

1 INTERVIEW WITH: Krell Sisters

2 Reporter/Transcriber: Mary P. Hennessy

3 INTERVIEWER: Okay. I think we'll just go ahead
4 and start. Why don't you tell me your names and where you
5 live now and a little bit just about who you are.

6 LEAH WEIMS: My name is Leah Weims. I live in
7 Houston, Texas, and we have been in Houston for 30 years since
8 the end of the war almost.

9 RUTH STEINFELD: My name is Ruth Steinfeld and I
10 was -- we both came over in '46.

11 INTERVIEWER: Now, you're sisters?

12 RUTH: Yes, we're sisters. And when we arrived
13 in New York, we were also told that we could go to three
14 places, Houston, Minneapolis and Seattle, and we picked
15 Houston. And we've lived there ever since and we're married
16 and have children.

17 INTERVIEWER: Why were you told those three places?

18 RUTH: I think that the OUSEE^{D.S.E.} which is the organiza-
19 tion that brought us from France were affiliated with the
20 Jewish Family Service and we came over as war orphans and
21 so there was no one for us to go to other than homes that
22 were supported, I guess, in some way by the Jewish Family Service

23 INTERVIEWER: How old were you?

1 RUTH: I was thirteen.

2 LEAH: And I was fourteen. We were one year apart.

3 INTERV: Were you able to spend the war years
4 together?

5 RUTH: Yes.

6 INTERV: Tell me what happened to you.

7 RUTH: We spent --

8 INTERV: Where were you from originally?

9 RUTH: We were born in Germany and in 1940 the
10 Germans deported all the Jews from the region where we were
11 born, which was Mannheim. They deported a whole trainload
12 of Jews and we didn't know where we were going but we ended
13 up in France, in the south of France, in a Nazi concentration
14 camp by the name of GERSE, and a lot of people have never
15 heard of GERSE, but it was an actual camp there. And what
16 did you say that we found out yesterday?

17 LEAH: I found out yesterday that they had set up
18 this concentration camp as a --

19 RUTH: Model.

20 LEAH: As a model, to see how people would do in
21 concentration camps. That was the first -- they did not
22 in that -- at that particular time want to mar their country
23 with concentration camps. So they set this one up in France

1 and Mannheim being the region which was closest to France,
2 we were deported to this GERSE.

3 LEAH: With our parents, our parents and a lot of
4 other people, we were told not to take anything with us.
5 We had to leave -- our father had a business and we had a
6 home and everything had to be left at home. We were able
7 to just take the clothes on our backs and we, with a lot of
8 other people, were lined up on the train station and put into
9 these trains without knowing where we were headed and
10 that's --

11 INTERV: How old were you at the time?

12 LEAH: I was six and my sister was five. And we --

13 INTERV: So at that time there seemed to be some
14 thought of keeping families together?

15 LEAH: Until we got there and then they separated
16 the men, and the women and children were put in different
17 areas of the camp. And the camp was very, very large
18 barracks with straw beds and very little food, and there
19 were people there already.

20 RUTH: Right, there were gypsies, I remember,
21 gypsies were there. And then all the people from Germany,
22 from that part of Germany were all piled in together.

23 LEAH: One thing about the concentration camp

1 that I've always had in my mind was the barrack next to ours
2 was filled with women who had -- my mother, they were
3 screaming all day, and I asked my mother what were they
4 screaming about, and she told me they had gone crazy. And
5 I -- that's -- for some reason was the one thing I did
6 remember a lot through the years.

7 INTERV: What happened to you when you got to
8 the camp? You were separated from --

9 RUTH: My father.

10 INTERV: From your father. And your mother
11 stayed with you?

12 RUTH: Yes.

13 INTERV: And how were your days spent? What
14 happened there?

15 LEAH: It's not very clear anymore. I do remember
16 the food we got was water that was colored and had things
17 in it and we had come from a fairly well-to-do home, and
18 we wouldn't eat anything. And we, I guess, cried a lot,
19 because we were so young, we didn't understand, but this
20 went very fast and it seemed like just a week or two,
21 although it was about six months later that we -- my parents
22 were asked by the OUSEE, the French Children's organization,
23 whether they wanted their children taken out of the camp,

1 and since our parents probably knew what would happen to
2 them, they told us that we were going somewhere and we got
3 on a bus and the last we ever saw of our parents was waving
4 good-bye, and that was what they must have done to save us.
5 And we never saw them again.

6 INTERV: It's surprising to me that the people,
7 the French people from that region, would have been allowing
8 this to happen. I guess they must have had some influence
9 to try and save at least the children. I don't know if
10 there was anything that you learned about this later or --

11 LEAH: Or that the organization was allowed to
12 even come into the camp. I'm sure it took a lot of influence
13 from the French people because this agency was supported by
14 the French people, Jewish or non-Jewish, I don't know, but
15 it was a French organization, and they were allowed to come
16 into the camp and ask all the parents whether they would
17 like to have their children taken care of and taken out of
18 the camp, not knowing where they were being taken. It was
19 still better than being in the camp.

20 RUTH: We later learned that our parents had
21 escaped. My father went to a farm and was working as a
22 farm hand, and my mother had gone to Montpelier and worked
23 as a maid in a hotel. And yesterday I heard this gentleman

1 speaking, and what he was telling the story of, that he
2 had -- he was part of the people that were digging under-
3 ground tunnels and breaking the barbed wires in certain
4 areas, so my mind would almost have to think that there
5 were some people who allowed this to happen, or they would
6 not have been able to escape. So the French people, too,
7 were scared of being themselves taken to concentration camps.
8 Also, my parents were then taken again to Drancy, which is
9 another --

10 LEAH: No, that was later.

11 RUTH: That was later.

12 LEAH: We were taken first to an orphanage.

13 INTERV: This is when you were allowed to leave.

14 LEAH: When we were taken out.

15 INTERV: And you were --

16 RUTH: During the night, we were.

17 LEAH: And we, of course, only spoke German
18 at that time. We were taken to a home called Chateau de
19 ~~Masgelle~~ MAGILLIEAU in -- near Paris. And we didn't know who was
20 there or what was there but there were about 250 children
21 there already when we got there with our busload, and they
22 assured us that we would again see our parents. Of course,
23 we -- it was very important at that time. And they fed us,

1 and we had classes during the day, and we got used to the
2 life, and --

3 INTERV: Were these other German children or French?

4 LEAH: German children and French children.

5 RUTH: And the one thing that I remember is that
6 every -- first of all, we had lice and so they had to shave
7 our hair and then we were put -- the ones, the new arrivals
8 were always put in a room upstairs in this old castle, and
9 we were made to sing all day so that we wouldn't cry and
10 obviously they didn't know how to deal with it, and that
11 crying might have been what we needed to do at the time.

12 INTERV: Is there anything in particular that you
13 remember?

14 LEAH: I remember a kind, kind person, when I first
15 got there, I guess, because I remember crying at night and
16 this woman came to me in my bed, and said, CHILD LU CA FALLE,
17 which means, "What's the matter, are you depressed," and
18 I'll never forget those words because you just felt so good.

19 INTERV: Did anyone tell you anything about what
20 was happening around you? I realize you were very young
21 at that time, but --

22 LEAH: We didn't know.

23 INTERV: Any explanation at all?

1 RUTH: Well, I know that we used to get little
2 postcards from my mother, and all of a sudden we didn't get
3 postcards anymore, and they called my sister down to the
4 office and she was not to tell me that --

5 LEAH: No, it wasn't that I wasn't to tell you.
6 It was that I didn't want to tell her, but they told me that
7 our father had been taken. No, that our mother had been
8 taken by two policemen from the hotel where she was working,
9 and they weren't sure where she was taken, but how could
10 they explain it to a seven-year old kid? But later we
11 learned that our father had already been taken, that he had
12 been tortured, and had to tell where my mother was. So we
13 assumed that that is the end, and nothing else was ever
14 heard from them, and I kept it from her for about three
15 months because -- yeah. So --

16 RUTH: See, she still doesn't allow herself to
17 cry. But anyway, so at -- during the worst part of
18 the war, we were given fictitious names. My name was
19 Regine, and fictitious birth certificates. And we were sent
20 to farms, farmers, small towns of maybe 600 people, very,
21 very small, little town, DABERGE DE LA TU, and no one even
22 knows where it is. And during that time we were sent to
23 Catechism, (continue on page 9)

1 and were told that we could never tell the truth about
2 ourselves, and --

3 LEAH: The priest was pro-Nazi, and he made
4 sermons in the church against the Jews, and the town sort
5 of was so small that everyone knew what the other was doing
6 and the couple who took us in never went to church. But
7 they were -- they knew we were Jewish and that they were
8 risking their lives by keeping us. And the neighbors
9 started to talk about them because they were doing this.

10 RUTH: And they -- because of this priest, they
11 started calling us ^{Sans Juif} SANS JUIT, you know, which means dirty
12 Jew, and so the ^{OSE.} OUSEE again stepped in and took us to other
13 childrens' homes. First we were in SAINTE LUCIEN and we
14 were with just orphanages, and there was no --

15 LEAH: Just steps ahead of the Nazis. Everytime
16 that they knew that the Nazis were on our tail, we were moved
17 during the night and just taken to different places. But
18 we were always together.

19 INTERV: This is one thing that I have been
20 wanting to ask you about.

21 RUTH: Yes.

22 INTERV: It seems extraordinary that you were able
23 to stay together during this whole period.

1 LEAH: Yes, it was very extraordinary.

2 RUTH: At one point my sister became very, very
3 ill, and had rheumatic fever, and there was no penicillin
4 or anything, and so for about a year we were separated,
5 and she was in hospitals, and that's a real, a strong
6 point in my life when I thought that I didn't have her,
7 and I've never -- you do it. Anyway I do have her and
8 she gives me hell all the time. You don't have to keep
9 that on there.

10 INTERV: But to have not been separated with
11 everything else that's going on --

12 RUTH: Yeah, except for that period of time --

13 LEAH: Which was very unusual.

14 RUTH: But in those -- at that point I thought
15 that not only had I lost my parents, but I knew that I was
16 losing my sister because they had taken me to the hospital
17 and she didn't even recognize me and she was very, very sick.
18 There was another point of, you know, sadness added to
19 what already was, you know.

20 LEAH: Thank God, I'm okay. RUTH: Yeah.

21 LEAH: But the main thing at that time was that
22 wherever we were being sent, I remember screaming at
23 people that were taking us out and trying to help us,

1 we are not being separated. We stay together, no matter what.
2 So whoever had to take one of us had to take us both,
3 because no matter where it was and who it was, it was always
4 made known to them in no uncertain terms that we were going
5 to have to be together or we're not going. That's how it
6 happened that we really were lucky. 'Til the end we were
7 always together.

8 INTERV: Well, you were moving around a lot.

9 RUTH: Yes.

10 INTERV: And was there any point that you remember
11 sort of knowing why this was all happening, why you were
12 always moving around?

13 LEAH: Yes, we knew that, by this time, that Nazis
14 were there and we heard horrible stories about them taking
15 children and that they were especially looking for children,
16 because this was their prime concern in those days, because
17 all there was left were children in childrens' homes,
18 because the parents had already been taken care of, and
19 they were looking for us, and we heard things about them
20 giving them injections, and taking them to have tests made,
21 and taking them to concentration camps, and therefore we
22 knew that when they told us we had to move, we had to move,
23 because we heard about the atrocities that were going on in

1 France, and everywhere else. But --

2 INTERV: How were you finally able to come to the
3 United States? This was after seven or eight years.

4 LEAH: Yes, we spent all the war years there.
5 One day, I don't know how, we were told, did you remember
6 better than me about how we learned our grandfather was --
7 had come here before the war, in 1938. We had tried to get
8 out of Germany also, but my father was a Russian prisoner of
9 war in Germany, and had something wrong with his eye, and I
10 had a birthmark on my back, and so they had any excuse that
11 they could, the Americans, to keep people from coming to this
12 country at that time. So my mother and my sister weren't
13 going to leave without us, without my father and me, so
14 we weren't able to get out. So our grandfather was here
15 and somehow he found us through INAUDIBLE.

16 RUTH: There was a, from what I understand, there
17 was an advertisement in the New York paper and they --
18 looking for people who might have had children that might
19 have survived in Europe, and so my grandfather, who died
20 just a few short months after we came to the United States,
21 took it on himself to find us, and he did.

22 LEAH: And all he wanted out of life was to see us
23 again. So, after he saw us, that was it, you know.

1 INTERV: Awfully extraordinary time.

2 LEAH: Yes. And he found us. We came off the
3 boat with 70 other orphans who were with us throughout this
4 war, and who had someone here in this country who found
5 them, and this is the list that my sister still has of all
6 those kids.

7 INTERV: Did you consider those other kids friends
8 of yours?

9 LEAH: We had a lot in common, yeah, but at that
10 time it didn't really matter. We knew we were all in the
11 same way, and we had lice when we came over here, too, and
12 we were on a terrible French army boat that took two weeks
13 for the crossing, and we were sick, and had bunks, and
14 those that wet the bed, would wet on top of those that
15 were underneath them.

16 RUTH: And when we arrived here, there was a strike
17 in the New York harbor.

18 LEAH: Oh, yeah.

19 RUTH: And we had to stay out and -- outside of
20 the port for a couple of days or weeks, I don't even know
21 anymore.

22 LEAH: And people greeting us, coming from Europe
23 in 1946, everybody with a picture, "Do you know them? Do you

1 know them?" We were scared to death. We, of course, didn't
2 know anybody. "Do you know them? Did you see them?" You
3 know, like we couldn't speak a word of English. This was
4 the third language we were learning. And my grandfather,
5 when we saw him, I recognized him because even though he had
6 white hair, he still looked like I remembered him. And he
7 took a pill right away. And this scared us to death. We
8 were scared of men anyway.

9 RUTH: We hadn't seen older people. I mean, we
10 lived in a world of young people, and here was this old man
11 who couldn't breathe, and couldn't, you know --

12 LEAH: We made the front pages of the New York
13 Post. We still have the pictures, and we're with him,
14 with us, because we were sisters, and there weren't too many
15 that made it back at the same time. There were three sets
16 of sisters that were with us and him embracing us and holding
17 us, we looked scared to death. And then he wanted us to
18 live with him and we wouldn't because we just were scared,
19 didn't want to have anything to do with him. Kids. You
20 know. Now, I feel very guilty about that.

21 INTERV: What happened then? He wasn't living in
22 Texas though.

23 RUTH: He was in New York.

1 RUTH: That's when we -- after he did, that's when
2 we were sent to Houston, and that's where our lives really
3 began.

4 INTERV: Can you talk about that a little bit?

5 RUTH: Well, the first part of that isn't too
6 pleasant, as again Houston was not used to foreigners at
7 the time, and we were put in these homes that were wealthy
8 people who have really had no compassion. They just wanted
9 us to do what we were supposed to do, and --

10 INTERV: You were together.
LEAH: Which was maid work. No, no.

11 RUTH: But this was the first time we were
12 separated, and we did maid's work and children, taking care
13 of their children, and --

14 LEAH: So that we could go to school part time.
15 That was the deal. They asked us, the agency asked us
16 whether we wanted to be in an orphanage, or if we would
17 like to earn our own way, and do this. So of course we
18 weren't, you know, we immediately said we wanted to go help
19 ourselves. So this-- she was put in one household, and I
20 was put in another, and they had other help. But weekends,
21 the maid was off, so we did the maid work on weekends, and
22 took care of the kids at night. So they wouldn't have to
23 have a babysitter. And they were nice to give us a home, but

1 it was a very unpleasant time in our lives. So we both went
2 to high school, business school, and got the hell out as
3 fast as we could so we could get jobs.

4 INTERV: Did people know where you had come from
5 and what had happened to you? Was that anything that --

6 RUTH: They were not really interested, and --

7 LEAH: Especially in school.

8 RUTH: Right. Houston, at that time, was very --
9 I mean it just hadn't been touched by any of this.

10 INTERV: It's a cow town.

11 RUTH: Right. It was far removed from reality,
12 like New York for instance, and the bigger eastern cities,
13 and they were good people, but they just -- they just --
14 well our own peer group had never been --

15 LEAH: Exposed.

16 RUTH: Exposed to people like us. And the people
17 who were coming over at the time from Europe were all Polish,
18 and so we couldn't very well identify with them, and so we
19 were sort of -- I decided just to become a good American
20 and never to have an accent again. And I did everything I
21 could not to have one, such as never speak French, and never
22 speak anything but English.

23 LEAH: That's right. And then of utmost importance

1 what happened though with our parents, what finally was the
2 outcome of how they met their end was not revealed to us
3 until we went to the gathering in Israel in 1981.

4 INTERV: When you learned what happened to them.

5 LEAH: After all those years. We never knew any-
6 thing. We knew they weren't alive, but we didn't know what
7 happened. And we went to Israel for the gathering, which
8 was a God-send, and we decided, we're going to Israel for
9 the gathering, but we're going to go to the ^{had Vashem} ADVASHEM, and
10 we are going to look up whatever we could find, if anything,
11 about our parents. So we started searching through the
12 books. But the books were mostly for the Polish people and
13 they had lots and lots of records of every home town for the
14 Poles. Then by sheer accident, there was a book that we
15 found from Serge Klarsfeld, who had put together a list
16 taken from the Paris Nazi office after the war. And he had
17 published it, and it was 80,000 names of Jews who went
18 through France on their way to someplace else by the Nazis,
19 and the book was by transports. Each page was a date of
20 the transports of a thousand Jews or more, and the name,
21 first name, last name, date of birth, where they're born,
22 and what happened to them. So we started flipping through.
23 My sister and her husband were there, and my son, who had

1 spent a year in Israel was there still, thank God. And I
2 went to use the telephone, and I saw that Gabe Pressman was
3 there, and he had been interviewing some people there for
4 the gathering. And I called up my son to tell him to come
5 to the ADVASHEM to meet us, and all of a sudden I hear my
6 sister screaming. And I ran back in there --

7 RUTH: Anyway, at that --

8 LEAH: She had turned the page and it was Convoy
9 30 -- tell it.

10 RUTH: It was in Convoy 30. By that time I had
11 already decided I guess I would never know what happened.
12 There were so many names. And there on the second page of
13 Convoy 30 were the names of Anna and Alfred Krell, and that
14 was the first time that we had ever seen our parents' names
15 actually listed, their birth date in there, place of birth.

16 LEAH: When they were born, we never even knew that.
17 My father's birth.

18 RUTH: They were not citizens of any country,
19 because Germans were not Jews, you know, were not citizens,
20 I guess you heard.

21 LEAH: And then there was the story in French of
22 what happened to the convoy, and that 900, approximately 900
23 from the thousand in that convoy had been taken immediately

1 from -- from where they were taken to Drancy, which was a
2 camp, and then to Auschwitz. And it gave the names of the
3 few that had survived from that transport, so we knew then
4 that on September 9, 1942, our parents had been taken to
5 Auschwitz, and that was the burial, and that was INAUDIBLE
6 and that was the date that was going --

7 RUTH: That there really was an Anna and an Alfred
8 Krell. For us that was all, something of roots, I guess,
9 and the next day the French people had, were dedicating a
10 monument outside of Jerusalem on which the 80,000 names were
11 all listed.

12 LEAH: And we went to the ceremony and we have a
13 picture of her in front of it pointing to their names, you
14 know. There, forever, are going to be the names.

15 RUTH: And the chief rabbi from France came at
16 that time to give the invocation, and at --

17 LEAH: It was a beautiful ceremony.

18 RUTH: -- that point, I felt like I had really
19 buried my parents the way they should be buried, and it
20 just opened it all up for me. I just, at that point, until
21 that time, was never really willing to think about it. Never
22 willing to talk about it. I have three grown children that
23 never knew very much about it, and it's like now I knew I

1 could come back and really --

2 LEAH: Open up.

3 RUTH: --open up, that I had a place where I could
4 say that my parents were buried just like other people.

5 LEAH: But then, what we did then, about three
6 years before, I had had occasion to have a job in Vienna,
7 Austria, and this will just take a minute, I just want to

8 INAUDIBLE

9 LEAH: Huh? No, no, no.

10 RUTH: It's okay. It's part of it. And because
11 I was in Vienna and so close to Germany, I decided there
12 was no way I was going to come back home without going to
13 see what I could find out. So one day, I worked. So on
14 Friday, we got off at noon every week. And one Friday,
15 about the second week I was there, I decided I'm going to
16 my home town in Germany. And I didn't know what I'd find
17 or anything, but I decided. I went to the train station.
18 I say I want to go to ^{Sinsheim} Zinsheim, Germany. And they had to
19 look, took twenty minutes, I finally got a ticket, I got
20 on a plane -- a train, I had to change trains about three
21 times. About nine hours later I step off the train and I
22 remembered the train station. That's where we'd been taken
23 from. That's the first time I had seen it. And I went into

1 the station. It's very small town. And there were some
2 people there. And I looked for the oldest people I could
3 find, and I went first to the booth. And I asked the man
4 in the booth if he was there before the war, and he said
5 no, but there's a man over there, why don't you go talk to
6 him. I still spoke German. So I went to this old man with
7 a beret on, and I said, "Would you please tell me, were you
8 here before, in this town, before the war?" "Oh, yes."
9 I said, "Did you know an Alfred and Anna Krell?" And he
10 said, "Oh, sure, didn't they have a delicatessen?" I said
11 yes. I said, "Well, I'm Leah, I'm one of the --" He
12 said, "They had two girls", he said. I said I'm one of the
13 two girls. And he said, "Oh, my goodness, oh my Gott, my
14 Gott." I said next question, "Are there any Jewish people
15 here?" He said there is one family. I said will you call
16 them. He took me to a phone, and he called them, and he
17 says, "You won't believe this. Anna and Alfred Krell's
18 daughter is here." And I had just taken one night's worth
19 of clothes. "Tell her to come to our house right now.
20 Tell her. Put her in a cab." So I ended up, I spent the
21 week-end with them. I was taken to the church which is where
22 all the social events took place. I was introduced to people.
23 I heard stories like you wouldn't believe of things. People

1 said, "Don't you remember me? I was in Kindergarten with
2 you? Don't you remember?" And they wanted to know what
3 had happened to us, and I told them I'm a rich American.
4 I'm not, but -- and I have four kids, and my sister has
5 three, and we're doing great. And they just -- they showed
6 me Nazis. They said, "This man took part in it." I met
7 one family of Germans that were just wonderful, they couldn't
8 do enough for me. Like they wanted to apologize. They took
9 me to their street festival. I had to make a speech. They
10 made speeches in honor of my being there. They made me
11 promise I'd come back. So every other week-end, I went
12 back. Nine hours train ride. So after Israel, the reason
13 I'm telling you this, after Israel I told my sister we were
14 going to Germany. She never wanted to go back to Germany.
15 I said, "Look, we're going to Germany." So we did, and we
16 took my son and her husband and we went to our hometown
17 and we found more people. We went to the town hall, we
18 found a Nazi who cried because he told us stories that he
19 didn't do it, he didn't do it, he had nothing to do with it
20 but he remembered. And this was a Jewish house, and that
21 was a Jewish house, and they all had become rich in 1940,
22 because that's when they took over all our property. They
23 were all rich. They all had big houses. We went to see the

1 house where my grandparents had lived. And the man who had
2 the business in back of the house showed us some equipment
3 that still belonged to my grandfather, that they had gotten
4 since they had still kept and used in the business. And
5 the kitchen, she remembered.

6 RUTH: I -- I knocked on the door and I said I
7 used to live here. Would you let me come in? And that--

8 LEAH: They were happy to see us. They called all
9 their friends and their neighbors, and they said guess who
10 this is. And they couldn't get over it, that after all
11 these years, that here we were. They showed us where our
12 house had been, our own house.

13 RUTH: Mostly, at the time that we walked into the
14 house, all the -- what happened to me was that I had for-
15 gotten everything. And when I walked in there, it was like
16 it all came back. There was my mother, my father, me, my
17 sister. I could hear the Germans walking up the stairs,
18 and in a few moments, it just, like my whole past, and my
19 nephew who's like 6'2, and very capable young man, just out
20 of my relation -- I was standing there, just crying, as if
21 it's happening, and he was standing there crying with me.
22 But, after that, I had such a sense of forgiveness for them,
23 for the people who were living in my own home. I really had--

1 it was like for a split second, I felt that I would have
2 probably done the same thing they did. That if it were
3 a question of my life or their life, I would have saved my
4 life as they did.

5 LEAH: You don't know that.

6 RUTH: And that's the feeling I have, whether I
7 know it or not, that's what I now live with. Where I used
8 to not have a sense of anything but a lot of hatred, and not
9 willingness to understand, it has totally turned itself
10 around and I feel a lot of compassion for the people who
11 have to be reminded everyday of what they did or in some
12 form were involved in as many as forty years ago.

13 LEAH: We heard stories for instance, of how
14 an SS officer, of the Nazi SS, had -- or they weren't
15 supposed to do business with us. How one of them had gone
16 into my father's business through the back door, but that
17 he was never seen again. The town people told us about this.
18 All kinds of stories.

19 RUTH: They really tried to help us and --

20 LEAH: And that one night we were there and the
21 next morning we weren't there anymore in school. These
22 people, who had seen, been with us in school. They said
23 we didn't ever know what happened to you. Whether they were
lying or not, I don't know. RUTH: In fact, this woman, who

1 in our home, had a daughter who was just a few years older
2 than my sister and I, and when she saw us, she just began to
3 cry and hug us and kiss us, because we were still alive
4 and that she was so happy for us, and we naturally didn't
5 remember her.

6 LEAH: There was one couple in the car that we
7 were introduced to by the friend that we have in our home
8 town. The man would not turn his head to talk to us. We
9 were told later that he was a Nazi, big Nazi. His wife was
10 crying when we were talking to her, because we told them,
11 we wanted them to know that we had children, and how well
12 our children were doing, and that we had survived. And he
13 wouldn't look at us at all, never said one word.

14 RUTH: I made sure to tell him that there were
15 now three generations of us.

16 LEAH: That we had made it, that we were well,
17 and it bothered them very, very much. And there were many,
18 many like that.

19 RUTH: It was like the whole town, it was like
20 everyone seemed to be aware of the fact that we had come
21 back, and they took us into their homes, and wanted just to
22 talk and tell us --

23 INTERV: Don't you think it also brought back all

1 of those things?

2 RUTH: To them, right.

3 LEAH: They haven't forgotten because to them
4 it's all, before the war, during the war, and after the
5 war. That's their life.

6 RUTH: It's like for me, it was -- I wouldn't
7 even go in a Mercedes, and I would like to have one, don't
8 misunderstand, but I would never think of owning one or
9 sitting in one, or how could they even do that.

10 LEAH: Talk about the cemetery, the Jewish
11 cemetery.

12 RUTH: Oh --

13 LEAH: In Israel.

14 RUTH: But, mostly, for me, I've got to just put
15 that out there, Leah, that I really had a sense of love for
16 them, and I know that sounds crazy, and I know that the way
17 we can make a difference now is naturally punish the people
18 who were involved, and there were a lot that were. But not
19 make the whole people guilty, because I want (inaudible)

20 LEAH: No, it's not everybody that was at fault,
21 but like Elie Wiesel said the other night, he said had there
22 been more righteous Gentiles this would not have happened.

23 RUTH: Right. Right. Like in --

1 LEAH: There were not enough righteous Gentiles.
2 They were all scared.

3 RUTH: They were scared. Like we were.

4 LEAH: I know, but there were some that weren't
5 scared.

6 RUTH: True.

7 LEAH: But we were taken to the Jewish cemetery
8 now, in our home town, a Jewish cemetery. It seems the
9 friend, the German woman who took us, she wanted us to see it.
10 We went through --

11 RUTH: (inaudible)

12 LEAH: --they could not open it. It was locked.
13 So we couldn't go in the door, but there was a little passage-
14 way that we could go in. It was well-kept, it was mowed.
15 Some of the graves had been patched together again because
16 they had been (inaudible). We recognized names, great-
17 grandmother, and other people.

18 RUTH: We found our great-grandmother after whom
19 I had been named.

20 LEAH: Her grave was there.

21 RUTH: That was so neat.

22 LEAH: But the cemetery is being kept by the
23 German people of the town now.

1 INTERV: As well for themselves.

2 LEAH: For themselves, yes. This seems to make
3 them feel that they're doing something to make up for what
4 they did.

5 INTERV: Was there ever any period at all where
6 you felt that you didn't want to be Jewish or you weren't
7 going to be Jewish, or --

8 LEAH: I don't think I ever felt that.

9 RUTH: I have for so many years that we had to
10 lie about our name and our religion, it almost -- I didn't
11 want to be Jewish.

12 LEAH: (inaudible)

13 RUTH: I wanted to keep my name of Regine instead
14 of Ruth, and I wanted to be Catholic, and yet I knew that
15 I couldn't be, but it was definitely a thought of mine for
16 a long time, that it was hard for me to tell the truth about
17 my religion. I went to work in a very Baptist company
18 and the boss took a liking to me and asked me what church
19 I belonged to. And I said I didn't, which I thought at the
20 time that he really didn't mean did I belong, giving money
21 belong, and I would never tell him that I was Jewish. And
22 the day of the high holiday, my sister got up before I did,
23 and mind you she's only a year older than I am, and called

1 up my boss and told him that I wouldn't come to work that
2 day because it was the Jewish high holiday.

3 LEAH: She was scared she was going to get fired.

4 RUTH: I knew that he wouldn't let me come back
5 to work because I had already lied about my age. I was only
6 16, you were supposed to be 17. And so the next day, I
7 walked up quite slowly, expecting to be fired, and to my
8 amazement not only did he not fire me, but he wanted to know
9 all about me and what had really happened to me. And so that
10 sort of made it better for me. After that I was able to
11 tell the truth.

12 LEAH: She didn't have to be ashamed anymore
13 of being Jewish. But I think it never happened to me
14 because I think the more that they did to us, the more
15 it was important to me that I remain what I was, and there
16 was a cause.

17 RUTH: And the amazing thing to me is that she
18 being only a year older, obviously took over the role of
19 mother to me, and I've always looked to her as if she were
20 my mother, even though she is only a year older, and I know
21 she's not. I mean, you know. But it --

22 LEAH: Not because I look older, like a mother.

23 RUTH: But I always had a lot of respect and a lot

1 of --

2 LEAH: We've been through a lot together.

3 RUTH: --admiration for my sister.

4 INTERV: That was something else I was thinking
5 about which is not having had any parents, but having to
6 deal with other adults, if there were any women who helped
7 you and if you were mistreated at all as girls.

8 LEAH: I think we were very fortunate because
9 people that took us in, for instance, were so understanding,
10 so good to us, that

11 (tape ends in middle at this point)

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1 INTERV: In France, while you were being moved
2 around, if there was any --

3 LEAH: I don't remember anything, but she --

4 RUTH: I only remember being treated with love.
5 There was one woman, her name was BEESH, we were all girl
6 scouts. And they made us sing, and we would climb mountains
7 and this is how they entertained us.

8 LEAH: That's while I was sick.

9 RUTH: And I just held on to her, and I remember
10 that she was, all of them, were just really wonderful to us.
11 Like we all came down with measles and chicken pox, and
12 we had rooms full of measles and chicken pox, and they, I
13 think, I have so much admiration for all of them. They were
14 much kinder to us then than the women that I encountered
15 when I came to Houston. I mean I --

16 LEAH: That's right.

17 RUTH: It's --

18 LEAH: True.

19 RUTH: I never verbalized that otherwise. But
20 they were much kinder. In Houston, it's like we weren't one
21 of them at all, and they couldn't deal with it, so they just
22 ignored it. And it's no fault of theirs, I'm sure, now
23 and didn't -- it would maybe be different, but --

1 LEAH: I don't remember ever being mistreated
2 at all. The hardest part was to be alone and ourselves
3 feeling the way we did. But people, the French people, were,
4 as a whole, wonderful. They, as I said, risked their lives
5 for us. Many, many, many, many righteous Christians that
6 are not commemorated anywhere. But they did do a lot for
7 us and they treated us very well and they made sure that
8 we had clothes, and we stole candy. We stole candy, I'll
9 never forget that. The woman in the peasant family had a
10 little cache of candy, and everyday we'd go in and find a
11 piece and I'd make her look out and make sure nobody would
12 hear us because this was like gold.

13 RUTH: It happened that the daughter worked
14 in the -- where they were rationed.

15 LEAH: Oh, yeah.

16 RUTH: And she got extra rations.

17 LEAH: Oh, yeah.

18 RUTH: And they were at the time nobody could
19 have chocolate. And she left it in our bedroom.

20 LEAH: Of all places.

21 INTERV: Little did she know.

22 LEAH: But we were never caught. At least, it
23 didn't seem we were caught.

1 INTERV: Maybe they didn't want to.

2 LEAH: They didn't make anything of it, right.

3 RUTH: Yes, they did tell me. Madame CHAPEAU
4 caught us and what she told us, that if we ever stole again
5 that she would have to tell the Germans that we were there.

6 LEAH: I don't remember. I don't remember that.

7 RUTH: We never stole again.

8 INTERV: Let me ask you one more question. We
9 have been talking a long time. Is there anything that you
10 do now in Houston to talk about your experiences or not?

11 No?

12 RUTH: I -- when we came back from Israel, Leah
13 had already gotten herself involved in this Holocaust
14 Survivors Group, and I right away called and I wanted to be
15 involved. I also have given my name to the Houston Public
16 School System, and I am what they call a living historian,
17 and on my day off from work, I get asked to speak at the
18 schools when they're studying that part of the history.
19 Also, my daughter Michelle, who is at the University of
20 Texas, has asked me to go up there and speak to them, and
21 it's been real wonderful.

22 INTERV: How is that received in the schools?

23 LEAH: Wonderfully.

1 RUTH: Wonderfully.

2 LEAH: I'm not involved in it to a great extent
3 like she is, but we have several people in our Holocaust
4 group that do this, and they go and the kids are dying to
5 know. They're amazing to us, because they all have so many
6 questions. The best part of it is the question and answer
7 time.

8 INTERV: What are they most interested in?

9 LEAH: They are most interested in how did we
10 live as children, and what -- how did we feel when our
11 parents weren't with us, because they can't fathom that
12 happening to them. So this is really what they're most
13 interested in, what awful things happened to us. Have you
14 heard that question, what kind of awful things happened to
15 us.

16 RUTH: A lot of my questions I've noticed is
17 what would I be willing to do now if this were happening
18 again, and that always stuns me because that they are aware
19 that it is happening now. And my answer is always to be
20 sure to communicate it with everyone and to just let everyone
21 know that it does really happen.

22 LEAH: That we are doing this so that it won't
23 happen. This is our purpose in life, so that our kids won't

1 have to go through war, we won't have to give our kids away
2 so that they can live. That's the reason, very important.
3 She has grandchildren, and I have four wonderful kids. And
4 KANINA HORRA, they shouldn't have to go through and give
5 their kids away, even if it doesn't happen until fifty years
6 from now, that they should never have to and you should never
7 have to go through that, and have to make the choice, do I
8 want my kids with me, or should I give them away so they live.
9 This is the most important thing that I remember of the war,
10 of everything, the feeling that my mother and father must
11 have had when they gave us away.

12 RUTH: And in the last few years, I have really
13 delved into my being, and realized that even though I held
14 my parents on this pedestal, and I would never embarrass them
15 and do anything that they wouldn't be proud of me about,
16 underneath all that was the pain of why didn't they let me
17 go with them. And I never realized how really angry I was
18 and I don't know how it ever showed, but I did experience
19 that, the anger of that they took everything away from me,
20 themselves, their love, the things, and it's been really --

21 LEAH: I never thought that.

22 RUTH: It's been really wonderful getting off of
23 that, and realizing those were just those emotions that I

1 had never been able to voice because I didn't even know
2 they existed actually.

3 INTERV: (inaudible) think about --

4 RUTH: So I have -- feel that we have definitely
5 made our parents proud and everlasting.

6 LEAH: And that we raised our kids right, even
7 though we didn't have a role model to go by. But I think we
8 did a damn good job.

9 RUTH: My sister's daughter is a lawyer, and her
10 son just graduated Columbia, and the other two are going to
11 Texas, and mine teaches, and my youngest one is going to be
12 a doctor. And like that.

13 LEAH: So, you see, this is how we fought back
14 I think, through the kids. They may not enjoy it, or
15 appreciate it, but I think they do, and they're knowledgeable
16 about our lives, moreso now than before, because we're
17 making it a point when we get back to get them all together.
and talk about this.

18 Interv: And I think I should invite my sister.

19 RUTH: Really.

20 INTERV: Yeah, really. I think, I don't know,
21 my sister, I think it would be really wonderful for her.

22 RUTH: I'd love to.

23 INTERV: I'll give you her --

1 LEAH: Tell her that you would appreciate it if
2 she joined us.

3 RUTH: And that, to do it for us, not --

4 LEAH: That it's a responsibility that we feel
5 that we have to tell her about it, okay?

6 INTERV: Yeah. I think it would be very moving
7 for her.

8 LEAH: Okay?

9 RUTH: I want you to know, though, that my
10 children have not ever been willing to listen to it.

11 LEAH: Because we probably, moreso you than me,
12 didn't want them to have any pain, we wanted them --

13 RUTH: I wanted them to be like everyone else.

14 LEAH: --wanted them to be shielded from all
15 this awful stuff. And mine moreso, I mean, more aware
16 than hers, but I still, they -- I don't like to talk about
17 it. Their father has talked too much, so I was going the
18 other way, because he was also pretty bad.

19 INTERV: Your husband?

20 LEAH: My ex-husband.

21 INTERV: Oh.

22 LEAH: But he was in all the concentration camps
23 and had --

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INTERV: You met him in Texas?

LEAH: Yes. Yes. But he's still sick, and never got well, and he dwells on it. So I went the other way and tried not to ever make any big deal out of this. Made light of it. But now it's changed. I'm not living with him anymore, so I feel that they need to know the bright side.

INTERV: Anything else you want to say for the tape, that's fine, otherwise, just talk a little bit.

(end of interview)