

Slim, beautiful.

I'm Sandra Bendayan. I'm here interviewing Rina Evan. Today is May the 28th, 1996. We're doing this interview for the Holocaust Oral History Project, and John Grant is our producer. Would you start please by telling us what was your name when you were born, if it's different than it is now.

Yeah. Well, I was born in-- shall I tell you where I was born?

Yes, please.

Sofia-- it's the capital of Bulgaria. And my name was-- I was named-- you know, a Jewish population had different names from non-Jewish. So my name was mostly like French. We kept those French names or Hebrew names. Because as far as the Jews have, still they kept those names, even though they lived in different countries.

My name was Desi when I was born.

D-E-S-I?

Yeah, Desi Evan. Not Evan, Mavorch with C-H.

Could you spell that please?

M-A-V-O-R-C-H-- Mavorch. And my parents were many generations. I believe they came from the Sephardi when they left Spain in 1496, you know, the Inquisition time? Anything else?

Why was this French influence in--

My family. We spoke-- the second language was French in the schools. You know, it's like the diplomatic language. So they always took French names. My sister name was Rene, but when we got to Israel, changed to Ruth. But this was her name. My younger sister was Stella. This is not Bulgarian. This is Stella-- it's like a Estrella in Spanish. Because we spoke Spanish, we changed it a little bit. It became-- but they could tell that we're not Bulgarians.

When we opened-- you know, on the street, no. But when we said our names and family names, Mavorch is not-- like the Russians have those -ov. Their names end with -ov. And ours were Hebrew names, Levy, Mavorch. There were a lot of Mizrahi. And all of them, they kept their names.

So the Bulgarian last names end with -of, too?

Most of it. Yeah. Like Dimitrov, we used to have this, the prime minister of Bulgaria-- -ov. Or to add to it, -va, or if it's a female -a, -va. So they knew that we are not-- we were not Christians.

Bulgaria had many population. Turkish-- we spoke Turkish, too-- my mother, all of them. They were occupied by the Turks for many years, so they all spoke many languages.

French was the second. My father studied and he became a certified public accountant. And he had to have-- he went to German college. And then he went to work for Germany in Germany's bank.

So the Bulgarians-- did they have French first names, too, at times?

Yes. I had in school. They called themselves different things at home, you know? From the one-- the Bulgarian name at school. But whoever wanted to change it-- Jacque, they call him instead of Ivan, or they changed different things.

So the Jewish population was immediately known more for the last names than for the first names.

The first names, too, that were not Bulgarian. Yeah.

I have a Shem Tov, my uncle, yeah? You know what is Shem Tov? It's a good name. The name is the family name, which is not Bulgarian. They all came from Hebrew-- from the Hebrew names.

When were you born?

I was born the 29th of August, 1933.

And what were your parents' names?

My mother's name was Fortuna. It's French, which she changed in Israel to Mazel. It's French, Fortuna. It's good luck.

My father's name was Sabeti, [NON-ENGLISH]. My son is named after him-- but in Hebrew, because he was born in Israel.

My daughter's name is Clara. I have a daughter and son. Clara-- she's after my husband's grandmother. We had to name for the relatives that perished.

And did you have brothers and sisters?

I still have two sisters. And my mother was expecting, but she had to miscarry, because the German came.

You say she had a miscarriage?

She had to.

And it was a boy.

She had an abortion?

Abortion, yeah. Because everything was confiscated-- no jobs, no work. We couldn't work any place, and she said, what can I do whenever there are-- there are three girls and a boy. It was a boy.

Did she have the abortion done medically?

Medically-- by our cousin, which is a doctor.

I see.

A gynecologist.

Were abortions legal in Bulgaria at that time?

By doctor, I don't know.

I mean, it wasn't-- it had to be done kind of on the--

No, he had the office in his home. She went to him, and it was performed-- very sadly, but what can we do? I told my daughter, and she cried. You know, what can you do?

What are your sisters' names?

My older sister, we have 20 months difference. Rene-- she changed it to Ruthie in Israel. And the younger ones is called Stella-- Esther.

And are you in the middle?

I'm the middle one.

OK. And what kind of work-- you said your father became an accountant. Was he always an accountant?

We had a property in Sofia, and there was a store downstairs. And I remember we lived above it. And it was three floors of apartment house.

Downstairs they told me they used to have a porcelain store, you know, what the Czechs are-- beautiful. But some of the merchandise was still in the attic. I don't know why. I didn't find out why he closed it.

And then we became-- first he was the accountant when he was young the World War I-- they called him to come back from Germany. And he joined the Bulgarian army. Later on, he was a prisoner of war. He ran away from the French army.

Was he in prison in France?

He ran away with a friend, and the friend stepped on a mine. And nothing was left from the friend, he said. And he ran back to Bulgaria-- my father.

And then, very sadly, for the Second World War, Bulgaria was with the Germans. The first one they were against it, the second they were with it. Because the King was from the German descent, so they were like-- they joined the Germans.

And it sounds like you were saying these middle class people in your town.

Yeah. We had a property, which years ago was on the outskirts of Sofia. And my father used to say there were so many fruit trees over there. One time he got lost, and he couldn't come back to the houses. He slept under the trees.

But then later on, you know how a city expands. And they built all around it when I was there. This was the center of the city-- not the main center, which is in Bulgaria. The center is not like here offices. You have the churches, the parliament, the theaters, opera-- everything is in the center.

So we had-- this property was borrowed money from the bank, you know, and they built these three floors-- apartment house, which belonged to the grandparents, plus another brother. Another brother-- my father had two brothers. They had another property later on. Everything was confiscated.

And this was during the Germans, yeah? My father came one day and said he was working for my uncle. My uncle was a lawyer. So at that particular time, he was working for my father-- my uncle, my mother's brother.

And then one day I was walking with him, and he said he saw a lot of army came, you know, green uniforms, blond people, tall. And he said, who is this? We Bulgarians are handsome, but this was something strange. The German army walked in. This was in 1942.

My father spoke. They asked him something. My father spoke German, but he was so frightened. Right away, I go back home.

We had a big synagogue in Sofia, which was not very far from us. It was a Sephardic main synagogue. Plus, there was a-- we had like a Jewish neighborhood. There was Beit Ha'am, we used to call it. It was a Beit Ha'am, in Bulgarian, yeah?

We knew this building had-- it was like a government. We had to pay taxes. The Jews had to pay taxes to this. And anything that became important, we had to go to them, and we got all the instructions-- the Jewish population from this Beit Ha'am.

When the Germans came, one day I walked by the synagogue. Next to the synagogues there was a private Romanian school. There was right away a truck. They arrested-- they took all of the people.

From our synagogue, we were afraid to go now to the prayers on a Friday-- Saturday morning, too. Right away we didn't know what to do, so we had to consult the government-- this Beit Ha'am-- every time we needed something. Like when we needed matzahs, we went to them, and we bought it from there-- nobody back in Sofia.

Later on, when it was the war, we got rations instead of bread. My mother brought the rations there, and we got matzah-- matzot.

And we got the notice, they start confiscating. The next day, they start confiscating everything. My uncle was a lawyer. He had to give up his telephone and his radio. He had to bring it to the bank. There was a National Bulgarian Bank-- beautiful radio. They didn't want any Jews to listen to the outside. It used to be-- had a shortwave, used to call it. At night you could hear information.

The war started. But the Germans came from Romania. Somehow they crossed from Greece. They came from the south. Greece was already under attack. We didn't know. We heard a lot of noise, a lot of-- used to say they're going to send the Jews to Polsha. We didn't know. Polsha was Poland. We didn't know what it means.

And then another announcement came. All the Jews have to bring their jewelries to the banks. And we were so frightened. They started beating people and start arresting them. Every neighborhood had a police.

And on the basement, they had those rooms. They used to beat up people over there. So somebody didn't bring the jewelry, they beat up. They thought somebody had, and he didn't bring it. They start beating people.

Were these the Germans or were they Bulgarians?

Germans. They got together. They got together.

So some of your friends became-- they call me names. They call me-- my grandmother used to live in a nice area with a nice and very new apartment. My uncle went to law school. So when he finished, there was an apartment down on the first ground floor.

There was a family that they used to clean the house. We called them [NON-ENGLISH]. It's the French word. I used to play with them. And all of a sudden one day they called me [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] is-- Turks used to call the Jews [NON-ENGLISH]. It's a Turkish word.

But I went to play with one. From one day to the next, you know, go home. [NON-ENGLISH] go to Palestine. That's what they told me.

What does [NON-ENGLISH] mean?

[NON-ENGLISH] is bad word for a Jew in Turkish. So slowly they started to get-- they took all the young men to the mountains to build roads in the mountains. This was the government of the Bulgarians.

They call it-- we used to call the police, polizei, special police. They had a special police. They start going and killing communists. They said communists, so they ran to the mountains. A lot of Jews ran to the mountains, too. I don't with what purpose, but something was wrong, you know-- just took off. There was a special police. They were killing people in the mountains.

Then my uncle went to work. He lived in an area not far from the palace. We have a big palace, the King's Palace. And after this, further up they had a big park. It's called the King's Park. It had a little lake with ice skating-- used to freeze. They used to ice skate, and a cafe-- a restaurant like a little bridge.

We used to go there. We stopped going. They were afraid to go to any place. My uncle used to live further out.

They said we had to live in a certain area, you know, around this Beit Ha'am. There were a lot of streets-- a lot to live over there. We were included in this area.

You already were living in that area.

Yeah.

You were living in a Jewish neighborhood, more or less.

It's not Jewish. We had a lot of neighbors Jewish. Across were relatives of my uncle's in-laws. They were Jews, but there were a few mixed.

But this Beit Ha'am was there. You could buy-- they spoke a lot of Spanish around that few streets. I notice when we get more older, we spoke more Spanish.

Speaking of that, what languages did you learn? You learned Bulgarian.

Bulgarian-- school. And we took a lot of French. You had to choose. In high school, there's French. We chose French. Even in junior high, I took French. But when the Russians came, they removed everything-- only Russian.

Did you learn Russian at that point?

Yeah.

And did you know Hebrew?

Hebrew, no-- only when went to Israel.

And what about Ladino?

Ladino at home.

At home. So you were speaking Bulgarian, Ladino, and later French.

My mother spoke Turkish. And my grandparents, because they grew up in a different area in Bulgaria, and there were a lot of Turks-- so they had the cleaning woman, they had the washing woman, and everything was Turkish ladies. So they spoke-- my mother, too, my father, too.

Did you speak Turkish, too?

I started to learn after the Germans came. We had to move to this area-- this particular area.

So a ghetto was made.

There was no wall. There was no-- just from this street to that street. And this was-- we went to the Beit Ha'am, they gave us those instructions.

Now, we used to have four rooms-- big apartment. So two people per room. So we had to move to the front rooms with

my mother.

And I haven't mentioned this for many years, but my father committed suicide. He couldn't take it. You know, he was a quiet man and depressed. One day we came home. He was hanging on the chandelier. I was nine.

You saw him?

So my mother was screaming. It was on Sunday. Bring a knife. Bring a knife. I brought a knife from the kitchen. And she cut him. He was dead.

So this had to be 1942. We buried him-- quiet, quiet, quiet. Don't go to the synagogue. Don't do this. We brought the coffin at home, from the home right away. They used to have a special carriage with horses for the Jews-- with a Jewish sign. Nothing-- fast, fast, fast, straight to the cemetery.

Why was that? Why couldn't you just bury a person as usual?

Because the Germans were there-- to be quiet, quiet, quiet. Don't do this. Don't do this-- quietly. So this was a gloomy 1942.

How did your mother cope after that?

She was depressed. There was no meaning of support, because everything was property rental. There were mortgages, but everything confiscated. But the mortgage was still going on. You had to pay the mortgage.

We had a friend, a lawyer. So he used to come and used to prepare for my mother the receipts. It's a government stamp you have to put on all receipts. It's legal procedure. It was very bad.

How did she get any money?

My uncle was a lawyer. He was in the mountains with no money. My grandfather used to-- when they came, they used to live in a different city. My mother is not from Sofia. They came from Pazardzhik. It's in the south of Bulgaria.

And when my uncle decided he wants to go to law school, they had to come to the capital. But my grandparents couldn't afford it, so they rented a small apartment.

And they had a small store. My mother used to make embroideries. They used to make sheets at that time. Everything had to be ordered, especially for dowries, you know-- monogrammed and a lot of crochet. She did everything on a old Singer machine. My mother had the touch-- an unlucky lady, but she was very talented.

So this they worked. After my uncle became the lawyer, he bought an apartment, and he did not want my grandfather to work. But when he went to the mountains to work-- so again, my grandfather didn't have a means of support, so he took merchandise. They had beautiful sacks.

And at that time there was no car, so he was going from store to store selling merchandise-- heavy. Sometimes he used to leave it in our apartment, because we were more centered.

And we brought the jewelry to the bank. My mother kept two pearls. My father's grandmother was in Egypt, and my grandparents became a [NON-ENGLISH]. We visited there the Holy City, you know, Jerusalem, years ago. So they brought the pearls, things. She hid this.

And one day we hear a big commotion in the stairs. We had those glass windows to look through, you know-- a lot of German soldiers on the stairs. My mother got so frightened. She took all the pearls. She went to the bathroom. She flushed it down. And then they opened the door.

They were asking for somebody else. But in the meantime, everything was gone.

And my father had a ring, and a ruby ring. They kept this. They hid it, so every time they were selling something to eat.

So that's how she was trying to get along financially-- was just selling off things?

Yeah.

They had an Omega watch-- beautiful. You know, those packets-- everything went. Silver things-- we had those cups with all these silver seals-- everything. One by one, it all went.

The last thing went when we went to Israel. All this Rosenthal-- there was a big Rosenthal thing.

China?

China. That's what he had. Every time he sold a piece-- a piece of this, a piece of that.

You mentioned that your grandparents-- were those your mother's parents?

Yeah.

And what were their names?

Esther Dannon, and Estrella-- we call her Estrella, I told, yeah? And then the grandfather was-- my uncle was Shem Tov. And my grandfather was Yitzhak. Zak, in French, but in Hebrew it was Yitzhak.

And what about your father's parents? Where were they?

I was seven or eight, and my grandmother-- my father's mother passed away.

Do the names of those grandparents? They mention a lot of name Mavorch. I don't know how it became Mavorch. They had changed their name.

Do you know their first names?

No, no. Not anymore. I didn't think. Maybe if I go home.

And your mother had this brother.

Yeah.

And did she have any other brothers and sisters?

A younger sister-- she got married in 1942, right after my father died. And she married an Ashkenazi. There were a few of them, even though he spoke Spanish. But the name was Ashkenazi.

What's her name?

Her name? Delphina Hirsch. She is in Israel.

So there was three children in that family.

My mother's. Yeah.

And on your father's side?

My father's side-- there were two brothers and one sister that had passed away, but I had never met. There were nieces. There were nieces we met.

What were the brothers' names?

Avram. He said in Bulgaria, it was guarding his property. The Russians confiscated it after he got released.

And the other brother?

The one-- I don't remember, actually. We never met him. He passed away years ago.

Passed away before you could know him, as well as the sister.

The sister, yeah. Yeah.

So I'm presuming from the way you're talking that your family was kind of Orthodox observant Jews.

Yeah, we went to the synagogue. During the war, the synagogue became the only socializing thing.

And before the war?

My father was religious. He used to go on Friday. And he had all this from silk, tallit and everything. That was one thing when we left. He had to live after the war progressed.

Because you were a child growing up, though. Did you go to Jewish school?

No, I didn't go. My mother didn't send us to the Beit Ha'am. I think they had something maybe over there, but we were not sent. We observed holidays every time. They brought from Israel [NON-ENGLISH] for this holiday. And this, [NON-ENGLISH] for that holiday. We used to buy everything, prepare the food. But we were not kosher. There was no kosher in Bulgaria.

No kosher in Bulgaria?

So nobody was kosher at that point.

My father didn't eat pork. He bought it for us, but he never ate any. During the war, we ate whatever was served. There was--

What about any antisemitism in Bulgaria before the Germans came?

My family was-- there were a lot of Jews that lived only in that neighborhood around Beit Ha'am. But my family was mixed in every house. My uncles were the only Jewish family in that apartment house. We were two floors with relatives, and they rented. I told you everybody-- they had to move two people in one room. They had to vacate the whole other area.

We were mixed. There, we had--

My grandmother told us that there was a pogrom, when she was growing, within a little city. One day she said there was screaming. They used to have outhouses. Some Jews had thrown a girl over there, and they were trying to make a pogrom. But somebody came and right away put them straight.

We had a lot of neighbors. I grew up between non-Jewish a lot. But then one day, we came. We were ordered to leave

Bulgaria-- Sofia-- in three days.

Do you remember when that was?

Maybe in the beginning of 1943. We had to leave. The Americans came to bomb Sofia. We were hidden in the basement. And everything was-- all the glass doors in between-- they were shaking. They were throwing bombs.

They bombed a lot the railroad station, which we didn't-- it was not very far from us, but all the bombs were all around us. And we had to pull blinds on the windows.

And they claimed that the Jews were signaling with flashlights to the American planes to bomb. This was a nonsense. But then we didn't have anything. We can not. We had to, all of us, had to go to the Beit Ha'am. And we got assigned to different city. We had to go to the south-- no, north of Bulgaria.

So we got three days' notice. To leave in three days, otherwise, we reject. My father was gone, and my mother didn't know what to do. So she packed two suitcases. We had to buy our own tickets for the train.

And we carried to the train. But meantime, everybody wanted to help you to the train and trying to steal your suitcases.

Everyone was assigned-- my uncle was assigned to the south, so my grandparents had to go over there. Late on when the Russians came, and he was liberated from work, he went to see-- he went to the south. He traveled 24 hours.

There was another woman in our compartment. Her husband was [NON-ENGLISH]. This is in German. So I speak a little German, my husband, also.

So this lady, again, was with children, small children. And my mother was with three children. We got to the Shumen. It was a railroad station. And came a group from Jewish-- every city had these main people that took care of the social work. There were some of the welfare people. They gave them food and everything.

Like a Jewish Federation or something?

It's not a federation, from the city.

Oh, the city.

From the city. So we got there, and a few people came in, and nobody else. Nobody else-- only we got there. They came to pick us up with one of those carriages. Remember years ago there was no-- this city was built on two hills. The city was in the middle, and a big factory-- a beer factory, very famous beer.

But we were supposed to go-- in that particular city, those Jews were assigned again to certain area. There were no wall, but you were not allowed to go on the other side.

And what would be the punishment if you would go out of this ghetto area?

They built a camp. They built the camp. It was in the north, but not in our area. We weren't even close to the Black Sea on the other side near Yugoslavia. They built a camp.

And there was a lot of German youth. They were marching, parading. And we were looking for-- when we were in Sofia, we were looking through the windows. What is this? There were the swastikas and there were those degel-- you know what they call it? What do they call it, degel?

Dagger?

Degel, in Hebrew.

Means sword?

No, no, no. It's the Bulgarian-- flags.

Flags.

With the German flags. They were parading. They had those marks here. And you are looking-- what is this? In school again-- in school again, that's where the youth that belonged to the German youth. And the other ones was against it, part of the class-- in the class.

So we got to this Shumen, the city. And the Jewish community came to pick us up from the railroad station. They helped us with the suitcases, and they assigned us in one house, which was in a hill. The whole city was-- Shumen-- in the middle of the hill.

It was in the end of the city where the beer factory was. There was completely Turkish neighborhood. All the houses were Turkish, a few Jewish. And they built houses on mud bricks. And some of them, some of them were nice little gardens. We bought later from them.

My mother got typhus from what we bought.

Lice?

Typhus.

Typhus from lice?

Typhus is not from lice. This is on the stomach-- typhus. It's on the stomach, from the contaminated water they used to water their vegetables.

I see.

So we got to this Shumen. It had a-- I used to walk a lot. In Sofia, in the meantime when we were there, they said you have to buy a Magen David, which is--

The yellow star.

The yellow star. It almost like a button. And you had to go to the synagogue. In the back there was a house. The shammas, the one that took care of the synagogue, used to sell. We had to buy. We didn't have cash. We have to buy.

So we made-- we outsmarted them. I was 12. I had to be 12. My sister and my mother had to have it. You'll see the pictures of that.

So instead of sewing it in every additional thing that you are wearing, we took down the Magen David and we went with a thread back and forth a lot of it. And then you put it like here with this pin from the bottom.

So it looked sewed on.

And we used to change this from blouse to blouse or whatever. But they got smart with this, too. They caught few of them.

You must have been younger than 12. Because if you were born in '33, you were probably about 10 in '43.

But I was all around the place, because I always used to go to my grandparents'. I used to go from one corner to the

next. I was not afraid to walk. I've noticed. I've seen all the things.

So my mother was staying at home with my sister. She didn't leave. She was homebody-- my older sister. And the youngest was very young.

Were you still in school?

I was in school.

You were going to school even after the Germans invaded.

Yeah, till they told us to leave the city.

Till that early '44 you said?

Yeah. No, '44 came the Russians to liberate us. We were already in Shumen for anything.

And what would happen if you left the ghetto area that you weren't supposed to leave? What would be the punishment?

We didn't see. But rumors, you know-- rumors were spreading. They had the building, all the German youth. They built a camp in the north, and they make barracks over there with a fence. There whoever did something wrong, they sent them there. And we always heard you go to Poland, we go to Poland to kill us.

Did you know what was happening to the Jews and the other parts of Europe? Did you know about--

There were a lot of rumors. There were a lot of-- some didn't give up their radios. Still there were some hidden radios. When we were in Shumen we used to go to the neighbors and listen at night. They used to send all the news.

And some of them-- with the Russians, again the rumor is the Russians were coming. But while we were in Shumen, a lot of Jews started to play cards. They lost everything. There was nothing to do. Some of them didn't work.

And they made a special school for Jewish. At that neighborhood, they assigned a special building to teach the Jewish children. My sister had to-- I went. It was a third cousin of my mother's-- happened to be that lady. She was in Israel. It was Palestine. And she came back, and she taught us how to read Hebrew.

By the way, was your family Zionist in any way?

Pro-Israel.

But you didn't go to Zionist group meetings as a child or think about emigrating to Palestine?

There were illegals. I didn't go because I was 14 and 13. And I worked during this thing, too? When I was in the Shumen there was nothing to do. You get assigned one room. You lived in this room for a year and a half.

The weather outside, it was very cold in wintertime. Inside-- my mother brought from Sofia-- they were allowed for one day to go to bring furniture. She brought the stove. So this heat us. We cooked on it with wood.

And then somebody told her if she will go with the bags in a carriage to some factory, that they were breaking those pits of apricot pits. They used to make in Bulgaria marzipan.

So one day she comes. And I see this Turkish carriage, and there were all sacks. And they unloaded these sacks, and I am very fast, even today. So I put it in one of those pans what we used to sift the flour, and you just put in the whole thing, and I get to the pits here, and the shell on the other side. My mother tried. My sister tried. What?

Getting the pits out of that looked like little almonds.

Yeah. Yeah. So I work-- work still today. So I was working, separating the pits. And quite a few sacks we filled up, and if you send it back, those pits we used to burn on the stove. And you cook with it.

What was the room like that were living in? Did you have a bathroom?

No bathroom. This was already some place. Somebody or some lady already-- the owner lived upstairs. We had a room with two windows and a door. And then out of the door, this was a problem. It was closed. It belonged to the other lady.

The son-in-law went to the mountains too, working-- it was a Jewish family-- building roads. So my mother-- we had a bed. Four of us slept in the bed. We had a few pictures and a table.

And a stove.

And outside we got the water, and washing the dishes on the backyard-- wintertime, too.

And a bathroom-- what toilet facilities did you have?

We got water. We could take water from this lady, which was her room further down. In the beginning was wintertime, so they let us use and wash. There was one of those big sinks. Later on, they will not allow us to go do this.

And did you have an out house, or how did you--

Out house was only a few steps up. It was on the hill. So there was an outhouse-- cold and freezing.

And the dishes, you took water, and I washed them outside. Or when it was summer, it was a little bit better-- inside and we throw the water out.

Did you all have to have a job, or how did you support yourself?

Well, another time the owner from the upstairs came and said he has thread, like the DMC thread. It came in a big roll. So my sister didn't do much thing, even though she was the oldest. She was the first child of the family, and my father was an old bachelor. So she was very spoiled. She didn't know much.

So here comes this thread. We had to make it, the DMC, you know, with the little label we have to glue. So I know first we had to make a big ball. Then I figured out maybe if we work it from this-- and I started to count how many centimeters. It had to be 12-- not yards, meters-- 12 meters.

So I filled one of those sticks how many times if I go over it, it will make 12 meters. And I get out of this, and I work hard for it, too.

So I was doing this, and when I got to the end of it, cut and made a little knot. And then it took from the piece of wood, took the thread and start different directions, put it together, and count. And then you put the label.

They paid us \$0.04 apiece. It was in Bulgarian money. And I was doing a lot.

And my mother went upstairs and asked for more material, and more. And he brought already. And all the neighbors took upstairs, too, but they were not doing that good.

By the end, the owners saw that we were doing too much, reduced it, to two pennies. And my mother got mad and said, no.

Then later on, my uncle got liberated from the mountains. And he went to live where my grandparents were in the south

of Bulgaria. And my mother was with letters. And we have no support, nothing.

So how were you managing?

He sent a friend from Sofia-- Bulgaria. He came with a coat one day by railroad. And he had money-- a little money, not too much either-- hidden in the lining of the coat. He came like this, and he brought us money.

Another time-- oh, were my mother had-- in this city, she had two second cousins that used to live over there. They were born in that city-- cousins. One day they come from school. We had to go to the Jewish school. It was in the house of this relative. In one of the rooms she had the table, and we had those books that we had to read.

We come home my mother is not-- ambulance there. Typhus-- typhus epidemic. I don't know. We used to buy from the Turkish vegetables-- everything, bread. We use to break bread. We had money, then we bought from them.

All of a sudden, they took her to the hospital. This was in Bulgaria in different area. It was a big government hospital, and it had one of those red cross on the roof.

But they took her with the ambulance. We didn't know what to eat. We didn't know nothing, you know? We just came, we three.

She asked this cousin to help us-- while she is sick to help us. We went there. They gave us milk. That was the whole thing for that day-- milk.

Another time again, I go. They had a big dog that bit me. I had to wait for these relatives to give you. That was not easy, I'm telling you. I was so humiliated, even though they were relatives. Because my mother always told us, be proud. Have a big face, even if the situation is bad. Act, which made it bad for us. Because in Israel, we could have gotten help. But because of her being proud, we were hungry many times in Bulgaria, and then Israel, too.

So she wouldn't ask.

She wouldn't ask. She sent me to see if her grandfather has can give you something.

After a year and a half, we heard the king went to Germany. And the rumors-- we got together in one of the houses in the evening. Oh, he's coming home dead-- King Boris.

They told us later that Hitler want to all the Jews. And he said, not all of it. On the way back, they gave him a little poison inside of a mask. He came dead back to Bulgaria. And there were big funerals.

So right away, they told us stay home. Stay home. Don't get into the street. In Bulgaria, we like to walk on the streets. In the evening you just get dressed and you walk, like in Israel. Bulgarians did the same when were in Israel. We were walking and meeting people. Said, stay home. So we stayed home.

Then they started to say that they are beginning to lose the war, yeah? They will send you to Poland. They'll send you to Poland. We went to school, and my mother was already healthy. We had to bring her juices, because she was not supposed to eat solid food.

And I remember this was in an Armenian neighborhood. Then I got beaten up and called me Jew-- dirty Jew.

Who beat you up?

The Armenians.

The Armenians.

I was walking. I was bringing a big pot with the juices. She was supposed to have everything strained. This fellow, a man, had those woods. You know, they collect woods for the stoves. He let it down. He gave me one.

I had to go. I had to bring the-- she was asking for food. I had to visit her.

Did you drop the food?

No, I didn't drop. I saved it, but he gave me one over the face.

There's another time, Turkish. We went to a Turkish neighborhood to buy a yogurt. Turkish got me again.

I'm the person that if I'm sent to bring something, I go over actual fire, extra, you know, and I do it. And I had to bring. My mother told me go and bring yogurt after this.

So I went to the Turkish neighborhood. Some person was making those things at home. They were doing all-- he had to buy from the homes.

In the meantime, my sister got sick, too-- the youngest one.

How did she get sick?

Malnutrition.

Malnutrition.

We ate, but--

You didn't have enough to eat.

They had a kitchen in Shumen. They had a kitchen in one of those old Turkish baths. Of course they had those baths-- one of the deserted baths. They had over there, and they set up a kitchen.

And they had beans. They used to cook beans-- volunteer people, not the same people. So one time we went there. My mother is so proud, cannot accept charity. I cannot accept your-- but we were hungry.

So I took a pot, and you had to go to that neighborhood, and awful food-- and was sending it. You know, it was put on two bricks in a big pot. Went, everything.

So I brought this. I carried it from far away, but there was not-- this was not our food.

just Couldn't eat it?

No. Again, had to look for some jobs. In the meantime, the Russians came. We started to hear they're advancing. They're going to come.

No, one day-- everybody home. Everybody home. They had a lot of trees in Shumen see, lot of trees. We used to pick them for the owner. And we could eat. You know, and peel them, let them outside. We ate. We ate.

Then they had those trees with apples. We ate whatever it was we took from the trees-- a lot of fruit at the time. Bulgaria is known for fruit.

So this was the satisfaction, but not bread. Everything was rationed. We couldn't get any.

Did you feel like you had enough to eat?

I had that hole in my stomach for years.

You did. You were hungry.

And when I was living with my grandmother in Sofia, before we moved to the province, my grandmother was a very organized person. She cooked. Today you get this bread. For tomorrow, you get that thing.

My mother just gave us-- eat. So we ate all of it, and tomorrow there was nothing. Again, we had to start looking. We sold clothes-- old clothes. We sold everything we found on the attic.

They had a place which was for conserves. People were making conserves at home, so you could sell the conserve. So I went with my sister. We got some stamps. With the stamps, we go in to bought a newspaper. That was a big thing.

Then we heard the Russians may come. The war was advancing. And all of a sudden in Shumen, they said they're going to throw you-- they're going to put you into the Danube. You know, Danube was by train. They're going to put us all in one of those sailing boats and let us go. They go to the Black Sea. We heard. We heard.

All of a sudden we see motorcycles parading, coming through the Main Street-- Germans. They had those motorcycles with the big addition, and there was another soldier sitting.

Side car.

Yeah, the soldiers was sitting over there. And we see it. They are all dusty. When they came through Bulgaria, they were parading. Everybody was giving them things, you know, hey, heroes. This time nobody comes. Especially through the-- they come from the province up from the--

We saw a lot of American airplanes came to bomb certain city in Bulgaria. We saw them, because they were between two mountains. We saw them. But we always seemed to scream come here, come here. Drop down maybe the liberators. They continued to Sofia.

Did any bombs drop while you were--

Not in the city, no. But there was a lot of militia, and after 5:00, they used to get into the red trucks. They used to go into the mountains, shoot partisans. And we used to hear this-- trr, trr, trr.

We were children. And one day I played-- this was after the day when the Russians came. I went to this station, and they were digging up things. And I started playing. Something was very hot. We started digging, digging. There were boxes with rifles and those ammunition. They left everything and they ran away, just a little bit before the Russians walked in. But the Germans were running away, too.

And there was-- I can have a water. They have those water things. And nobody would dare. Just nobody gave them anything. They ran away.

And then we see big noise in the homes-- big noise, big noise. We see-- we had a Main Street where we all lived. All of a sudden, we see the truck-- big truck with all sacks and a woman sitting on top-- soldiers hanging the Russians. Oh, liberation. Liberation. We're screaming liberation. All the Jews came out, you know? Not only the Jews-- among us there were some goy-- non-Jews, too. So everybody got out.

Why were there non-Jews in this ghetto area?

Because they were there. They owned the houses, so they stayed there. There was no wall. Just from this street to this street, you are not allowed to.

When my sister got sick, the younger one, suppose the doctor came and said they had to give her medication. But there was no pharmacy in our side. So they told me I had to go on the other side.

What's the other side? You mean the other side of the mountain?

No. It was the city, but those streets that you are not allowed to go to. They were Turkish, and we were in a Turkish area. But there were Armenians. There were the non-Jews in the other areas. The pharmacies were there.

Did you have to have a pass or something?

I didn't. I sneaked out. I sneaked out. I said, maybe they will not catch me.

Did you have to be wearing your yellow star then?

I was younger. I had to be 12. I don't think I was 12 already.

So you didn't wear the yellow star until you were 12.

No. Only my sister-- 12 and up.

Your mother.

My mother.

As long as you're talking about the sickness, how long was your mother in the hospital when she was sick?

They kept her quarantined quite a long time. And they came and they sprayed. I didn't know. We were again at school, the Jewish school, yes? We come home. We see two men coming out of the room, and they had like a little tank in the back, and they had a hose. They looked very unpleasant.

I said what happened? They sprayed the whole room against, you know, contamination. They put her in a contaminated room. They sprayed. They sprayed everything. We had some pictures. Everything was destroyed.

Destroyed in what way?

They sprayed everything-- the chemical they used. Oh, everything that was hanging-- we had nice pictures. Everything gone.

Such a powerful chemical it was.

Yeah.

And then she was in a hospital. We had to bring her food.

The hospital didn't supply the food.

They did supply maybe some, but not for little extra juices. One time we brought her-- whole grapes, we squeezed it through the sieve not to have the peel. The tomatoes-- somebody told us to put a little hot water, peel them, again squeeze. That's what we used to bring to my mother to visit her.

Did she get medication in the hospital?

There was no medication. They just kept them separated-- maybe some.

Was this like a Jewish hospital or--

No, government. Government.

Government hospital. So they did treat Jews. That wasn't a problem.

They did this.

What was the main non-Jewish population in Bulgaria? Were they Christian? Were they--

Greek Orthodox.

Greek Orthodox.

Most of them are Greek Orthodox. But there is another religion over there. It's connected with the Greeks, too. There were a lot of Turks left from the--

Were they Muslim?

Yeah. In Sofia, they had minarets and all those Turkish men. Like they had-- the main synagogue not far from there was theirs.

But during the war, when the Russians came, they sent them-- the Armenians sent to Armenia, and the Turks-- put them on the border. There were a lot of Turks in Bulgaria, because of the occupation.

You were talking about that as you were growing up, you had friends among the non-Jewish population.

The Armenians, Turkish in Sofia.

How were they treating you once the Germans came in with their antisemitic propaganda?

I was very young.

You were really young, but did--

Yeah. Yeah.

She didn't stay your friend?

In the class, we were too young to know. And there was a cross. No, there was prayer in school, which was-- there was a religious study, too, which the Jewish kids had to go into the yard and play.

My husband said in Vienna, they used to bring a special teacher to teach them religion. No.

I found one time a book in Bulgarian-- the Bible. And I read it, and that's how I knew about the Sarah and Abraham and all the things. I read the whole book. When there was a religious in the class, they told us to go.

But there were prayers. Every morning we had to turn down the window, and the Christian prayed God. They just mention it. I did like this and left--

Was there Muslim prayer, too, at all in that school?

No, it was to God-- pray to God. And I was like this. And this was all through the Germans.

Now, when the Russians came, there was no more religion. They don't believe in it, but the churches were there. Whoever wanted to go, they went.

Did your family have any idea of Germany entering Bulgaria or know about the German policies before 1942? Do you know?

Oh yeah. There was a lot of very-- Bulgaria was very advanced country, you know? Now they are behind. They stayed 50 years behind us in one place. But there were a lot of traveling. There was but they sent to Europe.

A lot of people studied. My family studied in Vienna. I had my grandmother's sister. She was a pianist. In Vienna, she received the first prize, and she was back in Bulgaria living. Then she went to Israel, too, later.

Well, you were very young. But do you have any memory of your parents being concerned about--

Oh yes, of course. My father had a lot of-- they were friends with the Bulgarians. Our lawyer was our friend, too. And when my father was very concerned what would happen to my children, and he said, well, my brother is a priest in a church. Bring him there, and he'll convert them. My father said, no.

And then he perished first. He was not there to see what happens, yeah?

Did your parents ever give any thought to trying to emigrate to someplace else?

No, not in Bulgaria. We were stuck between unfriendly countries. And one side they have-- the East side is a Black Sea. Romania-- and they were not very friendly. They were occupied so many times taking pieces of Bulgaria.

Turkey, they were under the occupation. Greece was not very friendly. Yugoslavia had Germans, too. So Bulgaria had wars with Greece, so they were not friendly with anybody. Macedonia is another little country down there.

The Jewish population in Sofia is good Bulgarian. But the provinces-- they had a little bit. I could not-- when we went to Shumen, I could feel different.

Plus they had a lot of gypsies. We had gypsies. Plus we had a lot of different-- some of my own aunts-- then she had friends. She came from Romania to Bulgaria, and she was an Ashkenazi, because Romania. But she lived in Bulgaria.

My grandparents were not Bulgarian citizens. They were Czechoslovakian. I don't know what was the purpose. They were born there. Even their parents were born in Bulgaria. They were Czech citizens.

Could they have returned to Czechoslovakia if they wanted to?

No. They will not leave the country. They were with my uncle. Whatever my uncle said, it was their son.

Were there other Jews that tried to leave Bulgaria over the German threat? Do you know?

There was another cousin we had that was interned in the camp-- in the Bulgarian camp.

Do you know why?

Yeah we had to leave Sofia in three days and her husband was a lawyer. And he was detained someplace. He couldn't come back to Sofia to start packing. we just packed with bags, whatever we could. In a sheet-- we put things and packed. And we went to the trains.

But they didn't leave. They had a daughter, too. So they caught him, and they sent him to this camp over there. Now, later on this camp was burned.

By whom?

By the Bulgarian German youth.

Do you know why? He didn't want the evidence?

No.

There was this cousin of mine. The parents went there. She had a Bulgarian friend. She was a teenager. Whoever did something wrong, there were a lot of people. Even one of my own friends, her brother was there. They just took him off something. They just took him, sent him there.

They had barracks, and they had a fence. And during this day, well, you know, in Shumen internment, they said there was a big fire. And the German youth were standing around it. They didn't let anybody leave. Everything burned to crisps.

And one of those, my mother's friend-- her brother was there. He went back to this barrack to take children back and forth, and he perished there.

So the people who were supposed to be burned, too.

They all got-- my aunt got out of there first because my niece-- her daughter had this Bulgarian friend. He was bringing food to them. And they were getting the food through the fence. You know, there was nothing to eat.

They burned them to crisp, and they did not allow anybody to leave. There is a memorial in Sofia about all those ones that perished in the city.

So this was an intentional--

Intentional fire. Yeah.

--people interned there. Do you know how the treatment was of the people while they were living there? There was not enough food. That's what I know.

Were they beaten or abused in other ways? They abused a lot of people. You know how they abused it? They just figured out this one has money. Bring us the money. And he didn't have any money, you know?

And one of the provinces in Plovdiv. Part of my mother's family come from there. They just came into the night-- at night in their houses. They took everybody, in a big rush, place, area, put a bucket in the middle, and said, now, throw your money over there. Jewelry and money, throw them in there. And, of course, Bulgarians took it, because the Bulgarians were there, right? Military they call it, gendarmerie. They took everything.

So we got back. After the Russians came, we could go back to Sofia.

How did the Russians treat you?

Oh, the Russians were-- oh, big thing with the trucks. They give us candy. They had those boxes, German. I didn't know what this is. My mother said go. They give to the children. They were giving those gifts.

And they were running to the big beer factory with buckets, drinking. They were lifting the buckets and drinking. There were a lot of women with them, and children. They were all in uniform-- oh, big celebration.

How old were these children who were in uniform?

Seven, eight.

They were supposed to be Russian soldiers.

They were the children. They were the children of the Russian women. They set up a kitchen outside, and they were cooking. And they had machines. They were sewing, making tents.

And they took a lot of beer, and constantly taking beer out of this factory-- you know, the stills. In the meantime, we were outside the center. My mother said, let's go and celebrate. We're going to go. They were giving blankets. They emptied all the army blankets, giving to the people. They gave everything.

They went to the stores, bought everything. They had watches, watches, watches, watches with the rubles, rubles-- people selling them things, even things that were on the windows for 10 years. Sell them to the Russians.

We went to the Main Street. All of a sudden, they start shooting from all over the place. And my mother said, ah, laying on the floor. The post office did not give up, so the Russians were shooting them till they got the post office, too.

The next day, they started to tell them how much the ruble is worth. People-- they told them things lost. Those big numbers, but nothing worth it when they went to exchange it in the bank. So they stopped selling to the Russians.

The Russians were on their horses, running up to one of our girls in the Main Street in the evening. We went for a walk. He was running after one of the girls on a horse. So right away, they said no more drinking. No more bars and giving beers free from the factory.

Were the Russian male soldiers trying to rape the women?

No, they were all drunk. They had their own women. Maybe they tried it. There is always something. In every city there are always girls that go with the winners. Like in Sofia, the Germans came. Oh, everybody spoke German, and everybody was in love with the Germans. And you know how it is. And when the Russians came, they were ready for them, too.

So those were willing ones. But did the Russian soldiers try to--

Not in our area. Not in our area. So everybody went back to Sofia.

How did you get there?

Again, you have to pay your own train.

And what were the train conditions like? Was that OK?

The train, yeah. It's a modern country. Today they are not good, but at that time, yes.

And you had the same train going to this place as you did coming?

24 hours. 24 hours. But my mother didn't want to leave yet, because we were going in school. And she said, well, I have to have those two months or three months to finish the school. She wanted to take the papers to show in Sofia that we're going to school.

So the Jewish kids had to go and make a test, which the goyim, the non-Jews, never did. You know, they finish the year, and they give you the diploma, and you pass. We had to go to a special place. And they asked me, you know, whatever I knew. And then they gave us a diploma.

So you got your diploma.

Got the transfer to a school.

While you were living in there during that period, you said there were quite a few non-Jewish families in the town.

Yeah.

How did they treat you during that war period?

We were friendly with the kids. We go to these houses. We went to visit. We visit Bulgarians visit a lot. We were friendly with the Turkish.

So they didn't follow those antisemitic policies it sounds like.

No, not to me. But we were scared. With no food, thinking of tomorrow, what are you going to eat tomorrow?

You must be very thin by the end of the war. I came to Sofia. I looked not good, but then I had malnutrition. My eye turned red and couldn't go away.

First, we had to get our diplomas. My mother wanted. So we took a test, and we had to go to a special area-- on a non-Jewish area to get through. There was this Board of Education. That was where we had tests. We got the diplomas, and we came back to Sofia.

Had you been able to be in touch with your other relatives at all?

Yeah, they wrote.

With letters or something?

They wrote. But we didn't know where they were. Because the ones that lived in the cities were not moved. Only the Sofia had to leave.

So you couldn't write back to them, because you didn't have an address?

It took a long time to write, and they had a censor. My mother was writing to my uncle. My uncle married a lady in the city. He met her, and they married over there, and then came to Sofia.

But my meantime, while the Jews left Sofia, other people took possession. And here we were coming back, and there was no place to go back to.

Your apartment was--

Was occupied.

You had to leave all your furniture behind, too.

They took everything. We salvaged one, big, nice sofa. It was beautiful, modern. One of my relatives-- he made a special, what do you call it-- furniture maker, but he was specializing. So he made us a big piece and a china closet on the side. And you could open the sofa if you had visitors.

My mother didn't want to let it be. So my uncle asked one of his non-Jewish friends what to do? What to do? It's new. I can take it and keep it for you. And then when you come back, you'll get it back.

Which we did go to see it. It was already scratched from his children, so my mother got so mad. We didn't take it.

Didn't take it back.

So he gave a little money, but it was worth it a lot.

Now, this apartment you had. Did you own the apartment?

We owned it.

You owned it.

It was a property divided, because after the grandmother passed away, the court had divided the property. There was no will at the time. So there was a little misunderstanding between the two brothers. My father was a good person, but his brother was not.

So they went to court to separate. He wanted to take everything. So five years it was in court, until the court separated everything. And then the Germans came and took it.

But you were able to live in it, I guess, meanwhile that was going on.

Five years.

Those five years.

Yeah.

And so by the time you got back to Sofia, it was still your apartment technically.

Well, when they assigned the area for the Jewish population to move to, we had to give up two rooms.

Who lived with you during that period?

Another Jewish family. They had three children-- two boys and a girl. And the mother and father were in two rooms. And we had the kitchen we had to be together, and the utilities, which was a very bad idea. After a while, no matter how nice you can be, there are misunderstandings.

During that part of the German occupation, were any of your non-Jewish neighbors helpful to you or kind to you in any way or brought you something?

They lived above us. We met them on the stairs-- nothing.

They treated you well.

They became communist when the Russians came. Then we had to shut them out, you know? From one day to the next, a free country became a communism. And we didn't understand this. Bulgaria is a country that-- it's a good student. There are teachers and the students.

But Bulgaria-- they were never-- 500 years it took them to get liberated. And again came Russian Prince to fight for them. They didn't have enough power, or maybe they were situated in a very bad place. So whatever they were opposition, they was killed.

Now, we went in Bulgaria. The Russians came from Romania-- big parades, I told you. And all those blankets had to be given back, and all the neighbors that give things, they had to-- the Russians had to pay.

And they start. They said it's impossible. They are all so drunk. They had to close the factory in Shumen.

They closed the factory. Then we got scared. We got scared-- the Jewish, because we were not far from there. The Russians were begging, begging for drinks with a bucket, knocking doors and begging by force. Give me something to drink. I think that those people drink a lot. We got frightened from the Russians.

Did they start to beat people up?

They forced you. They said, you have a watch? Sell it. No, I don't want it. Grab it, whatever it is. And they had watches. I don't know, watches were epidemic. I didn't know what was with the Russians and watches. So whoever have all the watches hid it.

We got back to Sofia. Every neighborhood has an assigned police station. And if you move-- go and visit-- you have to write down where you're going. And if somebody comes out of town and wants to know where are you, they go to the police in this area.

It's not discriminatory. That is the way of life. They find you. But those police stations became miserable when the Germans came, because they had a big-- they beat up people, and they were putting down in the basement. It's the same as the Russians did-- the same.

The Russians came. We came back to Sofia.

Where did you live if your apartment was taken?

We come upstairs. There are the two rooms already occupied with this family. My mother waited two months to get the certificates for schooling. They came right away. So they took their rooms, and we didn't have a place to stay.

The front rooms-- some man had it. He was out of town. We started to bang the doors. Nobody there. Somebody told us he lived there with his mother. The mother died, go find him.

We go into the police. Police, when the Russians came, nobody helped. Nobody helped you. They used to come and used to check. And then nothing. What can we do? Nothing we can do.

Can you find it? Go to court. This was the famous word. You went to court. They said go to the police. The police said go to court. This went for at least-- we didn't have a place to sleep.

And on one of my-- we had the suitcases, you know? We went to-- my father had a poor cousin. So he lived in our one room in the kitchen place. We didn't have what to do.

He was a vendor. He was near the churches they had those tables, and you could sell sweets. He had this lokum. They used to sell lokum.

And the Bulgarians-- from these imitation pits, they made this marzipan. That's what they said was in. That's the cousin. That was his job, what he did for living. After the war was good. There were no sweets, so people bought a lot.

So I was sitting over there. I mean, what can we do now? A niece was standing by my mother. I said, stop crying. Where will we live? Where?

So finally, he says, well, I don't have much space, but you can sleep on our floor. He have to work. He himself didn't have a-- he didn't have furniture. He had one bed and a table and a little kitchen, but he didn't even have a window.

We stayed on the floor. We put a few blankets for two weeks till my mother went to the ex-lawyer.

We went to the police. He went to the court. Nobody gives you any information-- nothing, nothing. Till the end, they

found a man, and he said, well, I'll draw the key, and I will not let you live over there. It's mine now.

So again, running here, running there. And meantime, my uncle comes back from the intern city to Sofia. And there they take back the apartment.

They had to rent now. You see, there were four rooms and a big whole thing. They had to rent. They had a tenant for 25 years-- one man living in one room.

So we get the space finally-- no furniture. We had to borrow from here, borrow from there, because everything was gone.

And I made-- we used to have those-- used to cook on this with coal. It was not coal. You know, from wood, when they make-- charcoal. Charcoal, to cook, if you went in a balcony. From this, I took a bucket, and I made it open. And I made it like a columns, and a cover, and one of those-- every room had an opening for the stoves.

Like a chimney?

Chimney. So I made like-- you put it the wood underneath to burn, and it was a flat--

A grill?

It was a grill, but I put on from one bucket, without a bottom, like it goes into. Like a stove, to make like a stove. This was the cooking, and this was the warming, too.

And some of the areas were bombed, not far from our home. And I went to look for wood with my little sister.

And this man, I think this was his home. I don't know what. He was guarding everything. I took one piece of window to take to warm. You couldn't get coal. Everything was rationed. When the Russians came, they gave us everything back and started taking back.

You didn't work, no jobs for you. My mother didn't get a job-- didn't work. You went to school. You had to pay. In Bulgaria you pay for schooling.

How did you manage? Your mother wasn't working and--

We got the property back. And this lawyer of ours-- my mother had told him, you know, everything was rent control. You couldn't make the rent. Mortgage was on. But this was our rent control for years.

So my mother told him, what can we do? You cannot-- 11 stores and one apartment. The roof apartment had the one room and a kitchen.

So the lawyer said, you know something? You talk to every tenant, and then tell them you'll charge them more. But on the receipt, it will be the normal price-- the rent control price. And he came every month, and made the receipts, and they paid.

Why did they pay extra?

It was an inflation anyway for years. For years they used the property without-- they made money, because one of them was a printer. One was making embroidery-- not embroidery-- on those crystal glasses. He was making the names, you know?

Etching?

No. No. He used to make monograms. He made a lot of money. I could see merchandise bringing. And they paid

pennies for rent.

Then there was another area. Some of it opened the doors in between and made a factory. This was socks-- lady's socks. They had the forms-- and men's. After they finish knitting it, they put it over this. It was like pressing, and then they took it, arranged it. It was pair socks.

So he had a whole area from the front of their house on the street-- the whole area. In the back there was an area that had wax. They had to wax. They used some hot wax. I don't know what they did with it. And then they had in place with the machine that was going around and around with the thread, and then the ironing, and cutting. It was like a whole warehouse, and they paid pennies.

Could you complain to the communist government that they were paying--

They didn't complain. But what happened-- all of a sudden, the lawyer gave us back everything. We made those receipts, and we cashed.

Again, the mortgage had to be paid. Taxes had to be paid. We had to paint. Nobody did any-- the roof, nothing, the gutters. We had to do this, too, for minimum pay.

So those people paid for a while. And then all of a sudden our lawyer's son was anti-government. They start arresting lawyers. They start arresting dentists. They start arresting everybody-- anti-communist, anti-communist.

Everyone was in jail. One time we were laughing. If you want to be among intelligent people, you should go to jail. They're all there sitting, yeah, Anti-communists.

All the educated people?

One professor ran away-- they made a big joke out of it-- run away to America. My uncle married a communist lady. And she weren't a communist. Anti the German thing. What came there next behind it? Russian Communism. So she was one of those.

In the beginning, one or two-- it was in a small city. She used to get arrested. Her whole family was communists. So he had a hard life with his lady. They used to laugh at him. He got married as an old bachelor. He was so in love with her, but he suffered a lot. The last year he passed away in Sofia.

They came back. They gave back their radios, whoever had. In the meantime, they used these things. There was nothing to give back.

So the Germans had used it up, all of it.

Nothing. None-- the Bulgarians.

And the Bulgarians also took things out of the apartments. But what about--

They were running. After we left on the third day, they said they were running all night, robbing in the apartments.

So when we left Sofia, we have to give the key to the police-- the same thing we did when we left Sofia and went to Israel. We had to give it to the police.

So we came-- I was talking about we went to school. All of a sudden it became communism. Big meetings, big talks, big things-- we used to hide, couldn't stand it anymore. Went to school afternoon-- our high school was together with the boys. They were in the morning. We were afternoon-- the girls.

We came home at 7:00. We couldn't even study, because we had to go to a meeting to sing. They open a meeting in this

neighborhood, a meeting in that neighborhood.

My mother did not like this regime. So as soon as she was not happy, she opened her mouth, you know? And it's-- uh-huh.

What'd she say?

Oh, these nice Jewish people, all of a sudden they were communists. I guess they just played the game, otherwise you know what happens.

So in our neighborhood there were Jewish communists. They had meetings, and they participated in meetings. My mother was against it. And so you are against it, you do a volunteer job.

Well, volunteer job was on Saturday. On Sunday, they have one day. On Sunday they had to go to the railroad station to clean the railroad stations. Everything was black and greasy. You couldn't buy-- we had rations, but you couldn't buy clothes. There was nothing to sell. Everything was on a black market-- nothing to buy, nothing to buy. But people did buy. The ones that sell on the black market, they had money. They bought.

Where did they get the goods to sell on the black market?

The goods were the ones they produced themselves.

They were making their own clothing and their own items?

Leather-- one of the shoemakers got the leather. He made shoes. He sold it. This leather man, he own a store. There was all around it sold.

What about food?

The food-- they all of a sudden they came. My teacher was very mad, but then she had to agree with it. They confiscated her land. She had the farmland. Yes, they confiscated everything.

But, of course, they are right. What could she say? We are not using it. So they confiscated it. That's what they did all the time-- confiscating things.

And my mother didn't even got the ration, because she didn't work. Only three of us got, and we had to eat four people from the rations of three.

Did you have enough to eat at that point?

We eat a lot of vegetables. Again, vegetables and fruits was plenty. Yeah, we Bulgarians--

So you were not hungry.

I was hungry for bread. The bread was the main thing to eat.

But you weren't starving.

Right at the beginning, no. Because we lived in a-- twice a week, our street was very wide. Years ago, my father said there was a little river-- creek passing by, which was filled in. So twice a week there was a market on it, and all the peasants came to sell their stuff.

All of a sudden, the Russians gave an order they have to produce so much and so much for the government. The rest, they can sell it at a free price. And they did raise the prices for everything-- was pushing it. And everything was-- I was

small.

They pushed me. They pushed me even to the bathroom. They had those baths in Bulgaria. They had Turkish baths. Over there was lines. Again, whoever pushed got first, and they all wanted back, and they never got a thing.

So they pushed me. They pushed me. We had to push in a bus. We didn't have enough transportation. We lived in two rooms.

My mother used to send me. I told you, I'm the one that brings things. She didn't ask how I got it.

They hit me, and they beat me. There was the open water thing. Those big buildings are not heated during the winter. We had those stoves, but there was no coal. So they froze. All those pipes froze. There was no water in the whole apartment-- nothing, not even for drinking.

So there was a main thing. Bulgaria was a clean country. They used to clean it. After the market, people went with the hose, and they washed the streets.

This was one of those things for water, like we have the firemen here-- fill up the well. This was there on the market, they opened. All the horses-- they came by carriages. They give some water for the horse.

I went to take water from there, and they push me in. And I was frozen. And my pot-- half of it was filled and I got home.

That was your cooking and eating water-- drinking water.

Washing.

Washing.

Then the pipes became warmer, so the pipes worked again.

And did you have water in the house?

Yeah.

Did you have a bathroom where you were living?

We had a big kitchen and a toilet, which was big. Somebody said you could put a shower. My uncle had a modern apartment. He had a shower in that bath.

But ours was from 1909, and we could have been. But what it is-- there were no refrigeration in our times. We had to cook it right away or cook it. And we had-- it was like in a northern area. There was a little cabinet to put to get the food to save it for the next day. Otherwise--

Did you have a block of ice for it?

No, the was-- no, just open area, but this was the northern part of the house.

Did you or your sisters do trading in the black market, too?

No, I couldn't. My mother-- the people were selling radios on the black market. I heard they were always announcing on the radio that all those people were arrested for black marketeering, black market.

And we found the Russians start again. All closed, all closed, all the private stores were confiscated and made a big one.

Government operated?

Government. So all one day, you know, I have shoes-- yellow shoes. They're selling yellow shoes from the pigskin-- pig whatever.

My mother said, what kind of people are those, [NON-ENGLISH]. So that's all they could buy. So everybody had shoes. And she went to one of the-- we had a Turkish shoe fixer in one of the-- he lived in one of the basements, in a little room, down in the basement. And he put a little black color, and it became black. But oh, they were awful.

So all of a sudden, from an intelligent country it turned to aggressive, pushing. All intelligence went to Israel when Israel became a state. Everybody left. So whatever came after us, it was not good material.

When was it exactly that the Russians liberated you?

9th of September, 1944.

1944.

And so you stayed about two more months finishing school. And then you came back to Sofia.

Yeah.

So you were in Sofia by the winter of 1944.

Very hard winter.

The war was still going on in the rest of Europe.

Yeah. They took Jewish soldiers and sent them to Hungary. I saw whole trucks with people. And people were crying. We knew who was Jewish. It was a soldier going to Hungary to fight.

To fight for the Hungarians and for the Jews.

No. Russians sent them.

With the Russians, to fight the Germans.

Send them, yeah, to liberate Hungary against the Germans.

So again, the Jewish young men were taken off after they were liberated to do this.

Yeah, because we were in the country. You see, my father went to the army. My uncle went to the army. They had to go if we lived in Bulgaria.

So at this time by the end of 1944, did you know about the wholesale extermination of the Jews in the rest of Europe?

Oh, we know. Yes, we knew. One of our cousins converted to Christianity-- my mother's cousin. He said, what can I do? He was a good dentist.

They were not allowed to use the profession during the Germans-- came a note who is allowed to work. My mother's cousin was a dentist, and his wife-- they both studied in Vienna. He went to Vienna, and met her, and came back.

She was retired. In the home, they had an office. She was allowed to work, and he was not allowed to work-- dentist.

Was she Jewish?

Yeah.

Why did she allowed to work?

On the list, her name appeared. But not his, and he was the one with the dentistry. So every time we knocked on his door, because they had an office in the house.

Every time we knocked, he looked through the hole. And if he saw we were relatives-- opened the door and he went. He had a whole box with drawers. He put it there near the chair, and he fixed our teeth. Then he folded and he ran away into the apartment in case somebody comes in and checks. But our uncle fixed our teeth. This was our first dentist.

How about your health in general after the whole war period? How were you? We went to Sofia, and I went to school again. WE had to go. In Bulgaria, it's a must. You have to go to school-- high school, too. Or they have professional schools over there. If you don't go to high school, there is a professional school.

Every year when the school opened, there was a nurse. And a doctor came and checked all the students that were on the list. We were on the line. This was from kindergarten. That was their goal in Bulgaria.

And plus, there was a station. They had a station. We got to the class. There was a nurse in the school, and there was a station. My mother used to go over with the babies. At [NON-ENGLISH] in Israel, they have it specially for children. They had a nurse and a doctor, a children's doctor.

My relatives went to universities. I was going to go to a medical school. I took Latin. Three years I took Latin. And it was a mess when the Russians came. It was a mess.

They were not allowed to go anymore to university. You have to have communists in your family. We didn't have a communist-- no chance to get in any place.

So you wouldn't have been able to go to the university.

To one point, I was already the second year when we left-- the second year high school. But my sister volunteered. She's two years ahead of me. She volunteered. She was that skinny-- very delicate. She volunteered all summer to dig. They were building a stadium.

Oh, she was so sick. We went to visit her. Oh, she was sick. Just to get a little metal so you can apply to the university, otherwise you're not allowed to go. They were screaming, we don't need professors. We need workers in the factories-- workers, workers.

What was she sick from?

She was a weak person by nature. Over there, they ate beans in the morning, beans in the evening. I thought it was a national food. I ate so many beans in Bulgaria.

But you said they checked you regularly. And your health was good or not?

We had a children's doctor. You see, we are-- even though we couldn't pay, you had to pay him. Again, we were fighting with this rental thing. They always used to say oh, you're rich.

I had to buy communist paper for the class. They had 40 girls, 40 papers. I said, I don't need it. My sister is in another class. She gets from-- no. They had to prove that they're selling them the magazines.

We were standing, and they were giving us speeches. This is the Russians. All of a sudden in the Jewish-- in the girls high school, all of a sudden they get the margarine. I didn't know what margarine is-- a block. I don't know who sent it, maybe America. I don't know.

Down in the basement there was a cafeteria where the poor kids ate. There was one girl. Her father was goy, was a non-Jewish, and her mother was Jewish. She went there to eat. And my mother told me, don't you dare. You know, proud.

Proud again, yeah.

Proud and hungry. So all of a sudden they told us to bring a spoon-- a soup spoon. And we were sitting in class, 40 girls. And the teacher came with something yellow. And gave each one to her-- bring your spoon. And she gave us.

What is this? We always had butter in Bulgaria. You know, the peasants used to sell things. My mother used to bargain in the market. But they became vicious. They became vicious, those peasants. When the communists came, they were all for money, no play-- no more friendliness.

You mean vicious that they would beat people up or just--

Want money-- money. They took care of their own private gardens more than the fields, so there was no production on the field. But they could buy triple price things. That there was a lot if you had the money.

One time we thought-- I told you we found old clothes. They weren't that old even. They went by kilogram-- they pay us. I went with my younger sister, so a few pennies. So we bought things.

But Bulgaria eats a lot of potatoes. You know, they put for winter sacks of potatoes in a basement, other things. There was nothing. You couldn't prepare for winter.

All of a sudden, they open this Russian big factory. There was a factory in Bulgaria-- frozen food. Frozen food comes on the market. They are selling it.

My mother buys a frozen thing. What can you do? It melted.

Nobody has a freezer.

No. Only one person had. In my grandmother's apartment, there was one doctor that had a freezer-- a refrigerator, electrical. I don't know who where.

So we ate a lot of those baked pumpkin. They had special Bulgarian pumpkin bread. They bake it and put it in the market. This can stuff you very good.

Then in wintertime, they had quince. In September, there is a lot of quince. You bake it and stuff yourself. Even baked onions, because there was a lot of produce. Slowly, slowly the Russians took it away. They start shipping everything to Russia.

And that's the way they are now. They don't even have anything for themselves. I went to visit Bulgaria in 1971. There's still lines. There is only cucumber one day. There were only potatoes in the same market that you shop so much. The Russians milked the country.

How about your apartment? Did they ever take over the buildings?

The Russians took it slowly away. We lived in this till 1948. In 1948 Israel became a state. A lot of Jews went with a ship, the Struma. That was a ship that was going illegal to Israel. And the captain sanked her on purpose. There were a lot of young died on this ship.

Another time, we went to see again at this community place. Quiet, quiet, quiet. What? What? The group are going to Palestine. How? I don't know how, to Turkey. I don't know how they did. But they went. You could see them. And they had the sack. And quiet, quiet, quiet, they went.

But then they were caught, and some of them were in Cyprus. The British made a camp in Cyprus, and they were there.

My cousin was there. He went with an accordion. I heard later that the British wanted to take it, and he threw it in the ocean. And then he said, no one is taking my accordion.

So they had camps. It was not that much liberated. There was still a war.

Did the Russians let the people from Bulgaria travel or leave the country?

Nobody could move. You can't even go to another city to visit. You had to tell them why, and you had to register. And the police did not allow anything. We didn't have money to pay for the train.

Did your mother think at that point that she would like to emigrate if she could?

We heard a lot of Palestine. And one of her first cousins from Sofia, he was going to go. One of them was already in Palestine, living in Jerusalem. And his brother was going to go, too. But he sent the papers to Turkey for a visa, and they were never returned. So he stayed in Bulgaria.

My mother's family were Czechoslovakian citizens. So I don't know what happened. But all of a sudden there came a Czech in our council. They gave to all their citizens condensed milk. This was during the Russians. My grandfather went and got some condensed cans. I liked it. Oh, this was the first sweet thing I ate for so many days, except for the fruit we'd gather.

So obviously your grandparents got back all right, too.

Later on, my grandfather had malnutrition. He was very, very sick. And I looked good, but all of a sudden my eye was red, red. I had to go to the doctor, and said 10 iron shots. They shot it here. It was awful thing.

Did you ever suffer from any nightmares or other things after all your awful experiences, finding your father, going through [BOTH TALKING]

Yeah, my father-- nightmares for years. Then it was bad. Children are very cruel, you know? Today when I see it, just the cruelty. I don't know how children become.

And the name Mavorch is a big name in Sofia, because we lived in a center. And my uncle is a lawyer. The other one was dentist. The other one-- we had another cousin. He went to study. He wanted to be a musician.

But my uncle told me, this is not a profession for a Jewish person. He loved music, so I said, go and study medicine, and then you can do whatever you like. And he did-- became a musician after became a gynecologist. That's why my mother used to go to him, and he made the abortion.

He went to Vienna to study. This was before the war-- met a Polish lady. She was an artist, a graphic artist, graphics, wood-graph.

And they had two girls, which was my second cousin. They're pianists. They were pianists already. Because my grandmother's sister was from Vienna, she had the work. She taught music, and so she taught these two girls he had.

And they were performing all over the place. But when the Germans came, the Jews were not allowed to do this. So their name was Kramer. Her name was Kramer. He was Polish Jew. But Kramer is not Jewish Bulgarian. So the daughter appeared in the piano concerts under the name of Kramer. They didn't know. When they performed in the

province, they didn't know that she's Jewish.

After the war they stayed in-- they came to Israel, but they couldn't make it. So they went back. Like a musician-- my uncle, this cousin-- Bulgarian. He was in the Bulgarian Philharmonic. Every evening he was performing, and during the day he was a doctor.

What happened to the Jewish community after the war under the communists?

The Jewish-- Yeah. In 1948, Israel became a state. And they started to-- you can go emigrate. You can emigrate-- immigration.

You had to register if you want-- all of a sudden, my mother sees herself no meaning of support. Nobody wanted to pay rent anymore. And we took-- we went to the police. Go to court. We went to court. Nobody did anything.

Even though the courts we paid to a lawyer, there was an assigned lawyer. They assigned us a lawyer-- not your lawyer, court assigned lawyer. We moved those people that were living over there-- comes from the police, put them back. The court has no right. The hand didn't know from the head. Everybody did what they want. So this was getting very, very bad.

In the meantime, the state was becoming-- people became restless. And whenever there was antisemitism, they call it go to Palestine. Go to Palestine. I didn't know what it was.

Were they still antisemitic after the war?

When you got mad. Yeah, when you get mad, somebody-- they call it [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] is the Jewish word I told you, a Turkish Jew.

Was the synagogue still operating?

The synagogue was closed.

Closed.

The communists--

No more synagogue. Next to the synagogue was I told you-- it was Italian school they closed. The Romanian school was closed.

The French college-- there was a special college not far from our neighborhood. Nuns ran it. A lot of Jewish kids were studying French. They closed everything. They sent the nuns out.

So all the religious organizations--

Nothing, nothing. The church you could go through. I used to love to go, just going either to weddings sometimes. They were there open, or nothing. Nobody was-- maybe they were afraid to go. But then later on, they made the museums-- never had old churches. They made them like a museum.

The palace had a big fence. They tore everything down. It was just a building for meetings. The king was chased out. He died, and the family was chased out. So they went to Egypt some place. I don't know.

Could you practice whatever you wanted to practice about your religion at all? Could you be practicing Jews in any way, or did you want to?

During the war?

No, after the war.

The synagogue was there. We came back, and the synagogue was standing nicely.

When I went to visit in 1971, it was locked with chains. And I said, what? I brought my daughter with her, and my husband. Look at this. There's a chain-- used to be such a beautiful thing. Inside was all velvet-- dark red velvet.

Everything is deserted-- one little room we can go and we will put a little oil. And comes an old man from the back, where he's taking care of it. Oh, we are remodeling. Everything was bombed during the war. I said forget it. It's not true. It happened to be a Jewish man that went to Israel, and didn't get along, and he went back to Bulgaria.

So the synagogue was still standing after the war.

Was standing locked.

So did you give up any Jewish practice that you wanted to do, or what did you do? Did you just-- didn't do much of anything?

We just did the socializing in the synagogue in the backyard. No, we were standing. When we had the holidays, we just would go to the prayers. And after, the children were playing outside.

And on Yom Kippur, if somebody wanted to celebrate, they were sitting outside. And some of them were smelling lemons. Lemons was the season that came. Before the war, there was import. Good stuff came in certain time of the year. But during the war, the Russians-- ha. It just took--

During the war did you have any practice at all when you went out to the provinces?

Yeah, we did. We had a synagogue. And this was a meeting we used to-- all the neighbors used to meet over there, and children, and we used to talk. In the front was a small area for the men.

And we had one fellow from Sofia. He sang like an opera. He sang. Just for him we went. Plus we had to study the Hebrew alphabet.

The children had little benches. We were sitting a little higher. And after the service we went on the back yard and talked news. And that was the religious stuff we had during the war.

You were saying that after the war, your mother got to the point of saying, whoa, I have no source of support. Did she ever think to marry again?

Yes, she did. But she always thought they were to marry her for the property.

So she didn't marry.

During when we were in the province, there was the a nice bachelor over there. And they tried to make a shidduch. Oh no, no. They want to marry. They all want my property. I don't know what she had. This property brought us only misery.

And then you said it was taken by the communists anyway later.

Taken one by one.

What do you mean one by one, one apartment--

They said three children-- three children. You don't need. You're not going to have. Only two stores for each child. There were three. And the apartment for my mother, because she was a widow. The rest of it was confiscated right away.

And then, before we could sell the upper apartment, which was a half roof-- the other part was slanted. It was small apartment-- 1 million pounds-- 1 million lev. When we decided to go to Israel to sell it, we almost got a customer. And we thought this was inflation. It could have been not much. But ready to sign, the man comes and says, well, the children are under age. What will happen if someday they come back and want the property? No sale.

So this was left for somebody. When we left, we had to give the key back. But when we assign my mother-- they said we can go to Israel.

You said the government of Bulgaria said you could go to Israel.

Yes, through our city. You know, the Beit Ha'am, this was our government. You can either immigrate. They got money from America. They paid for each person. Some Jewish organization paid for us. Then we were allowed to go, but leave without passport.

Without a passport.

You could not get a passport, and no coming back. You sign, and that's it.

Why did the communist government allow you to leave, do you think?

They got money.

They got paid off.

They got money-- lots of money.

Do you know how much?

No, I couldn't tell. But this was good money.

Per person?

Yeah, of course-- of course per person. And the first immigration, we got a slip to buy for my nails, and a few bolts so we can make one-square foot box. That was all we were allowed to go to Israel with.

Per person?

No, the whole family of four.

You could take one square foot box of your personal goods.

Yeah. So we had two pillows in there. I had a clock that made a little noise, because years ago, I took it apart. I'm mechanical. I wanted to see what is going to work in there. So we couldn't put it back. So this was with us. It was brass.

So my mother goes and registers that she wants to go to Israel. So we are allowed to take this and sell everything else-- get rid of the rest.

So first we started to sell. We put everything on the street to sell. You know, with 45,000 people selling at the same time, you know what your things are worth?

The peasants came from the villages. They had the gold teeth. The gypsies had more than we did, because they were working. They had carriages, and they were selling things on the market.

The woman were cleaning. They had the cash. The peasants came to buy from us the things. They came with fur coats, because they were selling everything triple prices, like free market.

So we sell what little we could. And my mother bought-- there was a free store. Could buy free material with more money.

You could buy free material?

You could buy stuff. This was a store. You could buy what--

You mean like free enterprise.

Yeah.

OK.

So she got cotton material, and she made us-- I have it-- three dresses. We had to go to Israel. We had to find a dressmaker and pay for the sewing. And she bought herself a coat-- lamb coat, with the thick fur. She wore it for years in Israel, because you got there in February. It was very cold.

And then money-- my grandmother left for my sister a ring and a pin. Years ago they used to wear those silk scarves tied up with a little diamond, which was a pin. I have it today. I made a-- you know, for hanging. I almost lost it-- better hang it. So my sister has the ring.