybody. And I bought myself a Magen David on a little chain. And I wore it always since then.

And he was stationed in a beautiful, little town, Idar-Oberstein. It was so picturesque, hills. And he rented this tiny apartment in a German home. They lived in that same house. And on the other side was that little apartment, separate entrance. And I came to Frankfurt. He picked me up and introduced me to the PX, and to the American foods, and drinks, and American culture.

And we settled down in that apartment. And the landlords were such warm people and so devoted to me. And they took me under their wings, like a member of the family. She taught me how to cook and how to knit. And she took me shopping with her. And he would let his car-- allow my husband once in a while to drive it. We didn't have a car. And they looked after me very much. And my parents were so grateful that they were so good to me that they sent them some oranges from Israel. And we corresponded with them for quite a few years after that.

Did you ever think to go and look up the Meiraus.

Yes. I wanted to do that after I was married and I came to Germany. But my husband said it was dangerous, that they would suspect, because this was in East Berlin, under the Russian occupation. And at that time, he says, they would think you are some spy or something. And I have clearance, you know, the military. And he said it was too dangerous for me to. So I never had the chance. But I still would like very much to go and see that place.

What about-- did you have any reactions to you in Germany wearing the star? Did you notice any?

Everybody was very nice to me. Of course, it helps when you can talk and communicate with people. And at that time, you know, I was a little rusty, my German. But it took me two weeks and I was speaking fluently again. And people

straightforward to my face were very nice, very interested in me, very interested in my background. And I had no negative experiences whatsoever, none.

Did you-- were you interested or did you talk about your Holocaust experiences with people?

Only with the landlords. They knew about that. I told them everything-- how my family-- and they were crying. And they said, they didn't know how bad it was and what was going on. And they felt so terrible for me. Yeah.

Did you ever think to go to Poland?

Oh, I'm thinking now about it. It's one of the things that I would love to do very much-- very, very much. First of all, I'd like to visit the grave of my brother. And my dream, really, is to go with my sons to Poland, to Warsaw, and kind of go back to my roots, just to see it, because I hear that Warsaw is rebuilt like it used to be.

I remember the address where we used to live, and the apartment number. And I would like to see it, just to be there, to walk the streets that-- where we lived and where we went through so much.

That's one of my dreams, to go with my sons, and then to visit Israel together with my sons. I was there once with my sons, but it was such a rushed trip. And we didn't have time to experience everything I wanted to see.

So did you feel that you had any negativity, or anxiety, or anger toward either the Germans or the Poles at that time in the early '60s when you went back? Was it the early '60s?

In Germany?

Yeah.

In Germany, yeah, it was '61. Yeah, actually, we came. And I was married November '61. We spent '62 in Germany. Yeah. And I felt apprehensive at the beginning. I looked at everybody. And I thought, well, was this person a Nazi? Was he in a concentration camp? Who is that man? And who is this woman?

But after a while, I think that feeling went away. And I didn't have any contact with any other Germans except the landlords-- some contact with American families from the base. But basically, we kept to ourselves.

But I never felt threatened. And never felt afraid because I didn't work a whole year. And he was busy on the base. And so I would walk the whole town back and forth. And I always wore my star and didn't care who saw it. I never had any fear, though-- felt very comfortable.

Did you ever hear any more about the fate of the life of Mrs. Elevein and her daughters?

Of who?

Mrs. Elevein?

Oh, Mrs. Elevein from Poland. Oh, you remember the name. I'm surprised. I think that my mother made contact with her after the war. I don't know how. And one of the daughters came to the town where we were living, in Dzierzoni³w, and stayed with us for a few days.

And I remember that my mother sent her back home with a trunk full of clothes and things. And she gave her money. And they corresponded for a while. And then we lost contact. I have no idea. Yeah, after we left Poland, there was no contact anymore with anybody-- not with my cousin, the one that that remained in Poland.

So after '62, you went back to the United States?

After '62, at the end of-- I was pregnant already. And so yes, he was getting ready to leave back for the United States. And I wanted to go back to Israel, because I was on a leave of absence from the hospital. And so I needed to resign officially. And there were money that they were supposed to pay me and so on.

So he took me back to Israel. We traveled together. And we stayed together about a week. And he went back to Germany. And the plan was that I would go to the United States directly from Israel and meet him in the United States.

Well, I started working a little bit again in the hospital. And then my mother had an unfortunate accident. She fell at home. And she crushed her hip bone. That was an accident that happened inside the house, you know, slippery floor and so. So she was in bad condition.

And at that time, they didn't have the technology yet to fix those broken bones like they do it now. And took a long time. And she was suffering ever since with that problem-- it never healed completely. Her hip was always stiff. She couldn't move around. And she had pains ever since.

And especially in the beginning, I couldn't leave her when she was still totally disabled. So I stayed. And I ended up staying in Israel until my son was born. I stayed eight months in Israel. And Joseph was born in July of '63.

And we had a nice celebration in the hospital. I stayed a week in the hospital. And then they did the bris in the hospital with all my friends, and cousins, relatives came. My father arranged everything. And I remember, my mother came, and looked at the baby through the window. And I'll never forget that look on her face-- what a beautiful baby, the most beautiful baby in the world. Yeah, she was very happy.

So I stayed with them a little bit longer until Joe was three months old. And then I went to the United States. It was very hard for my parents to leave them. I mean, they was used to the baby.

And my father didn't sleep nights. He was watching the baby. So god forbid if a fly or something came out. He would wake me up in the middle of the night. Why don't you watch the baby? How can you sleep? Go feed the baby. Yeah. And 2 and 1/2 years later, I had a little Adrian, who was born in Hollywood.

In Hollywood?

In Hollywood, yeah.

Is that where you had settled?

Well, my husband was still in the army when I came. And we were in San Francisco, actually. He was stationed at the Presidio when I was pregnant with my second son. And he received orders to be sent to Vietnam. So that's why we went. He sent me down to Los Angeles. And his brother and wife were living in Hollywood. So I moved in with them so I wouldn't be by myself. And I lived with them for a year.

That worked out?

It worked out very well, yeah. We were very close. We had a good relationship. I learned a lot of Italian, because my sister-in-law is from Milano-- and Italian cooking, a lot Italian language, and everything Italian. And it was nice. She has a son and a daughter. And they're very close to my children's age. So they were like brothers and sisters always. Yeah.

And your husband did go to Vietnam?

Yes. Yeah. He served one year in Vietnam. When he came back, Adrian was eight months old.

Well, that must have been a worry for you, that--

Terrible.

--he would go to war.

Terrible, yeah. Terrible. Especially that you could see everything on television then. And so I just spent all the time smoking cigarettes, and drinking espresso, and writing letters to my husband every day, every day.

And how-- and your parents were still in Israel struggling?

They were in Israel, yeah. My father had a hard time. My mother couldn't do all the things. She couldn't go shopping. And so life was difficult for them too since my mother had that accident.

And in 1967, when the war broke out in Israel, it became unbearable. They couldn't. You know, they were-- couldn't go to the bomb shelter. And everybody was required. It was just very tough. So my father put my mother on a plane and sent her to me. So since then, we told him to sell everything, come, and join us. And so he came about six months later. And we have been living together ever since.

So they came to your home? They moved in with you?

They came. My husband wanted them to be with us. I want them to be with us. And we lived together.

And so they stayed with you through their old age?

For 16 years, yes. For 16 years.

And then I gather they both have passed away since then?

Well, this was '83, '84. I separated from my husband. And my parents' health was failing. They were-- my mother, especially, was in very bad shape. She had diabetes, also, and all kinds of complications. And I just became totally disabled when my husband left me.

When he moved out, I was not able to take care of my parents. And I did the most difficult thing I ever did in my life is put them in a home for Jewish parents in Oakland. I didn't want to do it. I really didn't want to do it. My father was encouraging me to do it. He said, it's better for us, better for you. My mother resisted to the very last minute. And I felt like a traitor.

Yes.

Well, I went through a very hard time. But I had to do it. And I did it. And unfortunately, they didn't live very long afterwards, because it was not the place for my mother, especially. She couldn't adjust. And her health was failing. And there was one medical crisis after another-- emergency room. Every time, I had to be available, because nobody could talk to her, communicate.

So they would call me in the middle of the night to come to the Merritt-- Samuel Merritt Hospital, come to this emergency room, that emergency room. I spent a fortune to keep my parents there and for the medical costs.

My husband was very generous. He never-- he was willing to give everything. And he always did, whatever we could afford. So I feel that I have given them what the best that I knew. But if I had more wisdom, I would have arranged my life differently. And if my parents-- you know, but--

Easy to say after.

Yeah, that's-- yeah, that's past now. So they lived there one year. And my mother passed away after many difficult crises and suffering. And my father passed away about six months later.

He was sickly too?

He was not that sickly, but well, he had a war injury. His knee was shattered in a concentration camp. And that was never fixed right. And he suffered. He had difficulty, painful-- always in pain when he walked or sat down. And the knee was stiff. And he suffered with this all his life.

And he didn't have very serious health problems. And he was an exceptional man in that respect, that his attitude toward life-- he was always upbeat, and very optimistic, and had a very, very good outlook on life. He would never let anything get him down. And he would cheer everybody up around him. He would sing and tell jokes. And that was his nature all his life.

But after my mother passed away, he felt-- for the first few months, he would sit shiva. And he felt that he had some purpose, you know, to do that. And after that, he fell into a deep depression. And he talked about dying. He didn't want to live.

But it was intermixed with his telling jokes. And you know, so for a moment, he would say, I'm tired. I don't want to live anymore. And then the next minute, he would tell jokes with the nurses and with everybody that came to see him.

And so he was seen by a doctor. And he was giving some medication. He went for evaluation to a psychiatrist and didn't get the right help. And I feel a little bitter toward the home for Jewish parents, because he was depressed. And everybody knew that. This was on the record. And he was treated for it.

Well, one day, they called me at 5 o'clock in the morning. I saw my father a couple nights before that. And he told me, oh, I don't want to live anymore. And I'm all alone. And take me back home. And then he would tell me some jokes. And I told him, everything is going to be all right. I can't take him back home. I'll come visit every day. We'll be together. And we said goodbye.

And the next day, they called me 5 o'clock in the morning, Mrs. Cesana, your father is dead. I said, what do you mean? On the telephone, what happened? Well, we found him in the bathtub drowned in the middle of the night. So I don't know if it was an accident, if it was intentional. I don't know.

You haven't ever figured it out?

No. And I was too weak, and too tired, and too crushed myself with all my personal problems, with the problems of the divorce, and the loss of my mother, and now the loss of my father to cope with it.

Yes.

And I didn't have anybody--

Yes.

--to help me out with it. I was not very close during that period with my ex-husband. And I didn't even tell him anything. I felt he had another life. And he didn't want to-- with all the problems I went through with my mother, I was all by myself. My children couldn't cope with it. So I was always there. And came a time when I couldn't do it anymore.

You were exhausted.

Yeah. But they lived a long-- my father was 85 when he passed away. But he could have lived a little bit more. He would-- and I don't know. But my mother was also around that age.

So they had their last days together?

Yeah. Yes. They were together all the time, yeah.

And so you, I presume, had to get a job and start rebuilding your life once again?

Yeah. Well, for the first two or three years, I didn't get a job because I didn't work for many years. And I wouldn't know where to start from. And I just didn't make sense to me to work for \$5, \$6, \$7 an hour at that time when my husband was so successful. And we were so affluent at the time.

And so I didn't do anything for a while. And after I got out of my depression and back on my feet with the help of some friends who kicked me out of the house. And they said, you better start going to the Jewish center, and singles, and this, and that, and get in shape. So I did.

I went on a diet. I lost about 80 pounds. I looked 20 years younger. I got in shape. I started swimming. I swam the Maui Channel in Hawaii-- 12 miles. And I was in terrific shape. And I started going out. And men were looking at me very interested.

And I started having a good time. But I could not consider anybody. I was-- it took me many years to get over my husband. So in the meantime, there were other problems.

His business failed and financial difficulties, which I was not prepared for. I never handled any finances. And suddenly, I was left all alone to cope with everything. And I was very careful. I always saved my money. He was the big spender. I wasn't.

So there came a time that he came to me and he needed my help. So I gave it to him. Every penny I had, I gave to him. We were still married, but we were separated. And I didn't have to give him anything, but I did, because I cared about him. And I knew that also, it was also selfish. And if he would be well-off, I would be well-off because I trusted him. And he never disappointed me.

But times were very hard. And we both lost everything. And so I had to go look for a job. And slowly, slowly, I had one job in a skilled nursing facility in medical records. Then I had another job for a few months. And then I had another job with another company, also to do with medical forms, medical insurance. And then this is the final job.

But since that, was one crisis after another. The last blow was the financial difficulties, that I was really totally unprepared for, with the house that I didn't know how to make the payments for, the refinancing and taking every penny out of it.

And you know, and then finally, when I sold the house, the worst time when was the crisis with real estate. And then I sold it for so much less than I thought I would get. And so it's just difficult.

It is.

Yeah. But I feel that I have reached a place now, where I am making ends meet. And he's helping me with his help. My job couldn't. From my job, I couldn't make it. But in combination my job and my ex-husband's help-- and my son lives with me now. And so you know, life is fine. I feel at peace. I feel more or less content. And I feel just so fortunate to have my two sons.

Yes.

I have wonderful sons. And I live in a beautiful town in a beautiful country. I'm fortunate to be in America. And things are not bad. It's all right.

Have you talked with your sons about all your Holocaust experiences?

Yes. Yeah, they know.

And is it your younger son or your oldest son that lives with you?

My older son, Joseph. Joseph.

And your other son, does he live near?

He lives right now in Discovery Bay. But we are very close too. I talk to him every other day. And he pops in now and then. Yeah. That's my baby. And they are just both wonderful, just exceptional. I'm very proud of them.

Well, I have a good relationship with my ex-husband too. We celebrated my younger son's 28th birthday. And my ex-husband came. I invited him with his little five-year-old boy and with his wife's 12-year-old son. And I made spaghetti for them. And they loved it. And then we played hide and seek with his little boy. And everybody had a grand time.

So you're almost like two mixed families into one in a way?

Well, this is-- not with his wife. I'm not-- I don't know if I could feel comfortable in her presence. But with my ex-husband, yes, I'm OK. And I like his little boy very much too. He's a sweet little boy.

So you've come to peace with it?

This was the first-- yeah, I have come to peace. And if you would have asked me a few years ago, it was the most inconceivable thing to me. I never thought I would get over the loss of my husband, never. But I did.

Yes.

And I'm surprised by it. It really surprises me.

You've gotten over so many losses.

Yes.

And it's OK now. Somehow, it's all right. I lost my wonderful cousin, who I loved and I could lean on when I had all the difficulties. And she would take care of me-- the only person that was close to me after my parents passed away.

And she passed away so suddenly. And she was in such good health still, and had so much life, and had so much to live for. That was also a terrible loss to me two years ago. Yeah. Well, I hope that from now on, there will be just good things happening.

I hope so too.

Do you have any other memories or any message you would like to leave?

Oh, I'm sure there's so many things still. You know, it's hard to remember everything when you speak about it. Those thoughts come back later. There are so many details, and instances, and things that happened that I cannot recall right now.

With all the troubles that you've had, what do you think has been your strength to bring you through? And you seem to have such a cheerfulness inside you too and a strength.

I really don't know. I don't know if it's my personality or if it's something I picked up from my stepfather. He was always such a upbeat person. And at the time, I didn't recognize this in him. This was part of him.

But now that I'm older, and he's gone, and when I look back, I see how remarkable he was. But I think I have a

personality, probably, that way too. I see a lot of good around me, a lot of beauty, and a lot of value in life.

There are those hurdles that happen once in a while that you have to overcome that are so difficult. But the road ahead is beautiful. There is so much to see, and enjoy, and experience. And I'm just very hopeful that things will be good.

I'm very hopeful for my sons. I'm really looking forward to see them married, and settled, and with their families, and happy. I like to see that very much. I like to see whole new family and new generations growing up around me. Yeah. And I hope they won't let me wait too long. Yeah.

Oh, I don't know, is there any possibility?

Not yet. Nothing yet.

Well, I want to thank you so much for doing this interview and having the courage to speak these difficult things. And as we've said before, you have an extraordinary memory for details, and thoughts, and feelings. Just thank you very much.

Well, thank you for your patience. Well, you're very welcome.

Thank you very much.