

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Barbara Rodbell  
August 5, 1998  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Barbara Rodbell, conducted by Steve Roland on August 5, 1998 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

**Interview with Barbara Rodbell  
August 5, 1998**

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection.

This is an interview with Mrs. Barbara Letterman Rodbell, conducted by Steve Roland on August fifth, 1998, in her home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This is a follow up interview to the USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Mrs. Rodbell on June 12th, 1990. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr, for making this interview possible. This is the beginning of that tape number one and there we are.

Answer: Okay.

Q: And the answer to your question about why they want these?

A: Epps. It's all right.

Q: I -- I don't know exactly.

A: I don't know exactly.

Q: I don't know. I -- I think that the idea is just to have -- I -- I don't know academically, or in the research community, as people are studying the Holocaust and it's -- it's effects. I -- I suspect that there -- that there's some interest in trying to see what kind of effect the experience had on people as a group. I know that Simone had a very interesting conversation with me yesterday. She explained to me that there have been some studies done on the hidden children.

A: Yes, there were, yeah.

Q: And that the conclusion was essentially that those children fared just about as well as everybody else in the world, in terms of success or lack of success or divorce, or --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- continuing marriage. That there was not really any big difference. I don't -- I don't know the answer to the question. I just got involved -- my -- my personal involvement was that I've been doing audio production and interviews, for many years. And went to the Holocaust Museum about five years ago and was really devastated by the experience. And called them and started to beg them to allow me to contribute some small way, what could I do? And they put me on this list of -- of interviewers and said, "Well, maybe you can help us with these." And then they just said, "Well, look, this is what we're doing, we're doing this project of follow up interviews and trying to talk to people about their -- their experiences.

A: Yeah, this -- the hidden child thing is -- is very good. You know we -- I don't know if Simone mentioned to you -- what is her name now? I'm drawing a blank. Last name is Fink. She -- she was a hidden child, in Holland, she was four or five when her mother --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: She -- there's definitely -- in her story, you can definitely see that her life was influenced by the situation -- by her past, yeah. I have always thought that my life -- it might have been different, because I would have never left Germany, you know. I was born in Berlin and I would have lived in Berlin and probably married in Germany or whatever. And I would

have never had this broad experience of life, which I ended up having. Because Germany was very narrow. They were very focused upon themselves, they were the greatest, the best, the this and the that. And you would have never had this wide experience. But I would have had a very interesting life, wa -- you know, one way or the other. I don't know if it would have -- from that point, if you had -- it made a difference, in the sense that I was kicked out - - you know, that I had to leave, that I had to live a broader life than I would have otherwise. But as far as the history of humanity goes, that you have children -- that you marry and you have chi -- you grow up, marry and have children, I don't think that would have been very different. Would have been in a different country, but it wouldn't have been very different. I do think that my outlook ended up much broader than it would have been if I'd never left Germany, yeah.

Q: Can you explain that?

A: Well, that's -- that's what I said, that because you -- I had to leave Europe. I didn't really have to leave Europe, but because I left Europe and I s -- I looked at Europe from the outside. And I still f -- when I'm in Europe now, I still feel very European, very European. I -- I don't feel like an American in Europe. I -- I feel European. But when I'm here, I also do not feel a stranger at all, here. And if you want to go a little chronologically, you know, I never really did feel very strange here, you know. It was when I first came over, I felt extremely lonely, of course. I was terribly lonely.

Q: Why don't you tell me the circumstances of your coming? Wh-Why did you come here?

A: Well, after the war -- you know, I was a dancer in Amsterdam. I lived in Amsterdam, first of all, not in Germany.

Q: Right.

A: And I was there all during the war. I was with a group of young people, we were -- we survived the war intact. Not one of us got taken and it was due to the leader of the pack. That was Manfred Greenback, who is still alive and who is still in Amsterdam and -- and who is actually getting a pension from the Dutch government for the work he and his sister, both -- she also -- also has a kind of a small pension from the Dutch government, for the work that they did during the war. But, as a -- I was in that group with him -- with them.

Q: But this was a -- this was illegal work that he did at the time, right?

A: This was -- during the war, it was underground work.

Q: Yeah.

A: In the underground. But he definitely -- he and his sister both, definitely saved us. With the -- through their organization, their ability to get the various papers that you needed to survive and to get food stamps and -- and their connections with other groups. And it was like a large spider web of -- of underground activity. They were all connected, one way or the other, even though their beliefs might have been and their reasons for doing the work might have been very different from each other. During the war, they all worked together. And anyway, I saw -- we survived the war and after the war, I was in the ballet with Sonia Gasco. It is a -- the ballet that -- that later became Niederlander Balletta, the big Dutch ballet in -- in the Stutz-Hober, the big theater in -- in Amsterdam -- the state ballet. It was then called the

Ballet 1945, when -- when I was in it. That was the beginning. And Madame Gasco, who -- who started it, started organizing this last month before the war was ended. We -- we already knew, you know, that the war was going to end and we started practicing and -- and -- and rehearsing and doing all these things. And we were ready -- not quite -- by the time the war was -- was actually ended. And I -- I worked with her and I danced with the ballet and I had various other jobs. I also did photography. I studied photography with a friend of my mother's, who had also survived the war and had actually sort of held her hand over my head, even though I didn't even know it. But she had sort of protected me from various things that went on during the war. So it's all very complicated, but -- but it -- that's how it was.

Q: Ca-Can you give me an example?

A: Well, during the war, I was -- I was dancing. I -- I -- I think I tell all that on the -- on the other tape.

Q: You tell -- oh, yeah, mm-hm.

A: So I don't really want to --

Q: Okay.

A: -- go over it all again.

Q: No, I just meant about the way this woman was -- was protecting you.

A: Well, that's right, she was protecting me in the sense that they decided that some of the things I was during -- doing during the war, was endangering myself.

Q: I see.

A: And she saw to it that I had to stop doing them. She never talked to me, but she talked to the people who I'm do -- I was doing it with and they managed to -- without letting me know why -- to dissuade me from continuing what I was doing. And so in that sense, I didn't know til after the war that it was her -- she who had done this. It was very interesting. So, as I was saying, it was a spider web and -- and it was extended to me, I was part of it and they took care of me. So, even though I didn't know it. But anyway -- so, after the war, I was dancing with ga -- Sonia Gasco and friends of my parents started writing letters to our old address and -- and saying, "Well, what happened to your family? What happened?" You know, and these were people all over the world. I mean Australia and South America and America -- you know, was North America. Canada, every -- letters came from all over the world. And I went back to our old apartment, which was the place they all wrote to. And I told the lady where I was and she -- she forwarded all the mail. When I saw them all -- all these letters, I ch -- answered only the ones that I could remember, because many of these peop -- they were all friends of my parents, not of mine. And some of them I didn't remember and some of them I did. And the one I remembered best, was Dr. Kalinoffsky's family, because in Berlin we used to have gymnastics with their two daughters, they had two daughters, Hilda and Lothar Kalinoffsky. And we had gymnastics with them in Berlin and when we came to Holland, they had gone -- he was a psychiatrist in Berlin and they had gone to Rome. And he had to study again, he got a degree in Rome. And he was a psychiatrist in Rome. And then, when a -- when he felt like things weren't going so well in Italy, he decided to go to the United States. He went to the United States with his family and



he had to do a third degree -- the third -- you know, he got -- he got his doctorate in psychiatry in New York. And that's where he was, in New York. So when I got their letter, I wrote. And it turned out that he had been asked to help establish the Department of Psychiatry at the free University of Berlin. I think it's in Dallem. It's in Dallem or wherever it is. It's in -- near Berlin -- in Berlin. And so he decided he was going to go via Amsterdam and -- to Berlin, from -- from the in -- from New York. So he came by and he said, "Come to the United States. Come -- we take care of it, come." You know? Well, I was doing very well at that time and I kept saying, "No, I -- I can't make up my mind." He kept saying, "Look, your parents aren't going to come back and --" as I'm telling on the other tape, I kept thinking, "Yes, maybe they will come back, and my sister. Somebody will show up, you know, they will be all r -- somebody will come, I can't come right away." So I postponed and postponed. Finally, in 1947, he ca -- I mean, he kept coming, every three, four months, when he had to go to Berlin, and say, "Come, come, come." And he sent me an affidavit. And I got a call from the American embassy in Rotterdam and they were saying, "Well, do you want to come, or don't you want to come? You got plenty of people who want to come, I mean, what's going on there?" And so I took a deep breath and I went. It was terribly hard. I mean, I had a boyfriend and I had -- you know, I was -- I was in the ballet, I was doing well and I was getting up there and it was just terribly hard to leave. But on the other hand, I really -- I didn't see a real future and I -- I thought, well, you know, my parents were killed, my sister was gone, my grandmother was gone, my -- I had family. I had a lot of family still, my mother's family there. And even a cousin of my father's, Heinz

Kemfer was still there and -- in Holland. And -- but it wasn't really my own, you know? It wasn't close enough and -- so many changes had taken place, and I should make a change. And it doesn't have to be forever, I kept taying -- saying to myself. You know, I mean, after all, I could come back and you know, if I -- if I really didn't like it, you know, I could come back and --

Q: And what was your immediate plan? What would you be going when you got here?

A: Well, that -- tha -- I didn't even think about that because he's -- well, I thought I was going to dance, actually. Yes, I thought I was going to dance. Well, it turned out that they lived on Long Island. And I -- I'm having trouble remembering the town. I know that the second house that they had was -- oh yeah, I know, it was Babylon, I think. I think it was Babylon, but I'm not sure. The second place they lived was Brightwaters. They moved pretty soon after I had came, they had -- they moved to Brightwaters and that's -- you know, it is a ways from New York. It -- you have to take the Long Island railroad. And as I found out pretty soon, you know, it was difficult. I had to be in New York for the dance -- for my classes at the American School of Ballet and it was hard to get to and fro -- get the timing right. I could never date, because I -- the train came -- you know, the train -- I had to take a certain train back. And it was just too complicated t-to -- to live out on the island if you wanted to be in New York, which I did. And so I met a girl, Ellen Crooks, I met her in -- at the balle -- in the ballet class, at the American School of Ballet. And she was born and raised in Greenwich Village and her mother had a spare apartment. And so she and I moved in together to -- in Greenwich Village. And it was wonderful to have her, because I mean,

she was -- she knew every little corner of -- of Greenwich Village, having been raised there. And she was very nice girl -- very good girl and -- and we -- we had -- we lived together. We finally took another -- a girl -- a woman -- a girl, I guess we were then. And we lived there together and where we lived was on Third Street, where now is the library of New York University, the law library of the uni -- and at the time, they were already trying to empty the buildings, you know, so there were quite a lot of empty apartments, people whose lease had run out and they weren't replacing these people, because they wanted to empty the buildings, but they had to go to the end of people's contract. And -- and her mother's contract was very long. So we were just -- there were a few people left in the building, so it was -- got quite creepy, because there were many, you know, people kem -- kept sleeping up on the stairs, you know, bums and -- and hobos and whatever you have there. And it was quite an exciting time in Greenwich Village. It was still a little bit of the old Greenwich Village, you know, that you -- that you hear about. Many Italians -- downstairs was a li -- a small Italian restaurant, that was where our telephone was. He -- he would keep message and get messages for us and we could, you know, go and get the messages and we could make calls there. And many, many a time. So -- but it was very nice. I mean, it was exciting, scary and nice. I had to learn how to ride those subways. I mean, I came out of Amsterdam, after the war and it was -- I mean, when I got here with the clothes that I thought were very fancy -- I had taken my mother's -- I had some of my mother's clothes in Holland and I had them remade for the United States. Well I got to the United States and I looked like a spook, compared to the other people in the United States. It was -- there was something going on

called the new look. Remember, they wore these -- these very -- these skirts with many ruffles, sort of wide with -- with underskirts underneath, sticking out a little bit on the -- on the borders and I mean I looked absolutely -- what I thought was high elegance, I looked weird, highly weird. So the first day that we were there, Mrs. Kalinoffsky took me into New York, went to Macy's and she got me outfitted. I got a new coat -- I'll never forget the coat. These kind of things, you remember.

Q: Where did you get money to pay for these things?

A: Huh?

Q: Where did you get money?

A: She -- she -- she did it, she bought it for me.

Q: I see.

A: I had a little money. My father had given my Uncle Bep Person who also lived in New York, who was an announcer with CBS. Especially during the war, we kept hearing him, because he did the Dutch, the Belgian and I think one of the Nor-Nordic countries. H-He did the news for -- for those countries. So I kept hearing my Uncle Bep Person all the time. He worked, as I said, for CBS, for their foreign department, during the war. And after the war, he worked for the United Nations. That's really what he did, til he died. He worked at -- you know, he was a journalist at the United Nations. He wrote all the news from the United Nations and he -- he had been an editor of the Haffsupost in the -- in -- in the Hague and he had worked -- always been a journalist, so -- anyway, he -- in 1939, he took his family to the United States. He -- he had said to the Haffsupost, he says, "I think it's time that you have in

international correspondent.” And they said, “Yes, you know, we -- we like to b-broaden ou-our news and ti -- cli -- go.” So he had job here, in New York. He was in New York with his family. Actually, he lived in Great Neck, they lived in Great Neck, Long Island, but he worked in New York. And my father had given him a Shell stock to take. And after the war, Uncle Bep wrote me that he had that for me. And, so when I came, I had a little money. It wasn't tremendous amount, but it was enough, because I went to work, you know. So anyway, the Kalinoffsky's, they would have helped me a lot more, if I'd asked for it. You know, I didn't want to ask for it.

Q: [indecipherable] can you -- can you -- I -- I'm sorry, I'm a little unclear. What was your relationship with them?

A: Well, they were friends of my parents.

Q: I see.

A: And they -- he decided to -- they were really good friends of my parents and -- and they brought me over. They were the ones that gave me the affidavit and they had two daughters, you know, that were my -- who were my age and I never reme -- and I never forget opening up their closet when I first came to their house. In -- then Babylon, I guess. There were all these clothes hanging, these gorgeous clothes and -- hanging in the girl's closets. And I could not imagine how anybody could have so much clothes. I mean, now I -- you know, I think it's all normal and every -- but then, I mean, we had nothing, absolutely nothing, you know, during all those years of s -- of underground, the underground. I had a skirt and a sweater and a blouse. You know, and here, closets full, all matched things, you know, the

sweater sets and the -- the skirts that went like the triangles and -- and gorgeous things. So, where was I?

Q: Tell -- I wanted to ask you what -- you know, it's hard for me to imagine somebody having gone through the experiences which you did in the underground and then coming and saying that you were intimidated by being in New York, or that you were scared.

A: Well, I was not inti -- you see, that was actually one of the funny -- the strange things. I arrived -- I came on the Queen Mary and I -- I -- sh -- Mrs. Kalinoffsky picked me up and she drove me through New York to get to the Long Island thruway, what -- whatever it's called [indecipherable]. And she kept saying, "I'll take you to Broadway the next one -- next day, you know, when we go shopping. We'll go to Macy's and then we'll go shopping, you know, and I'll show you New Yo --" I went and I saw New York and I wasn't impressed. She was very sad. And now I know, you know, that -- there are many people who come from Europe and I take them around. Th-Things change. And they are often not impressed. Now, why is that, ac -- I explain it to her, that I had seen so many films -- I had seen so many films of New York, of Broadway and of -- you know, the -- the -- at the time, the man was blowing smoke rings, or the woman, whatever it was. And I mean, it was pretty wonderful, but at the time, I -- I wasn't -- I wasn't impressed. I had a very hard time leaving -- leaving Europe and what happened was that I flew from Amsterdam -- from [indecipherable] to London and it -- it -- this is very normal now, but there weren't that many planes in 1947. I -- I left in November of 1947. And friends of my parents again, [indecipherable] picked me up and I was going to have a week or so in London with them,

but what happened is that I got a kind of a nervous breakdown. I was shaking and crying. I couldn't control anything I was doing. I was so upset. I -- it turned out I -- I had left very bravely, you know, taken to the airport by my boyfriend and my best girlfriend together, they were -- and I got on the plane very bravely, I walked over there. I had a bunch of tulips for -- for the Ronas with me. And I remember handing it over to them and then breaking down right there at the airport. And I cried for four solid days. I just couldn't -- and finally the doctor -- I guess I got some Valium or something to calm me down and that was -- friend of my Uncle Heinz was there -- actually the brother of Ava Kempfer, his wife -- my cousin's wife, was there and he wanted to take me out, you know. And he took me out and I -- he said, "Ma -- Your eyes -- what -- something wrong with your eyes?" They were so red -- rot -- red and swollen and he took me out and the funny thing, he took me to his club. And w-we went to his club and they fed me something. I -- I will -- I think it was -- I had scrambled eggs with ham or some sort of thing and there was something wrong with the ham and I ended up sick in London from -- from eating that -- that ham and this cousin, he -- he had been just wonderful to me. He had saved his clothing coupons, there -- in England, and also in Holland, we still, in '47, had clothing coupons. And he had saved his clothing poop -- coupons and he went to a store with me and he let me choose a blouse or whatever I wanted -- it was a blouse -- from his coupons. It was the sweetest thing, and --

Q: This was your cousin Heinz?

A: This wa -- no, this was actually the brother-in-law of my cousin Heinz.

Q: Okay. And what was his name?

A: His name was Gunther Ver-Vernon. Their real name -- you talk about real name, their real name was Vershenski and his -- his -- they changed their name to Vernon. Anyway, Gunther Vernon, he saved his coupons -- his clothing coupons for me and bought me a blouse. But, the poor guy, he fed me something -- he didn't, I mean the -- the restaurant there in his club. So, I was sick from that and I was sick of heart, of leaving Europe. I was scared to death, you know, really to be on my own in a huge country. I mean, to come from Holland, which is the first thing the Dutch always say to you, "How do you like Holland, isn't it small?" You know, this is -- it's one sentence that they're saying. Of course now, you know, it's going to be Europe and it's going to be bigger, but --

Q: Well, be -- k -- k -- k -- can you explain something to me, just so I'm clear about it, because I -- I'm not -- what I'm not clear about is, what was the impetus to leave and to come to the United States, other than it's sort of the general dream, of going to the United States?

A: Well, I was at a point, you know, where I had to make up my mind what in the world was going to happen to me. I had a relationship, which really --

Q: This was with Otmar?

A: With Otmar.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And -- and I just thought I'm getting on in age and I want children and -- you might have heard, you know, Otmar did not want children.

Q: Yeah, I thought that was a very important [indecipherable]



A: It was a very important point and I said, "Oh, my goodness, you know, I'm getting to be 22." In those day, people married pretty early. Not as early in Europe as they married in the United States, but they did marry pretty early. And I was getting to be 22 and he didn't want children. And I was crazy about him. But -- and I think that's why I had the nervous breakdown, because I just -- I didn't want to leave him, but I knew I had to leave him. I mean -- and that's how I am. If -- I mean even -- even if it breaks my heart, if I know I have to do something, I'm my own protector. I have to take of -- care of myself and that is what I have to do. And so I decided this was a point where I had to leave. Another thing was that the Dutch had not given me citizenship. Now, you have to understand that my mother really was Dutch. She was Dutch, she was born Dutch. My grandfather was Dutch. My grandmother wasn't, but my grandfather was Dutch.

Q: You mother's mother?

A: My mother's mother.

Q: I mean, your mother's father.

A: My mother's father, yes. Hendrick -- Hendrick Zeetron. But he lived in Berlin and he had married a German wife, Ellen Fillipi. And when he died, in '31, my grandfather, when he died, my grandmother, my Dutch grandmother -- she had become Dutch, moved to Amsterdam. So, when things got tight -- well, we actually went to Holland on vacation. I sa -- I'm telling that in the other story, we went to Holland on vacation and again this Uncle Bep, my -- the journalist, he's the one who said, "Don't go back," to my mother. Anyway, I don't want to go over old ground.

Q: No, no. Yeah.

A: But that's -- that's --

Q: I'm just curious about -- about -- to understand the motivation.

A: Well, the motivation was -- it -- it was kind of a desperate -- cr -- a desperation kind of thing. If I don't get out of there, I'm going to be stuck with Otmar and I'll never have children. And the one thing I want, is children. I need something that is my own, my own. After all these losses, after no mother, no father, no sister. No -- you know, no grandmother. You see, you have to understand, I'd been extremely lucky, you know, I'd been extremely lucky. I had fantastic parents, a lovely sister and an everything, you know. I had a grandmother who adored me. I had always been loved and taken -- taken care of. And I think that's part of my success. I -- I have to be so grateful to them, so grateful for the strength that they gave me, through their love, real --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview, with Barbara Rodbell. This is tape number one, side B.

A: -- something that is my own -- my own. After all these losses, after no mother, no father, no sister. No -- you know, no grandmother. You see, you have to understand, I'd been extremely lucky, you know, I'd been extremely lucky. I had fantastic parents, a lovely sister and an -- everything, you know. I had a grandmother who adored me. I had always been loved and taken -- taken care of. And I think that's part of my success. I -- I have to be so

grateful to them, so grateful for the strength that they gave me, through their love, really. And it has carried me, even past people, you know, who really tried to down me and give -- tell me, you know, "You're no good and you can't do anything," and this and that, you know, I -- I have always thought, "That's what they say, I know better." And that's due to my parent -- that's due to whatever they did, you know, in the very beginning. I always knew that we were the best. I mean, we were -- you know, and -- and we were just right, you know, my father was -- was an intellectual, he played the violin, he -- my mother played the piano, we always had music. We had wonderful friends, I adored my parents friends. They were all fantastic, you know. That is -- I used to sit around, listen to them talk and they were wonderful, witty, well-based, intellectual kind of talks. And I adored it. I -- I just -- I would sit there and listen and listen. And I -- I would read the books they gave me and the books that I found and I've always liked that. I've never been a scholarly person. I've never been as somebody who -- I -- although I like school, you know, history and things like that, but I've never been a s -- a real scholarly person. I'm more toward the arts and toward the touchy-feely kind of things and -- but I love to listen and I -- I enjoy that kind of atmosphere. And amazingly enough, when I came to the States, the Kalinoffsky's, as wonderful as they were, you know, they didn't have it. There wasn't a painting in the house. I gave a painting to Mrs. Kalinoffsky for Christmas. A painting that was made by somebody in Greenwich Village, whom I liked very much, a -- a German girl who was there. She never hung it up. I looked at -- I looked at it. I couldn't frame it, you know, I couldn't afford to frame it, because I had to pay her -- my goodness, I think it was 50 dollars. And 50

dollars -- for me to make 50 dollars, I think that's what I made a week, you know? So I saved the money for -- for this painting and I bought the painting and I gave it to her. At -- and for -- for Christmas and I -- they never hung it. I --

Q: You were celebrating Christmas, or they were celebrating Christmas?

A: Oh yeah, they -- everybody I knew was celebrating Christmas.

Q: Was that a -- was that a change or was -- or was --

A: I -- we were never very religious.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I remember Christmas at home in Berlin. I do remember some Hanukkahs in -- in Amsterdam, but that was, you know, a-after the emergency, you know? It was because we were thrown into this peculiar situation of being not really at home. You know, I mean, we -- we were just -- we had moved to Holland and things were different in Holland, you know and we were sort of thrown in a society of people like us. I found out, when I was there just now, in Amsterdam, with -- with Barbara Addie--

Q: When -- when was that?

A: -- that -- well, it was just this year, in the spring I guess it was. Oh, it was very -- still very cold, so it must be early s -- early spring. I found out that the neighborhood where we lived in was brand new when we came. I -- I had no idea about that, you know, I ha -- I -- I saw it as a child. You moved in somewhere [indecipherable], but now I know that it was a new neighborhood at the time, just been built and that's why there were so many people like us. You know, German Jewish refugees, actually, who lived in that neighborhood. But it

made it a very -- it wasn't strictly like that, but a lot. And so that's why the Franks were there. And -- and the family of the woman he finally married and -- and -- and you know, I mean, just name it. Maria Austria was there, who became my foot -- photography teacher after the war and who also took many of the very beautiful pictures of our family at the time. And I worked as a model for her and for her sister, who had been a buwhouse weaver. And I wore the sweaters and things she designed and Maria photographed them and it got into the various magazines in Holland. LeBella and some of the other ones. And, so that neighborhood was very cozy in -- in that way, because -- and you didn't feel like a stranger, because everybody -- not everybody, but quite a few people were like that. I never felt -- I cannot remember, I should say, maybe there were moments, but I cannot remember feeling like a stranger.

Q: In Amsterdam?

A: In Amsterdam. Or an -- or an outsider. I might have been, because now people say that the Dutch really weren't very nice to the foreigners, they resented them and this and that. But I -- I personally can't remember it. Now I was just a dumb child and I was busy with myself and probably didn't pay attention. But I never felt like an outsider.

Q: Now when -- when you rephr -- I know you say you didn't feel like an outsider, but -- but are you s -- the -- as an outsider as someone from Berlin, or someone who is Jewish?

A: Now, this is a very interesting question. I never thought about Jewish. And, to tell you the truth, I -- I have never thought -- unless people ask me and I'm sort of -- stand back and look at it, you know. I really never thought about Jewish. In Holland, I never realized

anything. People are not -- were not very religious in Holland. They are not very religious in Holland. I remember in Sweden, which isn't quite the same, but still, people were telling me th-they were saying, "Well you know, we were really heathens. We're really heathens," she said. "We're -- we're -- we're baptized and we die in the church." I mean, for the rest -- you know the church. And in Sweden they actually tax everybody a dollar or [indecipherable] a certain percentage, so that the churches can be kept, because otherwise nobody would take care of them, you know? And it -- it -- in Holland, it's not quite like that, but it is like it, quite a bit. You know, religion really didn't mean much to me, I mean it's -- it -- it never has.

Q: Well, tell -- can you tell me a little bit about your -- a-about the atmosphere. Y-You started to describe the atmosphere in your -- in your home when you were little.

A: Okay, the atmosphere.

Q: And just about --

A: In Berlin? Or in -- we --

Q: First -- w-well, how old -- first of all, how old were you when you moved from Berlin to Amsterdam?

A: Eight -- I was seven. I had my eighth birthday in Amsterdam.

Q: Yeah. Well, either one, whatever you can recall. What I'm interested in is that -- the -- sort of the -- what -- what your family was like.

A: Okay.

Q: [indecipherable] you described a little bit about your father and your -- of playing the violin and the intellectual atmos -- but also about the -- the code of ethics and the -- and the -- and the religion.

A: I don't know anything about the code of ethics. I don't even know what it means.

Q: Well, [indecipherable] that's a weird phrase.

A: I mean, my father was a lawyer.

Q: Yeah.

A: And he never did anything that was not right. That's kil -- that's what killed him. I mean, he could not go outside of what was at the moment, the law. He could not see past that, you know? I mean -- and what saved me was that at the time this all happened, I was 16 years old. I mean -- I mean in Holland and I was just starting to develop my own little group of people, my -- young people. And they were different. I met Manfred and that was my luck, dumb luck. And he was politically interested. Now, he was 19 or 20 when I met him and he was political, but I didn't know anything about political. One thing I didn't know anything about was political. I knew we moved to Holland because of Hitler, but otherwise, it was just a move for me. And it was a struggle, that first year, to go from German to -- to Dutch in school. I was very b -- I mean, I had been excellent at school in Germany.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Which was in the same street, actually, or the street next to ours, that I could walk there, you know, to the school. And I came and -- by the way, and this -- this would interest you. One day -- now, I'm talking about Germany now. This was in the second grade. We got to

take home a little letter, which said, "From now on, Barbara should be in school at 10:30 on -- on Tuesdays, because the other children will have religious instruction, which was Lutheran. And in case -- you know, she doesn't have to come til 10:30, that's when school starts. Well, I cried and cried. My father had to sign this little note, that he had gotten the message and he s -- I -- I said, "Why shouldn't I go there?" And he says, "I don't know why you shouldn't go there. You want to go there, you go there." So he wrote to the teacher, "Barbara would like to attend." Come at nine o'clock, attend to school. So I had religious instruction, Lutheran -- the Lutheran religion. And I loved it. I was one of the best ones telling these stories, my goodness. Bread into wine -- I mean br -- you know, I mean bread - - I mean how he fed all the hundreds and I mean, it was just fabulous. I d -- I was a good storyteller and I got my -- the highest grade. I did very well. So, coming to Holland was hard for me, because I had to start all over, making my place in the class and -- and trying to -- and who was in my class but Margot Frank. And that's why we got to be so friendly, because we started the same year, the same day, the same everything, you know. And we lived in the same neighborhood, so we walked home together. And that's how the families met each other.

Q: So, but what -- so what was your ed -- what was your parent's religiousness like?

A: Well --

Q: Did they go -- did they go to synagogue on a regular basis?

A: No.

Q: They didn't?



A: Never. No.

Q: And --

A: Not in Berlin. Now, we're talking Berlin, now.

Q: And -- and had -- had you had a brother, would he have been Bar Mitzvahed?

A: I don't know. I don't think so. But I -- I might be totally wrong in this.

Q: Okay.

A: I do not want to put words in their mouth.

Q: Just -- yeah.

A: No.

Q: But your father had been Bar Mitzvahed?

A: You know, I don't even know that. I presume he was, because my grandfather was -- I think he was religious. My grandfather -- on both sides, my grandfathers, were religious. My mother's grandfather, I remember him putting on the Tefillen and davnen in the morning. But for the rest, you never heard anything about Jewish. You know, I mean, he -- he did that. I think they like, lit the candles on s -- on s -- Friday evening. I think they did. I'm pretty sure they did. I think they had Hanukkah and not Christmas, but we had Christmas.

Q: Your parents?

A: At home?

Q: Yeah.

A: We -- I remember we had a big hall and I remember this gorgeous Christmas tree. I mean, it was big, you know, all the way to the ceiling, with the real white candles -- live candles on there. I remember the plates, with the nuts and the marzipan and the -- and the apples, the red, red apples and the -- you know, what you get at Christmas. And we had a lot of maids and people, you know, and they were Christians and they were mostly Catholics, actually. And they -- and I remember also, that they all got presents, we got presents. I remember my father saying that -- not to forget to give him money in an envelope, because when he get -- went to court, there were all the people, you know, at the door of the court and the people who worked for him in the office and he was giving presents out, Christmas. And we had -- definitely had -- I remember that wonderful smell of the pine an-and I'm probably romanticizing it, but I can see it, how it was.

Q: Well, it's a --

A: Memories will make things prettier than they probably were. But it was very pretty, and -

Q: Well, those are powerful memories for children.

A: And you know, it was also that ma -- where my parents went skiing, or they went on trips, I had a Catholic maid, she was a Red Cross nurse. Sh-She wasn't a maid, she was a nurse. And she took me with her, to her parents. So, that was in Bavaria and it was completely, you know, Christian and I have still pictures of that and everything. And I would go -- later, when I had a governess and my sister had the -- the -- her -- Maria, my nurse, I resented my sister because of that, she got my Maria. And I got a -- an governess.

That governess went to -- she was also Catholic and I remember her -- going to church with her, because on Sundays, when my parents weren't there and she wanted to go to church, she couldn't leave me home. So I would -- I would go to church with her. And I -- I remember my parents coming home one night and my mother was giving me a hug and there was something crackling on my chest and she looked under the blanket and there was one of these holy cards, you know, the saint cards.

Q: I don't know what that is.

A: Well, that is -- that's -- well, you know what these baseball cards were, that boys exchange?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, it was like that, little bit longer, a little narrower and it had the picture of the saint and then it had some of his sayings or poe-poem about him. And what it was supposed to do, was protect me during the night, from anything bad that could happen to me. I mean, that was what -- what they did -- what -- what she did. She meant nothing but good with it. And my mother was very upset. I remember her being upset.

Q: Because?

A: Well, I presume -- I presume that she said, "Look, it's all right to take her to -- to church with you, but, I mean, how far can you go? You know, after all, you know, that's not her religion."

Q: Now I want -- I just want to do something here, I want to -- I want you to just go over the names of the people in your families, to make sure that we have them. Or -- or who you can

remember, but your grandfathers, what did your grandfathers do? What was their professions?

A: My grandfather -- my mother's father --

Q: Right, was his name [indecipherable]

A: Okay, that was just a Dutchman -- he was the Dutchman.

Q: And his name?

A: And his name was Hendrick Ruloff Zeetron.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And my grandmother's name was Ellen Filipi [indecipherable] Zeetron. And my father's -- oh, he was a furrier. He had a furrier business and that's a wonderful story, because -- I don't know if I told that, probably on the tape also --

Q: I don't -- I don't think so.

A: Well, he -- he was, of course, born in Amsterdam and he was born at number one Culverstrat, which is right across from the palace. It's a little narrow street, which is now nothing but a big junk heap. I mean it's -- it's -- I can't give you an example of a street that's like that. One store next to the other and not very classy. But they still owned the house. The family -- Cargill Zeetron owns that house and -- and a jewelry store that they all came out of that jewelry store. My great-grandfather Ruda -- Ruloff owned a jewelry store, which he, I think had already inherited from his grandfather at number one Culverstrat. And that house still is owned by the Zeetroons. It now is called Shrapzeetune or Fundumzeetune or something like that, the store itself, but my cousin Carroll has the upper -

- is only on the upper -- has an office now only, on the upper floor. He only does antique -- antique jewelry now. But there were 15 children or 16 children and it was sort of half and half -- half girls, half boys. And there was, of course, no possibility of all the boys inheriting this business. So --

Q: Because?

A: Well, that's never done. The oldest inherits it and the rest has to, you know. The girls get some help, you know, they get dowries and stuff -- they got dowries and stuff. But the boys were on their own and it was typical of the times that boys were walking around Europe, the -- not just Jewish boys, I mean all boys. Second sons, third sons, fourth sons, you know. They were not inheriting anything. They were on their own. So, my grandfather walked -- he had an uncle in Berlin and he walked. He walked first -- he was sent to Borna. In Borna, that's where the family spunyard came from, and that is --

Q: Family what?

A: Spunyard -- spanyard -- it was called spanyard.

Q: What is it?

A: Well, spunyard is -- at a translation is Spaniard. A person from Spain, Spaniard. Well, the spunyard family had a business in Borna, which was a mill and they produced cloth material, that's what they did. And he was sent there to learn the business. So there is my grandfather Hendrick in this teeny tiny town in the west -- in the west -- pardon me, in the east of Holland. He hated it with such a passion. Now, those people were very religious. My grandfather was religious, he was raised very Jewish, but he wasn't like they were, they

were narrow about it. And so he fled, after awhile and he started going east. And he kept going east and he told these stories about first he got to Dusseldorf, one of those towns. And he had to have some money. So he took a job with a furrier, and what did he have to do? The furriers would get furs from all over Europe, mostly Russia and -- and -- and the Scandinavian countries. And he had to scrape the flesh off of the furs, so you can imagine the stink in there. I mean, it was horrendous. And since he was the littlest, because he was only like -- I don't know exactly his age, but he was very young. And he would be -- the bag, because it stank so much, was hung out of the window -- where the scrapes were scraped into. And because he was the littlest, he was put into the bag to stamp it down. To -- to -- to compress that stuff, because he -- because -- then they could put more in the bag, these bags were leather and they were then taken somewhere and -- and emptied, I imagine. And he was telling these ta -- he -- we -- used tell these awful stories, how terrible that all was and he didn't want to do that, so he fled again and he kept walking east -- east -- east -- east. There was another uncle in -- in Berlin. And he got to Berlin and that uncle ha -- wa -- had a furrier business and he took furs that were already scraped and ready to go, you know, to be made into coats. And that's where my grandfather Hendrick learned his business. It was very -- it's a very amusing story, because what happened then -- he was quite handsome -- he was very blonde, very blue eyed -- sort of a reddish blonde hair. I was called a st -- called a Dutchman. And he was -- there were Jewish families in Berlin that had been there a long time, were very settled and one of them was the Filipis. And they were extremely rich and -- and one day the daughter, Ellen, my future grandmother had her 16th or 18th

birthday. And my great-grandfather, Louis -- Louis -- Luis, I think his name was -- who rode horses and did crazy things all -- all his life, gave a huge party for her. It was a g -- like a coming out party, sort of -- you would call it now. And he invited every eligible bachelor in Berlin to that party. And so my grandfather knew he wasn't eligible at all. I mean, he was just, you know, a poor boy, really, working in -- in somebody's business. But he heard -- a friend of his told him that there was going to be this great party, in this fabulous house and - - and he said, "Well, I want to go." And the friend said, "Well you have to have an invitation." And he says, "Well, we'll manage somehow." You know, "We'll -- we'll manage it. Just take me with you," you know. So they rented a suit for him and they went and somehow he got in and because he was really very handsome. He was tall and he was nice looking and -- and blonde, she f -- Ellen liked him, of all the boys there, you know, with beautiful names, that had been in Berlin for age -- she chose Hendrick Zeetron. And her father, after the party, said, "Well, which one shall it be?" Because he knew that whoever he chose, with all his money, she was going to get. So she said, "Hendrick Zeetron." And he'd never heard of him -- anybody like that. It was a disaster. He l -- he said, "Never," you know. And she said, "Oh, yes." And she locked herself in her room and she wouldn't eat and she wouldn't drink and she wouldn't this and she wouldn't that and she had the key and he couldn't get -- they couldn't get into the -- into the room. There were lots of sisters in her family and brothers also. But they couldn't -- he loved Ellen because she was just as strong as he was. This was my grandfather I'm talking about, Louie. And --

Q: Your great -- great -- great-grandfather.

A: My great-grandfather, yeah. So she won and she married Hendrick. It was a total disaster, but nevertheless, you know, it was a -- she got whom she wanted, and he got so much money. I mean, now it would be a million and a half -- something like that, dowry. I mean it -- it was just tremendous. I have a tape that my Uncle Huntz made. That was -- is my mother's youngest brother and that's where he tells this story. And he's the one where I get my figures from. So -- so -- so my grandfather suddenly was rich. And there are other funny stories about the fact that he wanted my -- my great-grandfather said, "Okay." He thought he would win out a little bit by that -- through that. He said, "Okay, if you want to marry him, he has to be a -- he has to become German. You can't marry anybody but a German, the Dutch are terrible all day. They have no culture, they have no this," you know, "or that." So, he tried to become a German. And -- and they have the papers, the family of my Uncle Heinz has the papers for that. He applied to become a German citizen and my Uncle Heinz has the answer of the German government to this and they said, "If you actually marry Ellen Filipi and if you have children and if they get to be 18 years old without any problem with the police or any kind of trouble with business or whatever. And if you haven't had any trouble with business, then you will be allowed to reapply for citizenship." So they got married.

Q: That's funny. Now was there any -- any question about or issue of their -- of his Jewishness?

A: No.



Q: They were all Jewish?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: He -- they were Jewish, but, you know, the Germans considered German -- Berlinners, they considered these Jews -- I mean the Dutch, the Dutch were peasants to them. All the Dutch were peasants to them. You know, nice little grab bag of -- of peasants.

Q: Okay, now tell us -- let's spend a couple of minutes talking about your father's parents.

A: Okay, my father.

Q: And just the other ones and then we'll go on to some [indecipherable]

A: Okay, let's go to my fam -- par -- now, my father was born in Hirschbeck in Aubershlasian, Upper Salasia, in Hirschbeck. Now, I have looked at where that is. I called the German embassy, because when we went -- we're going to Prague, actually and I knew it wasn't too far from Prague. And I thought it was in Germany. It -- I mean, at the time that he was born, it was Germany. These are these border areas that kept turning -- changing nationality. They -- they were -- they were German or they were Polish. Every time -- now, Hirschbeck actually always was German, but guess what, it's Polish now. It is called Yelenagura and it is up in the mountains in the most gorgeous country that you can imagine. It's a little mountaintop town. I guess it's bigger now, a lot bigger. But I went there -- the last time that I went there, I was six and a half, seven, sort of like that. That was when I was allowed to go walking with them. And I remember how gorgeous it was. I remember the fields with the weaving wheat and the red poppies and the blue cornflowers around the

edges, mostly poppies. It was so gorgeous, with the mountains up there. Anyway, that's where my father was born and where I guess his father was born also. I had hoped to go there and when I asked the German embassy, they said, "We don't have -- yes, they said, we have two or three Hirschbecks. Which one do you want?" And I said, "Upper Salasia." And she said, "We don't own that any more." After the second World War, it was given to Poland.

Q: Oh.

A: So, it's now Polish.

Q: Why would that prevent you from going there?

A: No, it wouldn't prevent me from going, but it does put a little bit of -- I -- I'm not anxious to go to anything Polish. I -- I don't know why that is, but I don't --

Q: Well, that's interesting. You're -- you're more comfortable in Germany than in Poland.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Because what?

A: Well, I can't -- I -- the Germans I can understand, you know. I can't speak a word of Polish. And -- and I don't know what they're saying and I've heard nothing but bad things about it. It's -- it's -- it's very strange, because of course, as a European, I didn't know many bad things about Poland, what they did to the Jews and this and that, but as an American, now, I met a lot of people whose descent is Polish and it's nothing but rotten. You know, the things that you hear -- that -- that I hear out of it. It's of course ridiculous, I'm sure it's not all true now, or that there are exceptions, you know, you shouldn't generalize, but --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Barbara Rodbell. This is tape number two, side A.

A: -- a lot of people whose descent is Polish and it's nothing but rotten. You know, the things that you hear -- that -- that I hear out of it. It's of course ridiculous, I'm sure it's not all true now, or that there are exceptions, you know, you shouldn't generalize, but the history of Poland and the Jews is not very nice, and so I -- I have a prejudice against it, that's what I have.

Q: Well that's -- you know, I mean -- and these things I think are important to mention and it's important just to understand --

A: Why?

Q: I think it's just important to understand -- you know, for me, like for instance, one of the things that -- that's a question that is -- some -- some people who have -- some people refuse to buy German products.

A: Yes.

Q: Particularly cars.

A: Yes.

Q: Like some people say, I just will never buy a Mercedes or a Volkswagen.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Some people say, "Well what's the difference?"

A: Yeah.

Q: You know?

A: No, I -- I have a hard time. I would like to buy a Mercedes, very much, but I would have to give myself a real shove to do it. I would -- really would like it. And no -- now when I was in -- in -- in Germany now, you know, and I met so many nice people. I mean, I met nothing but nice people. And I kept saying to myself, "This is the next generation and the next generation." There're two and three generations since I left.

Q: Yeah.

A: I hadn't been in Berlin for 65 years, I'm 72. So, you know, it -- it really -- I -- I kept saying to myself, "Well, it's not the same people, it's not the same people." But I know that even then, it wasn't all bad at all. Because my father had many, many nice friends. And there didn't seem to be, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: At least I didn't notice anything.

Q: Well, I mentioned to Simone yesterday, that when I went to Poland in April -- I'm relatively naive about all of the events that took place and about all of the cu -- the complexities of the relationships, and --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you know, I mean I have some idea, but -- but relatively unknowledgeable and for me, it was absolutely staggering to be there and to -- to try to comprehend the relationships between the few remaining Jews in Poland --

A: Oh.

Q: -- and the Poles --

A: No, you [indecipherable]

Q: -- and then the Germans, next door and the relationship that the Germans have to the non-Jews and the relationship the Germans have to the Jews. And the abs --

A: The German had with the Poles.

Q: Yeah. And how all of these people can live together with this kind of shared memory --

A: History.

Q: -- and history and trying to either preserve it or go on. It was -- to me, it was completely staggering and I was so confused and so emotionally drained when I got back. And it was the reason I never went there before, because I figured this was going to happen.

A: Course. Exactly.

Q: And it was still -- it was extremely interesting --

A: Extremely.

Q: -- and groundbreaking and it was -- for me it was amazing to go there. And -- and I took a trip to Auschwitz and went there.

A: Did you?

Q: And that was just --

A: I couldn't do that.

Q: I -- I -- wu -- I --

A: I'm a real coward that way.

Q: Well --

A: I'm a real coward that way, I mean --

Q: I don't thi -- I wouldn't recommend it for somebody whose been through what you went through. I think, for people who haven't --

A: No, I mean to think it's my pa -- my -- if I think -- I tell you what happened when -- when they opened the Holocaust Museum, we were invited --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- you know, to the opening. And I -- I went through the museum. Do you know -- I mean, I knew that my parents died in the ovens, I knew it. And you'd know my father -- it doesn't really make any difference, but he was a persnickety guy, you know, always clean every day, everything starched and everything -- you know, he was quite an old-fashioned gentleman. And, to think of him -- it was the first time that I saw a model of the -- of the path that they had to go to get to the ovens. And they said they had to go naked, that they had to take their clo -- if I think of my persnickety father, my -- my -- and my m -- it's -- it's -- it's unbelievable. I mean I -- I looked at that and I'd known it, after all. I have imagination enough. I had known all this and still, it just hit me so hard, that particular thing. The murder -- you know, the films that they show, the -- the videos that they show of the murdering, you know, where you have to look over the edge -- those things at the museum, so that kids can't see it right off. The television shows -- did you look over the edge yet?

Q: Oh, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

A: That -- that murdering and killing, I know that. But -- but that model of the path to the -- to the -- that -- it's a white thing, sort of beige-y white thing, yellowish white, the path that

they had to go through to get to the ovens. It's unbelievable. It is unbelievable that somebody can go and design that. I mean, to such an incredible thing.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then I went to Berlin. I mean, that is just. Now I went to Berlin and I looked at these people. These are the children and grandchildren -- [phone ringing] I just --

Q: You don't want to get it?

A: -- of -- of these people. And I just -- I just really -- I just really couldn't believe it, that -- that that is -- that they can walk around. But they are troubled by it. They are -- this -- the new generation is totally troubled by it. An --

Q: Hold on one second, let's just wait for it to stop ringing.

A: It stopped. That's the end, four times.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: So, so --

Q: But that -- that issue of the --

A: The -- the actual seeing of something is different from --

Q: But that -- yeah --

A: You know.

Q: But I -- no, but the -- the planning.

A: The planning, yes.

Q: The plan -- because even when -- when you go -- when I went to Auschwitz -- I didn't realize this, but Auschwitz had existed before the war, as an army barracks.



A: Yes.

Q: It was just my ignorance, but I didn't know that, so I -- so I went there and I saw it and it's -- number one, it's -- i-i-it's -- it's serene looking. Because it's just these -- you know, it's weird, because it's like these -- these small brick buildings with grass and -- and paths in between them.

A: Well, now --

Q: It has barbed wi -- has barbed wire everywhere --

A: Now --

Q: So you know what's going on. But the -- the thing was that it wa -- had -- was pre-existed and even the first gas chamber that they put there was previously a storage -- underground storage room for potatoes and food for the soldiers. And they cleaned it out and they sort of made it a makeshift gas chamber. What was really upsetting to me, was when you go two miles down the road to Birkenau and you see that they have worked with this small facility at Auschwitz and it wasn't proper -- it wasn't designed well, it wasn't efficient. So they're going to build from the ground up, with all of their knowledge about how to slaughter people.

A: Birkenau?

Q: Birkenau. Which is built on a field. It's humongous and it's so big. And the places that they put people were not these little, tidy brick buildings, but they were these hu-huge barns, for thousands of people. Which is -- they just pushed them in, like cattles. And then they -- their -- these are lined up and they were all -- they're -- most of them are burned, because

they -- because they tried to burn them all down as they were running away. But then you see the plan and the train tracks that come right down and -- and it's in that part of it, which is the -- exactly what you were saying, which is this conscious planning and very careful -- it's -- it's beyond, I mean it -- it was -- I had never seen anything like that in my life. And it's so far beyond my comprehension of humanity, that I was just completely --

A: Human.

Q: -- silent. I couldn't -- I couldn't stay there. I couldn't talk about it.

A: [inaudible]

Q: Turn off? But that -- you know what, why don't we get -- go in -- we were in the middle of -- you were telling me about your father and your mother, but you didn't get up to your mother.

A: Yeah, I told you about my mother, now I-I'm busy with my father.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: Do you remember I told you about Hendrick Filipi? I -- I mean Hen-Hendrick Zeetroon?

Q: I mean -- I -- I -- I'm sorry, about your -- your father's --

A: My father's father.

Q: -- father, and your father's mother you didn't tell me about.

A: Okay. My father now, I told you he was from Hirschbeck, Aubershlasian, Upper Salasia.

Q: Yeah.

A: In this beautiful, little mountain town. And my grandfather was a lawyer and he was on this town council and he was quite well known and -- and busy in that town and I think they

lived very happily. I also think he was religious -- belonged to the -- whatever congregation they had in Hirschbeck and -- and the -- I don't know how big the community was there.

But there obviously was one. The story is that he actually died giving a talk in the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, which was supposed to be an honor, to die in such a way.

But I -- this is his story and I don't know if it's true.

Q: Then this was your grandfather?

A: This was my father's father.

Q: Yeah.

A: He's supposed to have been a lovely man, but I -- I never met him. So, my father had a brother named Kurt and he died of a liver ailment, rather young. He also was a lawyer.

There was firm, really, Leiderman, Leiderman and Leiderman in -- in Hirschbeck, I think.

And then --

Q: Who was the third Leiderman?

A: Well, was my grandfather, my father and --

Q: Oh.

A: -- and his brother Kurt, who was older than -- than my father. There was also a sister named Kaita and the -- my cousin Heinz that I've been talking about, is her son. So that's the -- that the -- the combination. Kaita was 10 years older than my father. So that's quite a lot.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so, I've been trying to find out, you know, how old, actually, my grandfather was and my great-grandfa -- and my grandmother. My grandmother I only knew as a black dressed very old lady, with a very high hat, with -- with a black sort of drape coming off of it -- veil, sort of, coming off of it. She knit a lot of things for me, I remember that, having little dresses that she knit and -- and having scarves and things that she knit. And -- can you turn it off for a minute?

Q: Yeah, sure.

A: The -- the sad thing is that I don't know much about this grandfather. His -- his name was Benno -- Benjamin Leiderman. And I understand that his father too -- I think his father -- my great-grandfather -- my great-grandfather had been a teacher in Hirschbeck. So that's already, you know, quite a few generations that they lived there. They ha-had a wonderful house, which I remember, a really old-fashioned German tall house. And my grandmother -- at the time she was quite old and she had a stiff leg, which has worried me all my life, because I keep thinking, "Oh, I'm going to get the same thing that she had." Which I don't remember quite well what it was, but I know that they s -- made one of her legs stiff, because that was probably easier on her than -- than whatever she had, you know? They didn't have so many medical things as they have now. She always had somebody who lived with her and I know that in 19 -- during the time -- when Germany had it's -- it's bank breakdown, you know, which was earlier than the United States. I guess United States was '29 --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: When -- we -- yeah, this was earlier -- that she lost the house. And I know that my father and his sister rented the house, from the person who -- who bought it, for my grandmother, so she never knew that she had lost that house. Because they didn't want her to -- you know, I mean those were terrible days. My father was -- was studying in Breslau, I think he was in Breslau. Actually, he wasn't studying, he was interning in Breslau at the time. And he was telling me these stories about how he would get paid at the end of the week and -- and he would get an -- a paper bag full of money and he would run to the store and buy whatever he could buy, you know, in food and things, because if you waited at all, for a minute, that whole bag might buy you one little wurst, you know. That's how the money went down, I mean, the money was just worth nothing in Germany. And -- and I forget now when that -- when that was, '22? '20? So it -- it was earlier than -- than that.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was before he got married, yeah.

Q: And how -- and how --

A: And he got -- he got married in '24.

Q: And he -- he -- his mother?

A: His mother? Okay. That grandmother that I'm telling you about --

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: -- with the stiff leg --

Q: What was her name?

A: Her name was -- was Lutcia -- Lutcia -- Lutcia Schachtel. Her name was Schachtel -- a schachtel -- ein schachtel is a box, you know. You carry a box of groceries. This is ein schachtel, it's a bo -- a carton, actually -- a carton.

Q: How do you -- how do you spell that?

A: S-c-h-a-c-h-t-e-l.

Q: Oh.

A: Schachtel.

Q: Almost like a satchel.

A: Yeah, sa -- well --

Q: Not quite.

A: It's a carton.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: A carton of one thing or another. But that was -- that was her name and I don't know anything about her family. I don't know if she had any siblings or -- or anything at all. It's really strange how little I know. So, from that side of the family, my Aunt Kaita, my -- hers -- my father's sister married somebody -- they lived in Posen, and Posen -- I used to know the Polish name of it -- but in Posen -- Posen also kept changing from Germany to Poland, from ger -- and it -- they moved each time, they stayed in Germany. Whatever -- whatever was German, you know, they stayed in. But -- and she had one son, I think and that's was my Uncle Heinz -- my cousin Heinz. I called him uncle because he was so much older than - - his mo -- he was my mother's age. And my father was sort of a father to Heinz, because

her -- my Aunt Kaita's husband died very young. So this Uncle Heinz had two sons and I am in contact with both of those. So they lived --

Q: Wh-Where do they live?

A: Ray -- Ray -- doc -- he is -- he is actually the same as my husband, he is a scientist in -- but he lives in Jerusalem. And --

Q: And what's his name?

A: Raymond Ca-Camphor. Raymond Camphor. He's a Ph.D. and is doing quite well -- very well. And he's married to Miep and Miep is a doctor so they -- they're -- they're managing. And they have three kids.

Q: Now how old -- how old are they?

A: So I'm in contact with them -- hm?

Q: How old is he?

A: Raymond?

Q: Yeah.

A: He's -- he's maybe 10 years younger than I -- well no, more than 10 years. Maybe 15 years younger than I am.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. So he's still working hard. And my Aunt Ava, Heinz's wife, just died. She was 82 and she just -- she lived in Holland -- she lived in amst -- in the Hague and I was very fond of her. She was really the nearest relation in the sense that she had the German as well as the Dutch experience, the same as I had. And I remember her coming to Holland. Heinz came

earlier and he went back to Berlin and married her and brought her and I remember her coming, the day that she came.

Q: When was that?

A: In 1936.

Q: Hm. Now this is --

A: We were th -- we were there in '33 and she came in '36, but Heinz had already been there since '33. He came -- he was very close to us, because my father was sort of his best friend and his father, you know?

Q: Now, in the previous interview, you mentioned -- I'm -- this is -- I just wanted to double check this, because -- yeah, it says your Uncle Hei -- well, see it's -- first of all I should just note that it's -- it's written wrong in the transcript --

A: Yes.

Q: -- it's spelled Hans.

A: No.

Q: And it's Heinz.

A: Heinz.

Q: It's H-e-i-n-z?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, instead of H-a-n-s. And you said Ha-Heinz and Ava, who had a bagel -- the baby did go underground.

A: Yes.



Q: My father was just so upset because he said if they ever find him, they will be punished more than the Jews are already punished.

A: Yeah.

Q: At the time they thought all Jews would go to the labor camp and just work. Heinz was his favorite cousin, he was worried.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you want their story? And then she said no.

A: That's it.

Q: So I -- I want --

A: That's what I told you about this morning.

Q: I would like to hear the story.

A: You would like to hear the story?

Q: Yes, very much.

A: Okay. I hope I don't make mistakes in them, but -- because I wasn't there. The story was that -- that Heinz and Ava were still able to bring all their things from Germany, so they had beautiful furniture and lovely silver. Ava came from a very, very well-to-do family. And it was her brother with whom I went out in London and who saved his coupons for me.

Q: Ava's brother?

A: Ava's brother, Gunther. His name was Gunther. She had two brothers, they both were in England. And okay, so Ava and Heinz lived in the Hague and it was very interesting, because Heinz worked for a German company in Berlin and that German company, when

they saw things were getting tight for the Jews, sent him to Holland and he worked in Holland for this same company. And believe it or not, after the war, he worked for that same company, in Holland. And he became a vice president and had a wonderful life.

Q: What kind of company was it?

A: It was -- it had something to do with iron and smelting and metal and that kind of thing.

He traveled all over the world and was a great collector of oriental art, mostly Japanese.

And after he retired, he became extremely well known because he -- there's a small group of collectors all over the world, of these particular things that he was collecting. And he wrote many articles in the -- their papers and in their -- in their journals and magazines and that was the interesting thing about that side also, of the family, how very artistic -- how very internationally artistic they were. They all were like that -- I ver -- it was really amazing because Ray -- th-the son, who lives in Israel, he's also like that, he's also collecting and he's also, you know, very interested in history and in -- in -- in that whole oriental art. And I remember Heinz coming to visit in -- in Washington, when we still lived up there in -- in -- at Chevy Chase and he went to the Freer gallery the director knew him, you know? The head of the gallery knew him -- his name, anyway and he took him down into the stacks and he saw -- my hus -- Marty went with him -- my husband Martin went with him and so he told me how they saw things that was never -- you know, that was never, or hardly ever displayed, because the Freer never had enough gallery space to display. No museum really has everything that they have. So Heinz was qu -- he made quite a second life for himself after he retired. Okay, what happened to them in the war was that they had friends who

helped them go underground and who also took all their things and hid -- with them and kept it for them. And Heinz and Ava were underground with a farmer, who had a big farm somewhere in -- in Holland. And they could not keep Ray with them. Ray was only year and a half, or two -- something like that and they had to hide Ray. Now Ray was very Jewish looking, different from them, actually. Heinz looked a bit like you and Ava was -- you couldn't tell what she was. So, but -- but Ray had quite, you know, he had a definite kind of darkness, which in Holland you don't see much. And he was hard to hide and he was very little. And so, somehow the underground managed to hide him and just recently -- I thought -- I thought that he'd only been in one place the whole time. But just recently Ray told me that he was in many places, that he was handed around, you know, in many places. And that he felt -- was -- really had a terrible time, til the very end, the last people ended up being absolutely wonderful. And he's still in touch with them and he still ta -- you know, he -- he -- when their children come over here, he takes care of them. I'm -- I don't mean over here, when they ever come to Israel. The Dutch like to go to Israel, so they do come. And when he goes to Holland, he always visits that family. And it was most amazing how close they really had gotten.

Q: How long did he live with them?

A: But he was such a little -- I mean, h -- pardon me?

Q: How long did he live with them?

A: Well, I don't know, exactly. Must have been the last year -- the -- the last year, but he said that -- that in one place, the people hated him. I mean, they were so awful that they

burned him with cigarette burns and -- and all sorts of -- you know, he just had a terrible time. I have heard that in Holland, people were really wonderful. The ones I met were all wonderful, you know. But I've heard that there were really quite difficult thing -- for instance, the mayor of Amsterdam, he -- he wrote an article and he describe -- he was in 10 different places, he -- he was handed from one place, he couldn't get along -- you know, he was already a little older, so he had ideas. And in this one family, where he was -- I'm talking about the mayor of Amsterdam, the -- the ex-mayor of Amsterdam. It was his birthday and they didn't say anything about his birthday, and he knew that they knew it was his birthday. And it happened to be that in their religion, you don't make a fuss about anybody's birthday.

Q: What religion is that?

A: Well, I don't know. But it -- but that was in their -- in their particular brand.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so he couldn't -- he was a little boy, you know, and he couldn't keep his mouth closed, he says, "It's my birthday. You didn't say anything." And they were so angry at him. They were so terribly angry and he was already so lost and so -- you know, he -- this all came out when that hidden child business -- he was one of the hidden children. And he really had, also, it -- it was the first time that I realized what happened to some of those children. They were much worse off than I. I mean, you know, I was the perfect age, I described that off the tape.

Q: Yeah.

A: It -- but the hidden children, oh my God.

Q: So you mentioned that, yeah, yesterday, you know, that in -- basically in her -- her -- I think in the general theories of -- of -- of child upbringing, that many of the children who had gotten beyond a certain age, I'm not sure, maybe five, that they had previously had such warm and nurturing families --

A: That's right.

Q: -- that it prepared them to put up with this nightmare and also that they -- that those children had -- what was done to them was done to their whole family and not -- was not an internal problem within the family.

A: Oh.

Q: Which made it easier -- you know, so you didn't have the same kind of emotional effect. But what you're describing are children who are even younger than that, who have to go through that critical period of nurturing in a very roller-coaster kind of experience.

A: Well, I -- I -- that's very interesting, because Ray -- when r -- when the war was finished and Ray got back to his parents, it was extremely hard. I mean the --I -- he must have realized that these were really his parents, you know? But I think he was afraid. He never -- he didn't have a very nice youth. Another thing was, that for Ray's generation, there were really no Jewish kids, or very, very few Jewish kids his age alive. Th-There weren't any.

Q: Where did he spend the rest of his childhood?

A: Well, in Holland.

Q: In Holland?

A: In amste -- in, sorry, no, in the Hague. And he was extremely careful and -- and a bit worried always. And then he looked so Jewish and -- and there weren't anybody else around that looked like him.

Q: And you say he has a brother, right?

A: Now, he has a brother. Now let's --

Q: Who was born when?

A: '46. The year after the war ended. The guy has been a meteor. I mean, he shot up, you know. He was beautiful, he was tall. He looks like Prince Charles, exactly. Handsomer, I mean. He's younger. And he -- he had millions of friends. He was easy going. He knew, in short, from nothing, you know? From -- he knew nothing of what Ray went through and his depth of experience, and -- anyway, Ray has a lot more soul than -- than -- than Steve has. You know, it's built in, one way or the other. And he's doing -- he married somebody who wasn't Jewish, whereas Ray -- in Holland, as I said, there were so few Jewish people. So what they did was, they got the young generation together once or twice or three times a year, in a particular place. The Jewish people got together and organized that so the kids could meet each other. That's how he met his wife. He met his wife somewhere in Utrecht or somewhere where one -- where that meeting was. Because, where he lived, there weren't enough to even choose from.

Q: And Steven? Where does he live now and what does he do?

A: Well, Steven lives in London, but he has a house in Connecticut and he has a house outside of -- of London, in the countryside. He is a stockbroker. He is extremely well off.

He married a beautiful non-Jewish Dutch girl and they have three gorgeous sons. I mean, it seems like the sun is shining, you know, wherever he goes. And when Tante Ava died and there was a lot of the art work, that -- the art articles that Uncle Heinz collected, you know -- Steven wouldn't give up anything, I -- you know? I mean, to -- Ray lives in -- lives in Jerusalem. He -- he is the head of a huge -- of a nice department at one of the universities. He is very successful in his work, but you know, he makes no money hardly at all. I mean, he should have, you know --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Barbara Rodbell. This is tape number two, side B.

A: He is a stockbroker. He is extremely well off. He married a beautiful non-Jewish Dutch girl and they have three gorgeous sons. I mean, it seems like the sun is shining, you know, wherever he goes. And when Tante Ava died and there was a lot of the art work, that -- the art articles that Uncle Heinz collected, you know -- Steven wouldn't give up anything, I -- you know? I mean, t-to -- Ray lives in -- lives in Jerusalem. He -- he is the head of a huge -- of a nice department at one of the universities. He is very successful in his work, but you know, he makes no money hardly at all. I mean, he should have, you know, I mean, if I had been Steven, I would have said, "Take it -- you know, it's yours." Uh-uh. And so d -- it's very different kind of -- I love Steven, he's great, but you know, nothing -- you know, I can

understand Ray's resentment and he has it, he has resentment. He thinks, "Look what I go --  
wen-went through. Look what hap --" you know?

Q: Yeah.

A: And -- yeah. It's -- it's -- it's -- that is a typical story. Anyway, let me tell you what  
happened to Heinz and -- Heinz and Ava and -- themselves, so I told you about Ray.

Q: Okay, then we'll get back to you.

A: Heinz and Ava went underground with this farmer. And the underground had a rule that  
if you took in people to hide them, you weren't supposed to do anything else under -- you  
know, under kind of illegal work or anything.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But this farmer had a son and this son -- and they had a lot of land. And the son  
permitted the British to drop weapons, in big wooden crates, for the underground, on his  
land. And some other things, you know, that -- anyway the son got found out.

Q: I was going to say, that must have been pretty dangerous.

A: Oho, that's an understatement. So -- so one day the Germans appeared. They -- they had  
-- they had been given away or they had -- they weren't looking for Ava and Heinz, they  
weren't looking for underground people, they were looking for weapons that had been, you  
know, dropped from the sky or hidden there in the barns. And when that happened, they --  
they were warned and Ava -- they -- o-or if they weren't warned, Ava was -- they picked up  
all the men. They picked up Heinz, they picked up the farmer and his son and you know,  
whoever else they picked up there, but not the women, they left the women. So, Ava was --



the underground came, took Ava and hid her somewhere else. They hid her with a farmer in the south of Holland, in -- in Zout, Holland and Heinz they took to Westerbork, which was the collection camp, before you went to the east. And in that collection camp, there was a friend of his named Otto Bierman -- Otto Bierman.

Q: How -- how do you spell that?

A: B-i-e-r-m-a-n. Otto Bierman and Otto was a very intelligent man and he had convinced the head of the camp of Westerbork that he could produce something that would make him -- this -- this head of the camp -- ingratiate him with -- with Hitler and his upper -- the upper echelons. He said -- and -- and the man -- an-and he said, "Well, what would that be?" And he said, "You know, what is it that the German weremarkt really needs? One of the things it needs is toothpaste." Now Otto Bierman was a chemist and so the -- the commandant said, "That's a good idea, can you get it together?" And you know, and, "What do you need, you know, to do this?" And Otto gave him a list and this and that and -- and he said, "Well, I will need so many people to do this, to produce whatever you need, which is quite a bit." So I forget how many people it was, but one of them was Heinz and that saved his life, because he was still there after the commandant was gone, you know, at -- at the -- when -- when the war was over.

Q: Making toothpaste?

A: Making toothpaste.

Q: We-Were they making it for the whole army? The whole Germany army?

A: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Well, whatever they could do.

Q: Or -- yeah, well --

A: You know, they made as many as is --

Q: Wow.

A: So that Bierman really -- he, later on, Bierman and his wife, actually, who -- whom he met in the camp, who was the sist -- the reason I know Bierman so well is because he was the sister -- he married the sister of Maria Austria, who was my photography teacher. The one who lived the same place Anne Frank lived.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So, it's all sort of interwoven.

Q: Yeah.

A: In that small community. And they then raised two children, who belonged to her brother, who had been killed.

Q: Who -- who raised the children?

A: The Biermans. So Otto and -- and Li -- and Liese raised the children of her brother.

Q: Oh.

A: Her brother and sister died of illness in ca -- in Bergen-Belsen. And but -- and the girls had been with them in Bergen-Belsen, but survived.

Q: And where are they now?

A: In Amsterdam.

Q: Hm.

A: I see them all the ti -- whenever I go, I see them, yeah. We're pretty close, actually. One of them just --

Q: So they -- and the relationship was with -- with Bierman was --

A: Bierman married Lisa -- Elise Ershtasher -- Liesel Ershtasher and Liesel Ershtasher was the sister of Maria Austria. Ershtasher -- Austria, it's the same thing.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Who was my photography teacher and a friend of my mother's.

Q: Really? Okay.

A: And who lived on the Mawaydaplane.

Q: Okay.

A: Next -- actually the next stoop from Anne Frank -- the next --

Q: And they were -- and he -- they were -- they were -- previously they were good friends with Heinz?

A: This Bierman saved Heinz.

Q: But did he know Heinz from before?

A: He must have. He must have. I don't know about that, but I think he must have. Because he asked for him. Because Heinz of course, he was in a Straffbabacker, which means in one of the punishment barracks. One of the barracks that had an S on it for punishment.

Q: What -- I wanted to ask you a question, when you -- when we -- when the very beginning, when we first started to talk today, you were talking about your friend Manfred. Could you tell -- I -- I don't know if you can, but can you talk a little bit about what it's like

to -- to have someone like that in your life, who had -- who was so responsible for saving your life?

A: I don't know how to -- to -- I met Manfred -- this is rather interesting. I -- I told you I know nothing about politics. Here I am 16 years old and I describe in the other tape how when you were 16, you were considered a family on your own and you needed your own stamp of -- of security, so you wouldn't be taken away. Th-The Franks went, for instance, Otto Frank, the Franks went underground when Margot got called up to be sent to so-called work camps, right? Well, to avoid that situation, to not be called up, you needed to work in something that the Germans considered essential. Up to 16 years, your father or mother, whoever in your family worked for one of those organizations, like the Jewish -- the Yoteserrat, th -- some kind of organizations that the Germans recognized as necessary. Do you get that?

Q: Yeah, but what were they -- what were they -- what was this --

A: So -- well, my father, for instance, had one of those stamps, he was a translator for the Yoteserrat, for the Jewish organization that really oversaw the shipping off -- the organized shipping off of the Jews to the east.

Q: So they were necessary to the German shipping -- help in the --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: -- the deportations.

A: Yes. So -- but that's not what the Germans told him they were doing, you know, that -- the Germans told them that they were helping their own people and things like that, you

know they -- so -- and they would re -- that -- that they would remain after everybody else was gone and this and that, which is all nonsense, because everybody went. But this -- this is hindsight. You know, it's very stran -- it's very different to look at something from the historical point of view --

Q: Sure.

A: -- than when you're in it, you don't know what's going to -- what the future will hold. So -- what were we saying?

Q: I -- well, I was asking you about what it's like to have somebody who saved your life?

A: Oh, yeah, but how did I get to the Yoteserrat? Oh, there was an organization in ea -- in the east of Amsterdam, which was called -- and I have na -- now I -- totally escape. It was called Hershelsander -- Hershelsander. And it was supposed to be a culture -- Jewish cultural organization that would train Jews to be ready to go to Israel or some other country so that they could have a craft or a -- a profession that they could use. It's one of those hoax, nonsense, idiotic things that the Germans thought up. And that organization, it so happened, there were lots of Communists in it. There were lots of people that -- that had -- maybe they weren't really Communists, but they had a political opinion.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And they knew about things before they happened, you know? And th-they had some kind of a view. They had some people that came from Germany, for instance, out of the camps, the early camps, you know, in '40 -- in -- in '39, '40, who told stories about what was really happening in Germany, what -- what wasn't written in the press. And these

people were knowledgeable and one of them was Manfred. I didn't know anything about that.

Q: Yeah.

A: I met -- my father managed to get me a place to work in that particular organization. He didn't -- also knew nothing about them. He only knew that that was one place where he could get a secure place for me, becoming 16 years old.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So I went there. What did we do? We organized courses -- for instance sewing, cooking, garde-gardening, I guess. I mean se -- landscape -- land -- lundbow as they called it. You know, something to do with the earth, agriculture -- agriculture. However, we also had courses on Molière and Shakespeare. Well, in the course on Molière, I met Manfred. I -- I was working there and he was working there -- or he came there to take a course, I can't remember, maybe he wasn't even working there, but he knew the people. I didn't know the people, but he knew the people that were working there. This was an organization that really had been there before and was doing the same sort of thing. It had to do with the Allia, you know, the -- the s -- the people who were just wanting to go to Israel. I guess Zionists or something, although these people were no Zionists. But -- but they were training -- this organization had been there before and the Germans just took it over and used it as what I described, an organization [indecipherable]. So what I did was draw up the names of the people who wanted to take the courses, make up schedules for courses. Get the prou -- help get the professors for the courses and that kind of thing. You know, that's was my job.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Had nothing to do with anything for the German. So anyway, I met Manfred in there.

And I was 16 - 17, I'd never had a boyfriend, never gone out, never anything. You couldn't ride the trolleys, you couldn't ride the bus, you had to walk. So -- being Jewish -- so --

Q: Jews weren't allowed to ride on the bus?

A: No. No -- no trolley, no bus, no nothing. So I had -- we had the yellow star and maybe I had a bicycle, I -- I can't remember. We -- we could bike for a long time, but then -- then we couldn't even bike any more. So Manfred and I started -- I mean I started walking home or riding bike home or whatever it was, I can't remember details.

Q: Yeah. You tell some of this [indecipherable]

A: And we'd started getting together, you know, doing that and I got to meet him and I really liked him and he really liked me and so that was my first boyfriend. And that's how I got involved with this whole thing.

Q: Right.

A: And he knew more than I knew.

Q: I understand that, but --

A: And he started telling me all these things.

Q: Right.

A: And he's -- I -- I -- I s-suddenly started seeing beyond my parents. My father said, "If you get called up, you have to go, because oth-otherwise we will get punished." It's different from -- from Margot Frank, you know, where her father said, "If you get called up,

we -- we go underground.” My father was -- at the time, he was -- he was born in 1889, so in four -- in -- in ‘41, how old was he?

Q: 52?

A: Yeah. He was getting on. And he -- he had already had to make or that -- that move from Germany to Holland, it was too much for him, he couldn’t do another one. And he knew he couldn’t do another one. And when my mother, who was so much younger, started to talk about going underground, he couldn’t face it.

Q: Right.

A: So that was the -- the situation. And so Manfred started talking about all these things and my eyes -- my head, you know. And so I -- I started believing him, I started looking at things through his eyes and through -- I saw things I had never seen before. You know, I saw people going on trains with singing and Manfred said that they get killed. And they said they were going to go to work, and sit around a campfire at night. And, as difficult as it was, I started to believe him. It didn’t seem likely, you know, what they were telling me. And people -- young -- other young people started coming and telling me stories and saying, “I don’t want to die.” I remember my -- one girlfriend, Zucker, her name was -- her last name was Zucker, with a Z, you know, like sugar, in German. She came to me and she -- she said -- she sat there crying in my room, I can see her, you know, a little woman -- little girl, 16. Said, “I don’t want to die, I don’t want to die.” I didn’t even think -- I never did think of dying and I didn’t then. I don’t know, they were taken away. I -- I don’t know if she survived, or what.



Q: My question was --

A: How did you f --

Q: -- probably hard -- harder to answer, but I'm just curious what it's like since the war.

A: Oh, since the war.

Q: After the war. What is it like to have people in your life -- I mean, obviously -- I mean it's a -- it's a different experience, okay? It's something that in -- like I -- I -- I don't think -- I mean other than my parents, I don't think that there are people in my life who have saved my life, to whom I have this eternal debt, you know?

A: Yeah, well.

Q: I saved somebody's life, a stranger's life once in a swimming pool, somebody who was drowning.

A: Oh.

Q: And I just remem -- he didn't even, you know, it's like I never kept in touch with him or anything, but it was a mom -- but it's not -- it's not --

A: But we lived together -- I mean we lived together in a group. We lived together for years, after all. And it is strange, and I've seen it in other tight situations. When the war was over - - now, from a personal point of view, toward the end of the war, I knew I was not going to marry Manfred and we were talking about marria -- he want -- he wanted to get married and I knew I couldn't marry him. And it had partly to do with the fact that he kept telling me that my father had killed my family. And what he meant was that he didn't want to go underground. My father -- Manfred offered -- he -- he offered the papers and my mother

said -- got -- got him the money. My mother had the papers. Manfred said even if she hadn't paid, he would have gotten the papers, because he could not -- he would have had a bad conscience all his life, he wouldn't have done for them what he did for me, you know. Although I didn't get my first papers through Manfred. I got my first false papers through other people. But my mother gave me the money for it. And she had to ask my father for the money and my father did not believe in this. But my mother put her foot down. And she didn't do that very often. She became the strength of the whole family. And she loved Manfred. And she kept telling me, "Stick with him, he is strong, he is true. He -- stick with him, stick with him." And my sister loved him. She was younger than I was and she kept saying how wonderful he was. And I was worried about him. But he -- he was wonderful and he did save my life, but I never really thought about that til way afterwards. I mean, when you live your life, you live your life. And I did the cooking and I did the cleaning and I worked very hard, so did he -- I mean so did we all, so did his sister, who turned out to be as important -- maybe not more important than he was. He -- after the war, as I said, I -- I knew I wasn't going to marry him and we split up. I lived -- went to live somewhere else. I had met Otmar through Manfred, really. And although I wasn't sure there was any future in there, I lived by myse -- I went and got an apartment somewhere else, which was great luck that I could even find anything after the war. And then of course, my Uncle Paul came back and Heinz came back and they were the two anchors, you know, that I had, even though they were so busy with themselves, you can't imagine. After having all this happening to you, that to try to pick up the normal strand of normal life was not easy for people who had

families and for anybody else as well. And I went, immediately, I was already in the ballet the month before the war was ended, I immediately went into the ballet, which took all my mind and all my strength. We hadn't had any food. And to work as hard physically as I had to work, took all I had and a bit more, you know? We started to have a little bit better food. It took a long time for the food to come in. And although I had not been as hungry as most people had for as long -- because in the end we were very hungry, I still was really underfed. And I've heard it said that my generation of dancers, did not last physically as long as most generations last.

Q: Wow.

A: I mean that -- yes, that was a phenomenon of -- of the times, yeah. So, as I say, I went and lived somewhere else and -- and Manfred, he was unhappy, but he soon, you know, found -- he also felt he had to go on with his life and he had -- and he found somebody else and he had two children. And although the marriage didn't last, you know, very long and Manfred started messing around. He's always told me, he said, "It's all your fault." He -- every time he sees me, he says this, "It's all your fault." He's been married several times, three, four. So -- so, but the last 20 years he's had the same wife, much younger and very nice and I stayed with them last year. I h -- I stayed with them and it was funny, you know, the first and the last of his wives -- the so-called wives. We had a lot of fun.

Q: Hm. Wh -- and what was his -- what became his profession?

A: Well he -- even before the war was over, he knew what he w-wanted to do. He wanted to start a factory of women's clothing. And he started collecting sewing machines. Now I had

one and that was the first one. Yeah, I had one from my mo-mother and that was the first one. It wasn't electrified and he got a motor and -- but he -- he found -- he bought -- he went around looking for sewing machines, even before the war was quite, quite over. And he knew that he was -- wanted to -- wanted to do that. And he knew where there was a -- a cache -- I mean a number of -- a cloth that was difficult, you know, to find. There wasn't any material, there was no cloth. And this se -- first wife he married, Maurecia, she had been in that business and she knew how to do it. And she was a great help to him. That was part of their getting together, because she -- she was really knowledgeable in that. And she also -- because she had lost a great deal -- I forget what -- what she had lost, but she got at some money and she got some money from the government -- from the amer -- Dutch government as well as the ger -- I -- I can't remember, but she got a lot of -- she got some money and he needed the money. We did strange things, you know. After the war, they had money left over, my -- Manfred, I don't know what he did, but there was money. Now, there was no way to explain this money. And I -- I don't know why, I don't know anything about it. But the only one who could have had some money was me, you know, because I -- I could have s -- you know, I could have had some money from my parents, from jewelry that was sold, or this or that. And so you had to take in this money and get the new money that -- the current money that they were putting out. And so I did that for them, even though we weren't together any more. So I -- I kept in touch and I did -- you know, I went there and I s-signed saying this was my money and you know, stuff like that.

Q: Hold on one second, I want to change the tape.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Barbara Rodbell. This is tape number three, side A. This is the beginning of that tape number two, August fifth, 1998 interview with Barbara Rodbell, with Steve Roland.

[inaudible] the majority households who didn't do anything. And he said, and those people you can more or less forgive, because had they done something, they would have been putting themselves or their families at risk.

A: The same in Germany.

Q: Right?

A: Same in Germany.

Q: And he said and then you have those few Poles who were extraordinary heroes. Who -- Poles who did not have to do anything, but --

A: Did.

Q: -- went out of their way and they -- they did things. And those people are extraordinary and then you have the other ones, who were evil.

A: The bad -- evil. Pure and simple. And often have to do, I think, that often has to do with this terrific feeling of inferiority. And -- or uselessness, don't know what the hell to do with themselves, nothing but brawn, no brain, you know?

Q: Yeah.

A: And -- and this resentment, this terrible resentment against those who have made it and then they're very apt to -- to generalize in an enormous way, you know? So that -- that is it. If it's not the garbagemen, it's them.

Q: I think it's -- want to stop?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah...

A: Yeah, well. What I was saying was about the compartmentalization. I -- I sometimes worry about myself, that I -- I am too cool about things. Too -- I look ahead, I -- I try to plan and get myself ready for what comes next. And what I -- I think I've always been like that, but it might be just in my older age, you know, that I'm that way, because I've gotten older. But I'm so enormously prag -- I don't know if it's pragmatic, or -- if that's what you call pragmatic. I'm very practical. I can get -- I can get past my moods, past my -- I can get past feelings, by being pragmatic, you know. It's a -- the feelings come afterwards, first you do something and then -- it's just funny, my father used to say, first your duty and then your pleasure. And I think that that stuck with me. It's very German, you know. And I definitely, you know, I ha -- do first what I have to do and then I can let myself go, you know, I can also let myself go, but I don't do that before I do what I have to do. It's very strange. It's very strange, I -- I remember when I came to United States, you know, I had no money at all. Once I left New York, once I decided I could not really make a living dancing or in photography or something like that and I thought I had to leave New York, because that's what I did in New York.

Q: How long did you -- did you stay in New York?

A: Nearly two years, not quite. Nearly two years. And -- and part of that time, I wasn't there, I was other places. I was in the -- you know, I took jobs out of New York, because I did get into thr -- I did three auditions and I got into each one of the shows that I auditioned for. And one of them was the Ballet Rouse, with Danilova -- or Danilova. And I couldn't -- when I went to sign the contract, I couldn't do it, because they didn't pay me enough to pay the rent and to buy my shoes and to eat. So, I didn't sign for it. So I ended up -- and in the other shows that I tried for and I got chosen for each one I tried, there was either the star dropped out and they couldn't raise all the money that they needed, or something else happened, some contract fell through or some kind -- some of them I even started rehearsing and we had to stop because something happened with the finances or something like that. So in the end, I had no -- very, very little money and I'd worked at Macy's and I'd worked at -- you know, what actors and dancers do during -- in New York, during the -- while they're looking for a job. I'd done all that and I decided, I've got to get out of New York or -- you know, I joined a circus. I tried for the circus, after I'd tried all the other things, you know, the real -- the shows, the Broadway shows and -- and the ballets and I got into all that stuff and then every time something terrible happened, each time your heart jumps, you know and -- and bung, doesn't work out. So, I went to an audition at the circus, with Ellen Crooks, the -- the girl I had the apartment with in Greenwich Village and we both got in there and we went down to --

Q: As -- as -- and as what?



A: Ringling Brothers. Dancers.

Q: Okay.

A: And I -- they asked me if I wanted to do, you know, other things. And I said, "Oh, yes."

So I did the small aerial, which was 25 dollars extra. And I -- in the end, I ended up also doing elephants. One of the gals that was riding elephants got hurt and she couldn't do it.

And so the guy who directed the show, choreographed the -- choreographed the whole

thing, he knew my name. He called -- he called me the tawny Pippit. And he -- and his name

was Babbette and he shouted, "The tawny pippit, get on that elephant." And -- she fell off,

broke her leg, got carried away and I got on there. And he said, "Now you know why she

got hurt." You know, she didn't fold her legs behind her when the elephants were standing

still, which means -- and the elephants liked to rub up against the walls and she really got

whammed. So I put my legs behind me. Sitting and fold your legs behind you so the

elephants can't hurt them. So I did the show. I went -- you know, we ended up in Madison

Square Garden and all the way up and down, you know, the -- the coast and stuff. And then

they went inland, to the west. And that's when I got scared.

Q: Scared of what?

A: I didn't want to let go of that east coast. I -- I quit.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: I was really a coward. I had six month -- I was -- well, we had rehear -- you know, we had all the weeks in, in Florida.

Q: Yeah.

A: Sarasota, rehearsing and then I guess I stayed -- I stayed about half a year or something like that.

Q: And did you enjoy it while you were doing it?

A: Oh yeah, it was terrific. But -- but -- and it was very adventurous, I mean, gosh. You know, we lived on a train and we ate in the -- and we -- I made enormous money, because I didn't spend a nickel. I wanted to save for when I came back, that I had some money. And I had the apartment, so -- so that's what happened, that, you know, I got back to New York, I had a lot of money. And then I took a job at -- was it Macy's? Yeah, I as -- guess I took a job -- Christmas job at Macy's. So -- and there I made a fortune, because they put me -- they gave me a job -- you got a bonus for always being on time. You got a bonus for not missing any days. And you got a bonus for -- they put me to sell difficult merchandise. Merchandise that had some kind of a damage to it. For instance, I was selling a paint set for kids that was -- you put -- there -- it had a brush, it had some liquid and it had paper, that's all that was in the box. But when you stuck the brush in the liquid and you went over the paper, all sorts of colors and pictures came up. However, should you by any chance drop a drop of this liquid on the floor, it would eat the rug. So this was merchandise that was difficult to sell, because they had to put a warning on it and they did put a warning on it. So the people who bought it knew that, you know, there was no doubt about it, Macy's did the right thing, except they should never have bought the stuff, right? And I sold that. I sold a doll that ha -- was dangerous for kids, because it had some kind of a finger that stuck out or something, that might get into some kid's eye. So there was all sorts of merchandise that

was -- that was dangerous to s -- or -- or did something, or didn't -- and for each piece that you sold, you got credit. So, I tell you, I did all those things. I ran every morning. I had to take two subways or a bus and a subway, or something like that to get there. 34th Street and I lived on East and this was 34 --

Q: [indecipherable] something, when you say you ran every morning, you don't mean you got up and jogged every morning?

A: No, I didn't mean job. People didn't jog in 1950.

Q: Okay, [indecipherable]

A: In 1950. No, I -- or '49 it was. No, I ran up the elevator, which wasn't running, you know? And just trying to be on time. And I did, I was there. I made a fortune that Christmas. However, it was also a terrible Christmas for me, because the Kalinoffsky's had a house full of people and couldn't have me. And I was lonely to such a degree, I -- I can't describe it. It was too absolutely horrible. It was absolutely horrible. And -- so I had a lot of mo -- but I had another one of my really going kaput, you know, situations and you had to give an emergency number on your application and a buyer who was very nice, he was very nice to me and he called Kalinoffsky, who had been my emergency number and Kalinoffsky came and said he wanted to talk to me and stuff and -- so we did meet. We met for lunch or I went over one -- after Christmas they had a time that I could come to their pla -- and I always felt so beholden. Is he all right?

Q: I think he's asleep.

A: Oh good. So -- so I always felt so beholden, I didn't want to ask them for anything. And so, at the -- and he talked to me and he said, "You know, I wonder if you still think you're going to go back to Holland?" And I said, "Well, I am thinking that." He said, "Don't think it." He -- and he started explaining to me about Otmar. He said, "A person like that -- face him with it. You have to know that he really doesn't want to get married. You have to know that," he said. He thought that was the case. But I should know it and I should hear it from Otmar. If I had it in the back of my mind that maybe we could get married, and maybe he would give in to having children, you know, he said, "You'll never be able to settle down here. And you have to make up your mind." I had not gone out with anybody, during this entire period. I mean, I kept thinking. I -- I don't know what I thought, but I just didn't want to, you know, make any kind of commitment or even date, so that I might make a commitment or some -- and he -- so I did. I wrote a letter to Otmar and I said, "Otmar, I want you -- want to know, you know -- I -- I really ha -- what is the situation?" And I got a letter back and I'm -- again one of these letters, you know, with a lot of prevarications [indecipherable]. Is that the right word? You know, with -- with a lot of not saying one thing and not saying yes and not saying no and not -- you know, what he -- what either way he was, you know? Not being able to make his mind up about anything, so -- and it was a terrible loss, because he was a psychiatrist and he wouldn't join any group in Holland. I kept thinking, you know, he should join a group and be a part of something, but he's never done that in all his life. He -- he is now 80 some years old. He's never, during all his working life, joined up with anything. He always was working alone. He always did this and did that. He

never made up his mind about anything and [indecipherable]. And I -- I saw him -- when Marty and I went to Holland, we went for -- on sabbatical. We were in Holland for a year, in 1960. We already had all the kids. The youngest one was seven months. And he came for dinner, he -- Otmar did, in -- in the Hague. He lives in Amsterdam and we were in the Hague. And he came for dinner and he said to me, he said, "I should have left Europe long ago. I should have gone with you. I should have -- you know, I should have made changes and this and that," he said he just couldn't do it. He couldn't do it, [inaudible]. So, you know, he never really changed. And he married somebody who could not have a -- children. She had one son and she had some kind of disease, she couldn't have another.

Q: You mentioned that in the other [indecipherable] yeah.

A: Yeah. So, and he's not had an easy life, because she's been very sick all the time with that disease, you know, that she had right from the beginning. And he became something I did not really like very much. And I -- I said to myself, you know, "Oh, what luck, what luck. Oh, was I lucky." You know?

Q: I don't think it was luck.

A: Huh?

Q: I don't think it was luck.

A: Probably not.

Q: [inaudible]

A: But, I mean, I must have had some kind of insight. Well, I don't know, I was so in love, what kind of insight can you have when you're so in love? But I just knowed it wasn't good for me.

Q: Yeah. Ca-Can you -- this may be very difficult, but can you distinguish the attachment that you had to Ot-Otmar? And we don't have to go into this either. Can you distinguish the attachment -- you have the personal attachment and how it may have been clouded by the general excitement that you had about the war being over?

A: Huh. Good question. Well. Huh. No, I think that -- that -- I think there's a whole other angle to this. Otmar was German and my father had always adored everything German and he always spoke about the good Germany, you know, when the things went wrong, he kept saying, the humanistic tradition and how he was raised and everything he knew was from Germany and that all the good things that he was came out of Germany and, you know, that you always have to choose -- my father said, with what you pick up from any kind of civilization. And that if you pick the good things, you're very lucky, you know, if you can have a peaceful life, which he didn't, of course. And Otmar was the good things in Germany. And he was German and somewhere in my background, there was this belief that Germany was the best. That the good things of Germany were better than anything -- anything or anyone else in the -- any -- anywhere. That must have been in my li -- in my head. And that must have been this -- that gave me this enormous, you know, attraction. Because there were many things about Otmar that were very bad. I mean, first of all, I think that basically he was a little anti-Semitic, here and there. [indecipherable]. And -- and he

would never believe that, but I -- I -- it wasn't that obvious, it came out i-in various things, you know? The person he worked for, in the beginning, after the war, who really helped him like crazy, [indecipherable] the boss, who really let him work for -- in his practice, and who gave him a chance to get established in Holland -- in Amsterdam and -- and the remarks about Coon were not nice. They might have been partly right, but they weren't nice, because they were based on being Jewish rather than on being the person that he was.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You know? And that's not the way to judge anybody. And I -- that sort of worried me. I must say that that kind of sort of worried me, because I knew Coon very well and I knew all his good things, especially his wife, with whom I'm still very friendly. And -- and very attached to, actually, Magda. And it just --

Q: She still lives in Amsterdam?

A: She still lives in Amsterdam. And that worried me, it worried me. I thought if -- if -- he also -- I think he had a hard time taking me to see his family. Now, at the time, of course, it was right after the war, he couldn't have gone anyway, to Germany. He was a deserter. His family, you know, his family was good and would have accept y -- anything and was happy that he was alive and there and all that. His family wasn't like that at all -- was not Fascist or in any way. But -- but I don't know, deserting is another thing. And coming with a Jewish wife, to Germany after the war, eh. All that worried me. I thought, a life, a whole life and a child, maybe that was half Jewish? These things have changed. I mean, the next generation,

it would have been all right. As a matter of fact, I think it would have been a star in his -- in his crown. But the first generation, no.

Q: No.

A: And maybe it worried him more than it would have worried his people, you know? But he was already insecure from -- from what he -- what he himself had done. He couldn't go back to Germany for many years after the war. I don't know when the first time was that he did go back to Germany. Anyway, so as I say, it was -- it was not what you were saying --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- but it was more Otmar himself that --

Q: Okay, so when [indecipherable] say he wrote the --

A: -- that worried me --

Q: -- he wrote the letter and he sent a vague --

A: Who sent --

Q: -- a vague response?

A: -- th-th -- again the vague response and that's when I said to myself, "It is no."

Q: Right.

A: I -- I have to go on. I mean, now I am 24. I'm -- you know, you get, you can't -- you -- you -- or 24 yeah, was 24. So I looked in the paper and I looked for a job that was going to take me out of New York. And there was a job, with a cosmetic company, who was demonstrating -- wi -- who needed demonstrators and who was going to train in New York, and then sent you out. And that seemed like the perfect solution. They were paying during



training, enough for me to eat and to pay my rent. And they were going to pay a lot then, plus percentage, after you were trained. And that's what I did. I -- I went to work for this company -- cosmetic company, who isn't -- which name I have forgotten. And they were selling creams for your hair and -- and lotions and brushes and combs -- with particular circular brushes and combs, which was new then. And I had the perfect hair for it. And I could speak -- I had an accent, m-more than now.

Q: Did you have long hair?

A: No, like this.

Q: No.

A: But it -- my accent was an advantage, because people were going to listen to this accent. So, I had to -- di -- di -- you got a lamp, you know the company would get a lamp that was focused on you and you would give a speech about the combs and the brushes and the hair and answer questions and stuff. And the first place they sent us, because they sent two women together, always. After the training -- I trained all over New York. I was at Gimbel's, I was at Macy's, I was at something Strauss -- Abraham Strauss, was it?

Q: Yeah, Abraham and Strauss.

A: Yeah, and I was at another one and I was in Brooklyn, was the first time I ever made -- set foot in Brooklyn and I was all over New York. And then they send us and the first place they sent us was Baltimore, and we were a huge success. I mean, I sold enormous amount of comb -- and because we were a success, we stayed and stayed. And I got to know the buyer of the department, who was a Jewish fellow and I -- and he was very nice. He said, "You

know, you were here so long, you really should be doing something with your evening, something useful. And aren't you lonely?" And I was, because she was a gal who disappeared after work. And she had no interests that I had. And so he took me, one time, for lunch. He wasn't allowed to fraternize, you know, anything. But he took me to a place that during the day was a small restaurant where they -- very small, they don't have small places like that, hardly, any more, where they made sandwiches and stuff. And at night, the students from the various universities in Baltimore would come and play chess and he had some music and once in awhile he had somebody to talk and stuff. And my hotel was not too far from there. I could walk it and I could go there. And I met some people from the various universities. And I met some people who were in the acting sections and stuff and they said, "Gee, it would be nice, you know, why don't you come and try out?" And I said, "I can't, because I won't be here long enough." Well, after six weeks, they sent us to Cincinnati. And we get to Cincinnati and she of course, is gone at night and I decided maybe I should see something of Cincinnati and stuff and there was a fellow in the department, who said he knew some people. Well, it turned out to be German -- ex -- ex-Germans -- immigrants and they took me to a beerholla -- a beer hall and stuff and I -- I hated it, I couldn't tell you how I hated it. You know, they were all locking arms and singing, ah, la la la la, you know, and these beer songs and I thought, "That I need? I don't need that," you know? I mean, I could have gone back to Germany and had that -- the real thing, it wouldn't be as obnoxious as this. So I telegraphed the guy in Baltimore and I said -- he had said, "If you want a job, let me know." This -- the buyer at the company. And I said,

“Is there still a job? Do you still have a job and if so, could you let me know?” And he -- telegraphed back, “Job available, arranged for you to come and you can stay with so and so.” A woman in the department who was just divorced or something, has lots of room and just come. And I came. That’s how I got to Baltimore, of all places, you know. And --

Q: Was that where you met ra -- Martin?

A: Well, I did, because these people from the university, of course they saw me again and they said, “Come and try out for a play.” And I said, “I’m a real actress, I’m a -- I was a professional, I’m not going to do that.” And they started explaining to me about amateur theater in -- in the United States and come on. And -- and I said, “And my terrible accent,” and they said, “Oh well, you know, we’ll find parts that are just right.” So I went and I tried out for Molière’s “School for Wives.” “School for Wives.” It had a wonderful director and he didn’t take me, because of my accent. He said, “They’re going to listen hard to try to understand you and they won’t hear the play.” And it’s like a Broadway thing, had it just been a Broadway thing, because the girl that he did choose did -- got sick, couldn’t make it -- he didn’t want to have -- he was mid -- in the middle of rehearsals, he didn’t want to have another audition. He called me and said, “I’ll get somebody, the Hopkins Department of Linguistics has said they would help me, come and do the play with us.” And I did. And that’s where I met a lot of people I liked, you know. And all my age and -- and it was just great. I was just a little older than they.

Q: Let me ask you one question, just about your frame of mind at that point. Was there -- could you -- could you perceive a difference in your state of mind and your ambitions,

based on the fact that you had been through the experiences in Europe that you had been through and the Americans that you were with had not?

A: Yes. Oh, yes. The answer is yes. And it was the first time there that I had -- when I started meeting me -- boys, you know? That's when I thought, "This is impossible. I can never marry an American. Never."

Q: Can you el-elaborate on it? What were you --

A: Yes, because the people -- it so happened that a couple of the -- the -- the fellows I met, had been just on the cusp, you know, of the -- of the age that did -- didn't go into the war. You know, weren't old enough to be drafted or to get into the war. And those were the -- my first acquaintances. Fraternity kind of fellows. And I used to laugh. They would wait for me outside my apartment, when I came back from work. And I would see them standing there and I would laugh, I would laugh. This is ridiculous. I mean, I'm a woman -- I'm a woman and I am a grown-up, I've -- you know, these are so innocent. They're so damn innocent. It's impossible. I can never, never, never get together with them. I could never find a level on which we could talk together as equals. I don't mean intellectually, but even that -- I mean, you know, they -- they had no idea about anything. About arts or anything about theater -- about the war they had completely wrong notions, just completely wrong. I had to explain everything. You know, it just didn't work, no, it didn't work. And that was, of course, also Baltimore because in New York it was a little better, although there I didn't date very much either. But it just -- i-it was just so -- they were so childish.

Q: And how would you characterize the general American --

A: Th-The males -- the males in Baltimore, the ones that I met -- and I wanted to meet -- I didn't care whom I met, you know, whether were Jewish or not Jewish.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: They were just too -- too childish, too -- too immature. They -- I mean they were just out of rah-rah high school and college, you know? Football kind of guys. Even though I met some very intellectual. I met Russ Baker. I met, you know, I met -- you know, the people who were the same age -- actually, he went to school with Marty. He was very nice. He was certainly an intellectual. But he wasn't -- had never been allowed to really show it. Cause the girls wouldn't take it.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: You know? It took him awhile. And he actually had a girl. He was between, you know, having broken up with her and coming -- going back to her when -- when I dated. We didn't really date many times, a couple times. But -- but it really was -- he was very nice, he was the best of them.

Q: You're talking about the writer, Russell Baker, right?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: It -- it - it's just -- I just -- I met him, you know, Marty and I, when Marty got his Nobel, we -- we met him several times. And I said, "Do you know that you and I had a couple of dates?" He couldn't remember and -- and I could remember, because he was -- you know, I

had been following his -- his writing. And it -- it ma -- left no special impression, except he was a bit more, you know, when he knew he could re --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Barbara Rodbell. This is tape number three, side B.

A: He couldn't remember and -- and I could remember, because he was -- you know, I had been following his -- his writing. And it -- it ma -- left no special impression, except he was a bit more, you know, when he knew he could relax and actually talk about something.

Something more than football or baseball, which he had no interest in. And the-then -- you know, he -- he relaxed.

Q: And how did -- how did Americans in general, who now felt like they had been -- you know, they had helped win the war and liberate everybody. How did they treat people like you?

A: They -- they were good from that point of view. They -- they were -- they were good from that point of view. You know, the boys didn't want to talk about the war. That was -- that was -- that was really one of the things. Well, I didn't meet that many, you know, that -- that I could really -- that's why the circus was interesting, because they were Europeans. There were some Arabs, North African. There were -- there were various Germans, quite a few Germans. There were, you know, people who had really been through things, that it was, in a way, a bit of home, you know? I felt more, like belonging and -- and we were all

sort of footloose and fancy free in a strange country. That gave me a feeling of home and comfort in the circus. But American boys, no. I mean your average -- your average American boy, it was just impossible. Now, what happened was, was that the one fellow that I -- I got to know quite well, after awhile, he had to go to -- to bloom -- to go for his graduate school. And he told Marty -- he had taken Marty to see me at "School for Wives." And Marty had a girlfriend then and you know, there was no reason for us to get together. And -- but when he left -- when this Danny left, to go to Bloomington for his grad school, he told Marty to come and see me. You know, check up on me once in awhile, til he was going to come back Christmas, or he was going to come back Easter. But -- but Marty should go and see me. So Marty came to see me and I was deathly sick. He's always telling this story and I'll tell it very fast. He -- Marty -- there was a knock on my door and Marty came in and I was so sick I couldn't get up. And he couldn't believe it. I had a nice place, in a brownstone on Charles Street, near Mount Vernon Place in ba -- in Baltimore. And Marty took one look at me and touched my head, knew I had a fever and he went home to his mom and he said -- there was nothing in my refrigerator, he looked in the refrigerator and there was nothing there. So he went home and said to his mom, "I need food. I need a pot of --" And ma -- his mom had a pot of chicken soup. So he took some of it. His -- his parents had a grocery store. So he took so-some food from the store and he took some what his mom had and he came back and he fed me. And from then on, you know, I was his -- his -- what do you call it? His --

Q: Patient?

A: Patient, yeah, sort of. And he kept coming back and -- and making sure, you know, that I have food and that -- that ge -- I mean, I couldn't move, I was so sick. You know, I was -- of course I had something from the war. I mean -- for instance, when I had my first child, my gums just erupted, I had -- they -- they ended up painting them purple, because you know, I didn't have any vitamins, you know, nothing during my last growing spurt. You know, between 16 and 18 you cans still grow. You know, I had no food. So there was something, you know, innately wrong with me. So, I wasn't quite as strong to resist some of the bugs that were going around and Marty had a friend, Helmut Sonenfeld, whose parents had both come from Germany, they were both doctors. And when they got to Baltimore, they placed themselves -- they went, bought a big house in a black neighborhood and they treated the poor. They said, "We survived, we have to do something back."

Q: And who were these people?

A: Their name was Sonenfeld and they were two doctors from Germany. They had two sons. One of them was Helmut, who ended up as the sidekick of Kissinger, especially -- well, that's -- Marty knew him from -- I think from Hopkins, but maybe even before that. Helmut, you know, is a rush -- a specialist in Russia, an expert and still very important. I think he teaches at the school of international something or other in -- in Baltimore. And Helmut -- Marty called Helmut and said, "I have this German girl who -- or Dutch girl who doesn't have a cent and who is deathly ill. Would you ask your parents?" And they said, "Yes, bring her." And so these parents, I mean they did everything. They -- they checked me over, they knew that I nearly had pneumonia, you know. They got the medication, they



bought it, they -- they really babied me. They really took care of me. And I didn't like Helmut. Helmut and I didn't get along. I -- I never did get along with anybody from over there. When I first came to -- to New York, the friends of my parents, they had heard from the Kalinoffsky's that I was there, they got all their sons, you know, to come, because the daughter of Dr. Leiderman, you know, I mean, it should be terrific and stuff. And so I got invited to these fancy houses, all around New -- New York City and out in the -- out in the country, you know, Larchmont and all those lovely areas. Connecticut, upper Conne -- lower Connecticut and stuff and it was awful. There were all these fancy things. Boys -- young men, who had been in the United States forever, as far as I'm concerned and who spoke with an accent thicker than mine. I mean, it was just horrible. I mean, I said to myself, if I have to live in the United States, I'm going to marry an Americ -- marry an American. And one of the big shocks, when I finally got into this Hopkins group, was the split between the Russian Polish group and the German group. Now, I naturally should have belonged to the German group, but I despised what they were standing for. It was so horrible. After all the things we had gone through as Jews -- of course, they didn't go through anything, but I -- you know, I was not going to make -- I knew that it didn't help you to make a difference between Jews. I mean, you were a human being, you were a Jew, you were a German Jew and you were a snob? I can't tell you what kind of expression I would like to use, but it's a bad one. I was very angry at those Phi Ebs, which was the Jewish fraternity -- the German Jewish fraternity and the other ones, which Marty belonged to. His parents -- you know, I

mean it was just awful, I despi -- and I got telephone calls. I got calls saying, "What are you doing, going out with those people?"

Q: With what people?

A: With the -- with the Polish Russian group of Jews.

Q: Oh, the Germans were calling you?

A: Yeah. They were -- they were calling. And Marty doesn't believe me, but that's what I got. And I couldn't stand it -- and I couldn't stand it and I went out with one boy who was -- he was an architect and he had left that group for a long time and he was German Jewish and -- and he -- I was very fond of him, but he was highly neurotic and everything. And he took me to see his parents. And I had dinner there and I could see these parents, they didn't like it. I mean, I didn't have any money. And that's what they were after, even though they were [indecipherable], they were very rich. You know, but it was the idea that class came not from you, as a person, but class came out of your pocketbook.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You know, and I had to laugh, because all their parents and grandparents had been grocers and -- and whatever they were, you know, which I didn't give a hoot what they were, I only cared what kind of person they were. And here my parents, you know, came fr - - I mean, I felt like I was much better than they were and -- and they were saying, "Well, you haven't got a --" Well, at the moment I didn't have any money. And s -- it was lucky. It was lucky. I was just lucky. Because I decided I was going to go with something strong and the Polish Russian ones were the strong ones. And when -- when Marty came and we started

going out and we were very careful, because this was -- this friend of his was his best friend, Danny, who went to Bloomington. And hi -- I guess Marty had dated several of ma -- of Danny's ex-girlfriends and Danny wasn't happy about it and he was very careful not -- and I was very careful. Course, I didn't want any trouble, you know, in anything. So finally Danny called and said he couldn't come home Easter, because he had to take care of his drizoffulla flies, which is a -- for his research. He says, "I can't let my flies die."

Q: Fr-Fruit -- fruit flies, right?

A: Yes. Marty came over that day and he said he'd had a note from Danny saying he was -- and I had had the same letter. And he said, "You know, Barbara, that's just too bad for Danny." We were going out for three months. All we did was ever hold hands, vaguely. And I felt like such a child, I thought. But Marty, you see, had been in the war. Marty had been in the Pacific. He'd lived over -- he'd lived in China for eight months. He had seen different people, he had been together -- thrown together with all these people, which Danny hadn't and other people that I went out with, didn't have. And Marty was much more mature. Much more mature. And he was a couple of years older than -- than most of the others, because he'd been in the war for two and half, three years, you know? So he was not so childish.

Q: Was he o-older than you?

A: No. I'm o -- three months older than him.

Q: Oh, so you're the same.

A: We were exactly the same. And -- but -- but he was older than these guys I happened to have met, you know? And he was -- having been in different surroundings, having seen the suffering -- the Chinese were suffering like crazy when he was there. And having seen hunger and having seen all that, you know, he -- he was much more mature -- much more mature. And he had interests, and he was interested in a mature way, in what I wanted to do. And sport was okay, but it wasn't anything that interested him very much. And so we -- we really -- you know, we had the same political outlook. We had, for instance, I lost a boyfriend in New York, when we -- I first was in New York, because he voted for Dewey, you know? I mean, I could not see even voting for Dewey, I'd -- oh, let's say voting not for Roosevelt party. So I sent him away, I sa -- and this was a good deal, this guy. But the politics were important to me. After living in Europe, you know and -- and -- and seeing the things that happened in Europe because people did not care, the intellectuals did not care about politics and did not -- they thought it was below them, you know? So -- so I s -- I thought, people have to care about politics.

Q: Now, just so I understand, are you -- are you s-saying or suggesting that part of the problem in Europe escalated because people were not involved?

A: What do you mean? Not invo --

Q: Part of the -- part of the -- of the Holocaust happening was because -- because the intellectuals were not involved?

A: Yes, oh yes. I think that in the beginning, even Germans who were good -- really great people, good people, they did not involve themselves. Well, you didn't talk about politics,

that was for -- I don't -- it wasn't classy. It just wasn't done. You know, I mean intellectuals cared about intellectual things and politics was not intellectual.

Q: You know, it's -- it's funny, I've never really had anybody say that to me before.

A: Well, maybe I'm wrong, but -- but this is my impression.

Q: No, I think you're probably right.

A: My father never talked about it. My group -- the whole group never talked about it. I knew about Hitler because I heard the maids talk. I heard my governess talk. I heard Maria, my -- the -- the nurse talk. I heard the cook, the -- you know, I heard all these different people talk about Hitler in the house, when my parents weren't around. Because I remember taking a walk, I was six years old, we were out in the country. We'd had whooping cough and -- and it was terrible, there was nothing to be done about whooping cough. And so they took us out of Berlin, into the country, into the clean air and we lived at -- on a farm for about two months, because my sister and I both had -- my sister was very ill, I wasn't so terribly ill. And that's where I heard everybody talk. All these people were with us. And I heard them talk. And I remember taking a walk with my father and they were talking about elections coming up and I said, "I know," I was ru -- jumping around. "I know who you're going to vote for. You going to vote for Hitler." That was the only name I knew. I didn't know any other name. And why I remember that, I think because my father must have shook me or something. But it stuck in my head, that I was so stupid. That I was -- was saying that. I must have gotten punished for it or something. Or anyway, told not to -- my parents didn't tum -- punish. But they must have told me very definitely, that is not

something -- you know, we talk about around -- you know, not to talk with the s -- help or something about puli -- politics or something. There was some reason I remember this occasion. This was when I was six. Anyway, I -- that's my -- my view of it. Yes, I think that people didn't want to think about it. People who were, in any way, intellectual. And -- and didn't have to be involved in politics, you know, it was a profession -- it was a profession.

Q: So this -- so this then affected your involvement with things? I -- I mean what was your -  
- what became your involvement with politics here?

A: Well, th -- be -- I was not involved in anything. I never was involved in anything. I'm a member of the democratic party now. I don't think I was until we got here, you know? But I voted democratic.

Q: [indecipherable] When -- when -- when did you come to North Carolina?

A: In '85, yeah. And then -- and here there were some people who -- you know, I didn't have the kids to -- or anything to -- to think about and so I started to sort of reach out and find a few new things that I was interested in and somebody came to the door, actually and asked, you know, what our -- well, we had to register to vote and I've always voted. There hasn't been a time that I didn't vote. When we were in Holland, I used to go to Rotterdam to vote, with the, you know, your absentee ballots and when we were in Switzerland we voted absentee ballots, you know. We -- we always -- I always voted. And when Marty gets disgusted -- and he does, nowadays -- get disgusted with, you know, always voting against something, rather than for something, I say it doesn't matter. If you don't vote at all, it's for it, rather than against it and it's better to vote again -- you know, it just -- you have to vote --

you have to vote, it's so in me. I can't -- I -- I -- the kids -- "You've got to vote. You don't vote, I don't vote, I don't talk to you." I mean all four of them. "You -- you vote. You're --"

Q: Let's talk about the children for a little while.

A: Okay.

Q: Are we fin -- is it okay? Can we [indecipherable]?

A: Yes, oh yeah.

Q: Good. So, first tell -- tell me their names.

A: Well, you know, we had children all over this country because Marty and I got married in Baltimore and we immediately went to Seattle, the next day. We -- we took off for Seattle, where he was going to be working on his Ph.D. He asked me to marry him -- he came out to Long Island because I was there to do a show. I was doing -- dancing and acting in a show that was playing out on Long Island. And he came there and he said, "Do you want to marry me?" And I had just gotten the first agent interested in me and my partner, who was a girl -- we were -- she had very black hair, she reminded me of my sister, you know? Very black hair, white skin. And I had blonde hair and blue eyes and we were a good couple and we danced together very well. And he wanted us as a couple, you know, to dance. And Marty came and asked, "Do you want to get -- marry me?" And I said -- I thought to myself, I'm 23, you know -- I'm 24. Yeah, I was 24. I said, "Yes," and --

Q: Right away?

A: And we married -- three or four marries -- I went -- we went back to Baltimore after the show --

Q: Did you say re -- yes, right there on the spot?

A: I said yes on the spot. I s -- I thought to myself, "You know, you can think about this and you can think about this and --" you know, I wanted -- I was sure of one thing, I wanted somebody that I was starting with. I didn't want anybody who was already -- had a lot of money, that I would have had to say thank you to. I didn't want somebody who was a lot older, because I had a boyfriend there in -- in Baltimore that I was very fond of, but he was a finished person. He was already 41 or 40 or something and I was 25. So I -- and that was the same as my parents, 15 years different, and I said to myself, that's not good. So here was the perfect thing, I mean he was -- he was starting on his graduate school, so I would have to work, we would start this thing together. And I liked him. But, you know, it wasn't what -- this overwhelming feeling that I had had with Otmar or anything. But, I thought, he's the best guy. I could -- you know, I liked him very much and he -- so I said yes. I said, "Yes, that's what I'm going to do." So when I got back to Baltimore, I went to a shorthand and typing st -- school, to do shorthand and typing, because I knew I had to go to work. I couldn't count on acting or dancing or -- and it's exactly what happened. I got a job before he got a job and we went to Seattle and we were -- we were there, he did very well and -- and we -- we were there for about three years. It took four years to get your Ph.D. in those days, takes longer now. And that was the ideal circumstance and -- and that was four years. So I worked for three years or even longer. I worked up to the day that Paul was born. And we had nothing -- we had very, very little money and we were happy as clams because we lived in a community of students, and -- and who were all pregnant with -- five of us



pregnant at the same time. And Marty was doing tests to see if he could figure out whether we were g-going to have boys or girls.

Q: What kind of tests?

A: Well, they thought there was -- he -- at the time they thou -- now, they have, of course, great things, you know, but -- but at the time they thought maybe a saliva -- you know, a urine or something. We all did the tests and the only one that was right was mine. So the test was not a good, de-definitive test. So, anyway, I had Paul in Seattle.

Q: In what year?

A: '53. And I had done a lot of acting in Seattle. There was the theater at the university, the -- the -- our own theater, we started a theater of our own. And we had -- I mean I did a lot of acting, next to my full time job, which was downtown in a bank. And okay, in -- so that was '53. In '54 Marty graduated and we moved to Urbana, Illinois for two years and that's where I had Susie. I did a lot of acting in Urbana. Acting and dancing.

Q: She was born in '55?

A: She was born in '54.

Q: '54.

A: Well, December 30th. I mean, you know, just about -- hanging on. Good tax deduction, she was. And then in -- the next one -- Andy was born -- oh yeah, in '56 we moved to Bethesda. We lived in Silver Spring, actually, but that's when he went to NIH. He was at NIH for -- we went to NIH and that's where he stayed. So Andy was born in '57 and Philip was born in '59, December '59. And that was our house, that was it. And then in -- in '60,

we went to Holland for a year, on sabbatical. And that's -- you know, that was terrific, I mean that --

Q: Well -- okay, now what -- well, tell me about that, I have something -- there's one thing we forgot -- I forgot to ask you, but tell me about going to Holland with the family.

A: Okay, well, that was most amazing, because --

Q: Was that your first time back?

A: That was my first time back, so that was what -- I -- I left in -- in '47, November and I got back in '60, I guess July or August it was. July, maybe. And my Uncle Huntz, my mother's youngest brother, who had gone to Israel after the war -- he also has a great story. Anyway he we -- he ended up as ambassador from Israel to Holland, cause he was Dutch originally, you know? So he spoke Dutch, so they sent him to Holland. And he was there in 1960, when we came, in -- as ambassador, with my Aunt Ruth and his daughter -- their daughter Alliane and of course, they had other kids, but they stayed in Israel. And so it was great. They had gotten a house for us and we looked at the house and it was dark and miserable. So we looked further and we found a wonderful house on the ocean. Many dunes in front of it -- I mean you're not right on the ocean, you can't see the water, but it's the nearest thing you can get to -- to the water. And we brought a girl from -- from America to take -- help take care -- a young girl, six -- 16 - 17, who'll take care of the kids. And then we -- we hired somebody to cook and to -- to clean, because I wanted to do photography. My Uncle Paul is still alive, he's a painter.

Q: What kind of photography were you doing?

A: I was doing portraiture, landscapes, things like that.

Q: And what -- were you selling -- were you selling them?

A: I was -- I was selling them, but not in Holland -- not while I was in Holland. I was just working with people in Holland and I found wonderful people to work with right near us. I couldn't go back to Maria Austria, who -- who had been my teacher, because that was in Amsterdam, but near the Hague, there was a friend, Veekmon was her name and I worked with her. And it was -- and I had a dark room in the house. It -- it was fantastic. I worked very hard. I finally got to -- he really -- and my Uncle Pa -- it was a wonderful -- it was a fantastic year. What happened was that Marty really was in Brussels that year, for six -- for six months and we -- we were going to be in Brussels and my family then, Heinz and Ava said, "That's ridiculous, you know, you're going to be in bru -- in Europe for the first time with all your kids, we want to see your kids, you know. Don't go to Brussels." You know, then -- this too far. So, the house that we had was just two blocks from them and that was really nice. I mean it was -- it was unbelievable to be back in Holland with my own kids. I shopped in the same stores for them. I took them to Amsterdam, of course -- we were in the Hague. But I had known the Hague very well. Uncle Paul was in Vosinar, which is -- which is between the Hague and Amsterdam. I mean, it was -- for me it was one of the best years I could ever remember. I mean, imagine I went to stores in Amsterdam, met some company where we used to shop and -- and there was -- an aunt of mine was sitting there, and -- was an aunt of my mother's really, was sitting there. "Barbara," she says, "how are you?" I mean, this doesn't happen to me in the States. I mean, it was just -- it was a wonderful year.

I -- I ended up -- we -- you know, I had so much family that was still living there and many of them are dead. My uncle's dead, his wife is dead. You know, and etcetera. My cousins are alive. So I do go there and I visit with them.

Q: And -- and did you meet th -- at that time, did you meet people that you had worked with in the underground?

A: Yes, I met everybody, of course.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes, I me -- we went to see Manfred and on -- the funniest thing was Marty, my husband, because I had -- he had -- always wanted to hear stories about Europe and the underground and this and that and I had been telling him these stories. And I guess he believed them, but you know, it was so colorful. I had -- I mean, my uncle who was a painter and who knew everybody in the art world. And the -- and -- and my -- my dancing buddies and my -- and then, when we came to Holland, Marty had never been in Europe. He had been in the Pacific in the war, but never in Europe. So this was his first time. He met all these people and every bit of it was true. As a matter of fact, you know, he could flesh it out. It was more colorful than he had ever thought, you know. He met my uncles and my -- my cousins and my f -- my family and my friends. All the underground people were then alive. He met Coon and he met Magda and he met Maurecia Austria, the photographer that I used to work with, he met her husband, he was still there, that husband. And -- and he -- he met Manfred and his cu -- then wife, Maria. And he met their chil -- I mean, it was just -- for him it was like a picture gallery opening up.

Q: Wh-What were Mar -- I forgot to ask you, where were Marty's family from? They were from Poland?

A: Well, he -- they weren't --

Q: Originally.

A: -- they were all born here.

Q: Yeah, but before that?

A: But originally they were Polish, yes. His grandfather -- his grandfather was the one that, gran -- and grandmother. His grandmother was from Lithuania. His grandfather was from Warsaw. And they met in the United States, so already Marty's father was born in -- in Baltimore. And his mother actually was born when his family -- when her family moved from Poland to -- to -- I guess it was the United States, but she was born in London, on the way. And she was three when she came to the United States. It was a funny thing because she never got the American citizenship. Because it was past the time that when you married an American, you would get American citizenship. And she never -- she said -- she always said -- you know, we asked her to come visit us in Europe. That's when all this came up. She wasn't a citizen, she didn't have a passport. She says, "I'm as American as anybody." I mean, she'd never been anywhere else. She was three years when she came. So she was very proud of it and she would not take the test. She says, "I don't have to take a test, I've never been anywhere." It was funny as heck. She -- you know, she's -- although she'd never been in a -- in Poland, she was -- she had all the sort of behavior, you know, that -- that comes from the east. You know, th-the kind of bit of superstition and -- and nothing bad,

you know, just -- just the kind of thing. She cooked like a whiz. You know, and it tasted better than anything I'd ever eaten. You know, she -- she -- I don't know what she did, probably chicken fat we -- we think now. But it was wonderful. And her baking, it was heaven. So -- so -- so as I say, she came when she was three. So his parents really, you know, were Americans. They had been born and raised here.

Q: He says something, let me find it [indecipherable] little --

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Barbara Rodbell. This is tape number four, side A.

A: -- tasted better than anything I'd ever eaten. You know, she -- she -- I don't know what she did, probably chicken fat we -- we think now. But it was wonderful. And her baking, it was heaven. So -- so -- so as I say, she came when she was three. So his parents really, you know, were Americans. They had been born and raised here.

Q: He says something, let me find it [indecipherable] little article that he wrote. I just wanted to ask you about it. What did I do with it? It was just an interesting -- well, one thing that he w -- that he acknowledges -- there's something about your relationship to -- about his re -- his -- his involvement with European culture.

A: Well, you know, he got very friendly with my Uncle Paul. And Uncle Paul would take him places, I couldn't always get away and he would take him places, so he met a lot of Paul's buddies -- you know, his painting buddies and his co -- his other buddies. People were alive then, who were older than my Uncle Paul, you know, and who -- who are real classics, now -- whole groups of Dutch painters. And --

Q: Oh yeah, here it is, he says, "The -- the year in Belgium and Holland, however, proved to be most important because of the cultural impact of European civilization on my life. I have been wedded to Europe since then.

A: Well, it was -- it was because of all the -- he finally saw it all and took it in, you know? We traveled. We -- we -- because we had help with the children, so we could travel and we

took a big trip. We drove, you know, around and we -- we went south. We actually drove to Venice and took a boat to Israel.

Q: Israel?

A: Yeah, because my Uncle Huntz, you know, he -- he was -- wait a mi -- was that in '61? I think it was '61. Huntz was back. Why was Huntz back? I think it was '61? Or was that in '67? We were in Geneva twice and I da -- I can't keep it quite apart from each other. I think it was '61. Now, why would Huntz be in Israel in '61?

Q: This is Huntz or Heinz?

A: Huntz -- Huntz. My mother's family.

Q: Oh.

A: Huntz -- si -- cr -- Hanan Cidor -- he's in -- in Israel he changed his name from Huntz to Hanan, which is spelled H-a-n-a-n, Hanan. And s -- and he -- from Zeetroon, citron, from Zeetroon, he changed it to Cidor, C-i-d-o-r.

Q: C-i-d-o-r, oh.

A: d-o-r. That means nothing. That -- that's just a name, Cidor.

Q: Okay. And what -- what was the purpose of the change?

A: Well, he worked for the government and you should have an Israeli name. It wasn't just that he worked for the government, he wanted to have an Israeli name.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that's what he did. So he changed it -- of course, again, he was not religious, but I remember when we were in Holland in '60 or '61, he -- we -- the first boy born after the war



in the Jewish community, was Bar Mitzvahed at 13 and this boy was Harry -- Harry Zeetron. So in my family, the Zeetron family. And Huntz -- Hanan Cidor, who was the ambassador from Israel to the Netherlands did the officiating at it. He wasn't the rabbi, but he officiated at it, he was the representative of Israel, he was -- he wa -- he was the official maven there. And that was quite an occasion. I mean, the first boy Bar Mitzvahed. And I'm actually surprised, because what happened to my cousin Steven, who was born in '46, if I'm right, what is that? '46 and 13.

Q: Would be '59.

A: So -- '59 -- so he should have been Bar Mitzvahed, he must have been the first. This was '61. So I don't know what -- what the situation is. Maybe he wasn't Bar Mitzvahed, although I can't believe --

Q: Yeah.

A: It's possible that he wasn't Bar Mitzvahed.

Q: Hm.

A: It was very interesting. And we went to it, of course, we were invited. And Hanan was not at all religious and so was that whole government in the beginning, wasn't -- in Israel, wasn't religious.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So, was nothing special, but he knew what to do, you know, he was ri -- I mean they trained him to be representative of Israel. And so --

Q: Hm. So -- so tell -- tell me about your children and about being a mother.

A: Okay. Well, when I had Paul, that was my first one, that was in '53 and again, I had a breakdown. I had Paul -- Paul was born in May. May sixth, 1953 and I had no trouble carrying, I was very nauseous at the beginning and I got Vitamin B shots and then I had -- I was member of group health of Puget Sound, which is still in existence and one of the oldest of the group -- group health. It was a wonderful organization at the time, just terrific. And I had my baby in their hospital and it was very difficult, took a long time. He had the cord wrapped around his neck and stuff. But after I had him, the -- you know, how the first three days, before your milk comes in and all that? I had a real breakdown, because I suddenly started missing my mother and started thinking about my -- th-this was like a huge shock to me. I mean, there wasn't anybody who really cared, I thought. And there was nobody who cared about my baby, you know and me, that I had this child. It meant nothing to anybody, except myself and Marty. And I cried for three days and they -- they tried everything at that hospital. You know, they finally took me out of the room -- I was with four -- three other people. This was very helpful, actually. They were all experienced mothers, I was the only first timer and they took me out and -- and they talked to me and said, "What is it?" And I remember that I said to them, "Nobody cares. I have this child, which is so special and my family --" and my -- in my Dutch German family, this was something fantastic, when you had a child. I mean, it was rare, people didn't have so many children. Here, people had a lot of children, in my generation, they didn't have many children and -- and -- my mother's generation. And I -- you know, and I cried and cried, nobody cares and my mother and that was -- you know, I wanted my mo -- my parents in

the worst way. And -- and they said, "But you have a wonderful husband, I mean he's -- you know, very -- he's everything anybody ever would want and -- and you know, he cares --" and they tried everything, you know? But what -- it was a physical change as mu -- now I know, it was a physical thing as much as a mental situation. And when the milk came in, I settled down and by the time I went home -- in those days, you stayed five, six days in the hospital and by that time, Marty's mother and father had come. And that was very helpful. I wa --

Q: How did they get there? I'm just curious, did they fly?

A: They drew -- they drove.

Q: They drove? From Baltimore to Seattle?

A: Baltimore, yes. They had -- they took -- a fa -- his father was retired then and they drove very slowly across country, stayed in various places and then they -- me -- they've had it figured out just right. And they -- and she -- people said, "We asked, are the Rodbell's moving? Because your mother-in-law emptied out this little house that we had and put everything out in the grass and cleaned the place." She was a fabulous cleaner, I never caught up --

Q: Your house?

A: yes.

Q: Your house?

A: Yes, well, when you say house, you know it was -- th-the University of Washington had -- all the universities were packed after the war and they didn't have housing for their

students and -- grad students or anybody, and -- not enough. And there was this influx of soldiers, you know, re -- people who came back from the army and they -- we finally got a little house and this was -- the army -- the officers houses from the army. So these were shacks, you know, they were shacks and -- and we had a-an entrance that had a stove in it. Now, let's see -- gee, I guess it was already the real stove. It wasn't the barracks, it was a little house by itself. And it just had a living room, that had a kitchen along it -- a Pullman type kitchen, you know? One bedroom, a small bathroom. I guess it had a shower, it surely had no bath and -- and a closet. I think -- that was all it was. So that was -- and the furniture we bought at the Goodwill, you know? But it was -- looked very nice. And all put together, you know, different things. If I didn't like something, I put -- I bought a piece of cloth at the materials she -- at the shop and put it over it. You know, decorate it over. But she cleaned it all, you know, by the time I came home, that was spic and span, whatever there was of it. And they stayed in a hotel -- I mean, they couldn't stay with us. So she cooked and she took care, you know, and she saw Paul and they saw it, so -- for -- that was very nice.

Q: You -- you got along well?

A: Well, yes, we got along, but not we -- not very much. They also would have liked Marty to marry somebody with some money and some -- you know -- I think they were disappointed. I'm sure they were, yeah. She didn't take care well, of my things. You know, I had rug -- I had some -- some Or-Oriental rugs and they got wet in the basement and they just threw it out. They didn't know what was good, really. And -- but they -- and what they did was, they went into my -- into my trunk and they got out the pictures to see about my

history and stuff. They didn't trust -- they also sent somebody to my -- before we married, they sent s -- a d -- they ha -- they asked somebody to go see my uncle -- my Uncle Bep Person to see what kind of family it was. You kn -- if it was true, what I had told. I mean, here was this girl, alone, living thi -- and there was no family with it, nothing. [doorbell] This I have to answer.

Q: Okay. [inaudible] At what point did you ever find out the fate of your parents and your sister?

A: Ah, never. Well, no that's not true. I was trying to get a death certificate, because I couldn't inherit -- I couldn't -- I couldn't lay claim to anything. Not that there was much, or anything, actually. But I couldn't -- there was no proof of anything, you know, that I had a right -- why did I need it? There was some reason that I needed a death certificate and there wasn't any and so the Red Cross, at a certain point, in 19 -- I don't know exactly the date, but they gave a blanket death certificate to all the peop -- because of this, th-the inability to inhe -- you know and the inability go on with your life, practically.

Q: Yeah.

A: They gave a blanket death certificate. But I had heard -- I knew th-they -- I found out -- somebody told me what transport they had gone on, which was November 19th, 1953. That they were sent to Auschwitz.

Q: Say what -- what was the date?

A: November 19th, I think, 1943, that they were sent to Auschwitz and that particular --

Q: Three -- three of them go? Your sister too?

A: Yeah. And that particular transport was immediately sent to the ovens. It never -- you know how in other transports, there was right and left, sort of?

Q: Yeah.

A: This, no. This particular transport, they were not tortured first. They were killed right away. And that the Red Cross knew. And they knew that they had been in that parti -- because Westerbork had records. You know, the collection place in Holland had records.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And they knew that that transport went to Auschwitz at a certain date and Auschwitz had records and -- they knew that that whole transport was killed the day it arrived, which was maybe the 20 -- the 23rd of November, 24th of November. And one thing that's always gotten me is that I keep thinking, what did I do that day? I mean, you know? That is so -- that is something that got stuck in my mind. You know, another reason I know when they left, is because my Uncle Heinz was there in Westerbork. He saw them go. His mother was on the same transport. My Aunt Kait, my father's oldest sister. So -- so she had been underground, but she had been given away by somebody and she was -- she was in that same transport. So that they all went together. And -- and that's something, you know, I think, what did I do? What did I do? As a -- it's an incredible thing. Of course, you don't know what goes on. I mean, you know I can be -- sit here and Marty can -- you know, something happens to him at the hospital two, three blocks away and I don't know what goes on. And in the war, you didn't know what went on three blocks away, unless somebody told you. You know, it just -- I mean that -- the way I escaped, for instance, you

know, the people did not know the -- M-Manfred did not know what had happened in our part of Amsterdam, the part where I had been. Well, this is all on the other tape, but you never know what went -- what went on. No, unless you heard shooting, you didn't know somebody had been killed. You know, it's just -- it's -- it's an in -- absolutely incredible things. And -- and -- and guilt, let's talk about guilt. I -- I -- I think I have less guilt feelings than most people and I don't know why that is. I often think that I have not as much sensibility as other people. And it worries me. But -- but maybe it is because I decided to do what I did, you know? I decided to escape. And that I don't think that putting yourself in danger, in any way, makes you a better person. I think it makes you a stupid person, if you have a choice. If you have a choice -- like people who climb Mount Everest, if they die, hm. Whose fault is that? If you have a choice and you put yourself in danger -- and I had a choice. I didn't know whether I was going to make it -- you know, whether I was -- do you know what I'm talking about? When I escaped from -- that was the day they were taken away, I escaped. So, anyway, I --

Q: They day that -- that who was taken away?

A: My parents.

Q: You escaped?

A: Yeah, I escaped fr-from the situation that they were tak --

Q: But you had already escaped, hadn't you?

A: What?

Q: Weren't you already separated from them?

A: I was, but I'd gone back home. I was home the day it all happened.

Q: Oh.

A: So -- so I -- I -- I'm -- I did it, I made -- made up my mind and I tell you, when I went to Holland and we went for the documentary, that your --

Q: Mm-hm, yeah.

A: They took me to the bridge that I escaped from. We didn't know exactly which bridge it was, but I remembered that I tried three bridges and it was the last one, I succeeded to get over. The first two didn't succeed. And we went to that bridge and I looked at it -- now this is 50 some years ago, you know? And I thought -- and things have changed a little bit in the neighborhood, but not too much on that side. And it -- it was a shock, you know? I'd never been back there, consciously. And there was that damn bridge and I just saw this guy standing there, the one who let me out. I tell you, I -- and -- and to go to my house. To go to my apartment, where we lived, on the Notaramstellat. And to -- to ride in the trolley. We rode in the trolley that I escaped from and do you know that I miss -- that I thought that the trolley that I escaped on was the trolley that was in front of my house. It turns out it was the one across the street. The one in front of my house went the other way. I had it wrong. Either I had it wrong, or they changed. I -- I -- I still would like to find that out. But they filmed in the trolley. I didn't escape the second time on that trolley, the fir -- I escaped twice. And the first time, I was on -- I did it on the trolley. The second time, there was no trolley. And I had to walk to the bridge. But anyway, it -- it -- it -- I often think that this feeling that I don't feel so guilty that I am alive. I feel terrible, terrible, about them not being



alive and about my sister. That's the worst thing. Because I remember Manfred telling my parents, "If anything happens, please put her in the hideaway." There was a hideaway in the house. "Please put her in there, please put her in there" And as I left, I said, "Susan- Susanna, you go in that hiding place. They won't come. It's too big a rattsia, it's too big a pogrom, it's too big a pick up situation. They cannot go into every house, they won't go into every house." And they didn't. She could have been there and we could have gotten her out. But she was three years younger than I was, so that means I was -- she was 14. And in those days, 14 was a very little girl and she didn't want to leave her parents. And they didn't force her to. There were some parents who sent their kids to England. There were some paren -- which was horrible. There were some parents like -- like this girl Fink, I told you about, who handed their kids over to people. But my parents didn't do this to Susan. They didn't tell her to stay in there. I said we would send somebody to get her, you know? And they did not do this, they -- we did -- we -- Manfred went in the evening, when all was dark and was quiet, you couldn't see anything that had happened in that neighborhood. And -- which was a very mixed neighborhood and people were on the streets and everything was normal. And Manfred went into -- I had the key, after all and he went into the house and he took out a lot of silver and he took out a lot of stuff. Rugs he took out and everything, that -- which we sold to live during the occupation. So he could safely do that un-under cover of darkness and with his false papers, which were quite excellent. They said that he was a German and all that kind of stuff. And -- but Susanna wasn't there. You know, he went there to get her out.

Q: I'm sorry, cause maybe I didn't quite pick up the whole story from the video tape, but just explain to me -- you had -- you had already left the family and were already working underground?

A: Yes.

Q: Right?

A: I was already underground.

Q: And I know that there was some tension, because there was a fear that you had that if it was understood that you had gone underground, that your parents might get in trouble.

A: Well, that was their fear. We -- we were saying it won't make any difference.

Q: Right.

A: What -- what the Germans said was, they put in you in a s -- they're going to put you in a special barrack and you will sent -- be -- be sent away before anybody else. That's what they had said. Now the thing was, where would they send you? You would die one way or you would die a -- this is what Manfred told me.

Q: Right, right.

A: He said, "Dev -- dead is dead and there won't be any difference. So you come and you go underground." But let me explain to you. I had gone underground and I was living somewhere else and it was a holiday, the 20th of June. And my f -- my father called, or I called home to see how things were and he said, "Please come. Please, please, please. We haven't seen you in eight -- in so many months," I forget how many months. "Please come, you know. We're still here, it does -- seems okay, you know, and it's not to be too

dangerous.” So I told Manfred -- I wasn’t living with him then, I was living in a poncion, in a boarding house. And -- and he said, “Don’t go. I don’t think anything will happen, in particular, but why would you make -- endanger yourself like that?” I hadn’t been wearing a star, I had been underground. Had good pa -- not good papers, but I had some papers. And, “You shouldn’t endanger yourself like that.”

Q: Just to travel?

A: Just to go from -- no -- yes, to go from -- and be there. Why should you go somewhere where something could happen, you know? And of course I did want to see my parents. And I went to friends of ours, a Jewish friend and I put on my star, very lightly, just at the points. And I went to see my parents. And that same night, somebody came to see us and told us what was going to happen in our neighborhood.

Q: Which was?

A: A big rattsia. An enormous pogrom. An enormous pick up of Jewish people. Very mixed neighborhood, so it wasn’t like it was all going to be emptied out. They’re going to -- were going to be people there. And for instance, the people called Erstrasher, you know Liesel, Emma and Maria Austria and all of them, they were there when -- when that big rattsia happened and they did what I asked my parents to do with Su-Susie. They went in a hiding place that they had, upstairs. They did the same thing, we had double walls. They sat in the double wall. They had a dr -- a drawers that they pulled toward them. They had a handle on the back of drawers and they pulled it -- from the hole in the wall, they pulled it toward them.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: So if people would come up, it wouldn't look like enis -- anybody there. It was a Sunday. On Sunday people go away. They -- it was a beautiful day, it was June, you know, people go for walking, they go fo -- to the beach and do -- go whatever. And -- so they didn't have to be there. The Germans came, there were loudspeakers, they were saying all Jews have to prepare themselves, nobody else is allowed on the street. And so, the Jews just went downstairs and went on there. On -- on the wagons, the cars that they had, the trucks. But the ones that didn't come, didn't come. And the Germans did not go and eve -- if they knocked on doors, which I don't know if they did, if people didn't answer, they didn't break the doors down. They didn't come. There were too many people involved. Crowds of people, crowds of Jews that came down. Everybody -- all the others stood at the windows watching, after all.

Q: Wh-What -- and -- but wasn't there a sense that there was great danger? To get on the transport?

A: Of course they knew if was danger, but they si -- that was the rule. I mean, most people do what they're told to do, you know?

Q: And just that -- so I understand, in -- in relationship, time-wise, wh -- at what point did the Franks go into hiding?

A: Oh, way ahead.

Q: What -- much before that?

A: They went -- they went into hiding when Margot, in the beginning, you see, in '42, people were called up by name. And Margot Frank got a letter -- a note which said she had to be at the train station on that and that date, at that and that time. And she had to bring a rucksack, she couldn't take more than a small -- etcetera.

Q: Yeah. But you're -- and your parents knew that they had gone in to hiding, right?

A: No. We didn't know they had gone into hiding.

Q: Where did you think they were?

A: In Switzerland.

Q: Oh.

A: Some people -- people with money could escape and the Franks had -- you know, they might be -- get caught, but they tried. And -- and -- but the Franks had family in -- be -- in Basil, we knew that. And that was the rumor that was spread, because they had a person who was renting a room in their house. And he was there and I remember going there, asking -- wanting to ask Margot to come out -- to -- to talk.

Q: Right.

A: And he opened the door and he said, "Oh no, they're gone. They went to Switzerland." That -- they wanted him to say that.

Q: Right.

A: And that's -- that's exactly what happened. Of course I spread the rumor. People were asking, "Well, where are the Franks?" I said, "I guess they went to Switzerland."

Q: I see. So you found out that th-there was going to be this round up and you did what?

A: And we -- we found out that -- about the round up. Amazingly a lot -- enough, through a woman that -- whom we always had called Cassandra. She came and she told us. And at that point, my father had always said, "No, don't go -- don't go underground," because of what we mentioned before.

Q: Yeah.

A: This time he said, "Go." And -- and my mother, w-we -- I couldn't take anything, because they thought, if I get picked up with anything, you know what I'm --

Q: Yeah.

A: So I just took a towel, a bathing suit and my toothbrush, or something. I forget what I took. A -- a piece of soap maybe, for a --

Q: Yeah.

A: As if I was at the pool. I don't want to tell that story. But anyway, that was when I tri -- went by the --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- bridges, and --

Q: And you took your star off?

A: Oh yes, the star was off. And -- but I was the only one on the street, because Jews had to get ready and they had an hour to get ready and no gentiles were allowed, nobody else was allowed on the street. But I was on the street. So anyway, that always gives me the shakes. And I tell it on the other tapes, I --

Q: No, I -- I know. I'm sorry to [indecipherable]

A: So -- but we went to my house -- my apartment and I -- I looked up and I saw that there were lamps and things sort of leaning up against the window and I thought, "There's something wrong. There's probably nobody there. Maybe they're painting -- they're painting, or something. And the woman underneath us -- th-there was a woman und -- at the window, watching the filming, which they did in front of our house, of me. They filmed me walking up to the house and looking up, etcetera, etcetera, as you do. And she saw that. So they -- Barbara rang the bell at her house and said, "Look, could we -- since this doesn't seem to be anybody up there, could we come in your house?" And they said yes. Now this apartment was a little different from ours, because ours was two levels. We had an downstairs and an upstairs and hers was just one level, but she had a -- done a beautiful job redoing her house. It was just wonderful. And I saw again what a lovely neighborhood that was. I mean, it really was and -- but it was just unbelievable.

End of Tape Four, Side A

Beginning Tape Four, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Barbara Rodbell. This is tape number four, side B.

A: We -- since this doesn't seem to be anybody up there, could we come in your house?" And they said yes. Now this apartment was a little different from ours, because ours was two levels. We had an downstairs and an upstairs and hers was just one level, but she had a - - done a beautiful job redoing her house. It was just wonderful. And I saw again what a lovely neighborhood that was. I mean, it really was, and -- but it was just unbelievable to be

in there. Just -- just unbelievable. What had happened upstairs was that these people, who had lived there all the time, since 19 -- I don't know what -- just after the war, I guess. They had just died. They had just died and their -- their children were cleaning up the apartment and they didn't feel that anybody could be in there, which was logical. So that's why we went to the apartment underneath there. Yeah, and we looked -- I looked out of the window and I saw this -- what I always used to see. Nothing had changed there. What had changed is the store -- there was a store on the corner and that had changed. Was -- it's a dentist now, which is not nice, instead of a -- a baker, yes I think, yeah.

Q: So te-tell me a little bit more about this transition to motherhood and having your own children and --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and building a family once again.

A: Well, it -- it -- it felt like old hat. I mean -- I -- it felt like I should have done it all the time. I mean, I was 25. I -- no, really I was older, I was 27 and a half, maybe, when I had my first child. We were married when I was 25 and I had my first child in 1953. We were married in '50. Two and a half years. And I f -- it felt absolutely wonderful. I mean, I had a wonderful mother, I had a caring surroundings as a child myself, and I guess the way you do, you pass it on. And that -- we have a wonderful family. We all -- we all get along and -- and it's very loving with all of them and very close. I have one daughter and three sons and the boys are wonderful. As nice, as wonderful as the daughter and it's just -- it's just been very good. And, to my great surprise, when I was mentioning that you were coming, and



also during discussion of the -- during discussion of the film that was being -- was made, I asked them these questions which I had never asked them. "We-Were you influenced at all by my having had this history?" Because I never felt that we were in any way different from anybody else. And they said, "Well, we didn't have any family. We didn't have much family." Well, we had Marty's family, but they're very small family. Marty had one sibling and he's not close with her. Sh-She's six years younger. And his father died early and his mother was a bit s-strange and -- but she came, so we had some connection with his mother. We weren't enemies in any way, we were friendly with his mother, although not close. He did -- never cared too much for his mother. And so that was something they did care about. Now, we had many friends and they had children and we had a close knit group, so I had lot -- they had lots of people around. We have lots of pictures of Sunday brunches. We always gave Sunday brunches. And we had lunch of -- lots of parties and we had people in the neighborhood and people from his work and we always had a very lively surroundings. It wasn't that they felt lonely. But they did -- now, they all married people with big families. Which was ju -- is -- is maybe not surprising. I mean, after the war, people had lots of kids, so they had lots -- we had four kids, after all, you know? And these kids have family -- have -- have siblings. And they say, "Oh, I come from -- my -- my husband or wife has lots of family," because they have four -- you know, they have three siblings. So they all have huge families on the other side. All of them.

Q: Now what -- what -- what do they do?

A: Paul is a small businessman. He has a degree in business and in geology, a small degree in geology and a big degree in business. But he is in business and he's in business for himself. Now, one thing, he can't stand authority, so he can't really work for anybody. But he works for himself, he does very interesting things. He goes to South America, that's one of his things there. He -- and -- and he buys goods and he sells them. He sells wholesale and he sells on the street, sometimes.

Q: And where is he living?

A: And he lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, so in the same area that we lived in all the time. He's not married. And I keep thinking, is that anything to do with our history? He says that he has felt different from other people his age and his group, as long as he can remember.

Q: Because?

A: And that is very strange to me. Because of me. Or because of him knowing what he -- his background, you know, his grandparents -- happened to his grandparents and this and that. Now, I want to tell you, we never discussed it. I mean, we talked about it, if it came up. You know, if there was something in the paper about the Holocaust or about the war, we discussed it. Dad -- Marty told about the Pacific war and what he -- what happened to him and I would tell -- or he told a lot about -- about China, where he was -- eight months he was in China. And I -- and they would ask me and I did tell. I told a little bit, but never from a gruesome kind of point of view, you know? I did not see a dead person, all during the war. As impossible as that seemed, I didn't. We weren't bombed to any degree in Amsterdam. And I never worked in the underground where you killed people or did anything like that.

And you know, there was nothing that I would tell that would scare them in any way. But I remember that when it was brought up in school -- and it was, you know, when he had history and -- or something at school, in high school -- that they came back with these tales and that they asked me, you know, "Was it like this?" And, "Was it like that?" And -- and h -- they hated the Germans. I mean they just hated them. I didn't hate them at all. I mean, I -- I look at people as people and I don't expect too much from them. I don't expect from an -- an average person to put himself in danger for anybody else, not even for themselves. Most people just go along with what's going on where they live. It takes character to -- or -- it takes character or it takes absolute willpower to -- to be an ideologue of some sort. To -- to act differently than your surroundings. And there are very few people who would do that, you know? Very few people who stand up and -- up and say, "Do me something, but I feel this and that way." You know, bang. I mean, what's the good of it? So -- so you don't expect too much. You don't expect people to be other than normal in trying to stay alive. That seems to be the human condition. The -- the necessity to stay alive, really overcomes all other concerns that a person might have. And people will do nearly anything to -- of ne -- of -- of momentary necessity to achieve that goal, the goal of staying alive. They sometimes will kill, because staying alive might say -- might need food and if there is very little food, you have to -- might have to do something to get it. I often think of that when we're stand in line at the grocery store. I think we can be -- we can afford to be friendly, because we know there's plenty more in the store, you know? But if there isn't -- so the human condition is very, very weak and shaky and it's built on certain assumptions, the assumptions of the

moment. The assumption of -- that there is enough food and there's good water and there is good this and that and that is the wrong assumption. And you have to do something for it. And to do something for it might be difficult. Like what you told me about the underground water being polluted in certain --

Q: On -- on Cape Cod, yeah.

A: On Cape Cod.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I mean -- the government would have to be extremely strong. It would have to say, "We have to clean it up." And it costs a lot of money and people don't think, they don't think that if we don't clean it up, nobody can drink the water any more, including my own children. They forget that if they don't clean up the air, they themselves and their children will not be able to breathe. Not just the poor schnooks who happen to live in that area. And -- and there is -- there are all sorts of wrong assumptions.

Q: Yeah.

A: Momentary -- that's why I say momentary. Only think of the moment and not --

Q: Right.

A: -- of any future situations that come out of the --

Q: So let's get back to the chil -- the other three children.

A: Other three children. My daughter's married, she has a degree from Berkeley.

Q: Her name is?

A: She's number two.

Q: And her name?

A: Suzanne.

Q: She named after your sister?

A: Pardon me?

Q: She named after your sister?

A: Yes. Paul is named after my Uncle Paul, who is the painter and Suzanne was named after my sister. I just wrote her with a Z rather than an S, which sounds better in English. And her second name is my mother's name, it's Louise, which ma -- was my mother's second name, because my mother's first name is Ilse, I-I-s-e and that's not good in English.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Nobody would know how to say it. So -- so --

Q: The middle name is Louise.

A: Ilse Louisa, it was my mother's name.

Q: Louisa, mm-hm.

A: And so Suzie's middle name is Louisa, after my mother. She was loaded down with -- Suzie's extremely bright, extremely bright and -- and very active and she married a terribly nice guy, lee -- named Douglas Burton Richardson, from Michigan, a ge -- an geographer, Ph.D. geographer, who had a business having to do with computers and satellites and wonderful, current things. And they're working like dogs, both of them.

Q: She works with him?

A: She did work with him, when -- when it was really necessary. She worked very, very hard and -- but now it's not necessary, so they just bought a second home on Chesapeake Bay and we keep hoping that something good will happen and they don't have to work so hard any more. Such as selling, maybe, their business or something.

Q: She have children?

A: She has two children, one of which is Sara Richardson, Sara who -- and her name is Sara Simone and she's, you know, the one who is going to go to Columbia. And a wonderful second daughter named Alexa. Let's see, Alexa Rose Richardson, who's a wonderful girl, 12 years old, plays the cello. Hopes to be a musician, but anyway is -- is a great baseball player and very athletic, tennis player. And then there is -- after Suzie there is Andrew. Andrew is married and has three sons, one of whom came with his wife, so he has actually two sons. And he lives also up there in Bethesda. And he is a video editor. And he has both his own business and he is working for a company. He's a wonderful guy. He's extremely loving and caring and a great parent and husband and -- and just a -- very special kind of person. And --

Q: And the names of his children are, just to [indecipherable]

A: Oh, the -- the name of his children? There is Eric Martin, who is named after Marty and - Eric Martin and Max Hendrick and that's an interesting name, because Max is Marty's grandfather's name and Hendrick is my grandfather's name. So Max Hendrick Rodbell. So that's very -- a nice name. Eric was a preemie and we hope things will go well with him.

Q: How old are they?

A: He's very small. Huh?

Q: How -- how old are they?

A: Eric is six and Max Hendrick is three.

Q: Oh. And the other -- and there's one more boy?

A: Then there is the one that is --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- her child. And that's Jonathan and Jonathan is nine. So that's -- that's him and then there's the youngest one, that's Philip. And Philip is the one who was seven months old and spoke Dutch before he spoke English. And there's still a few funny things he says. He says "Ohven" instead of oven. And he says, "Pannacooker", pancakes. Pannacooker, which was the du -- so Philip is in Boston and he's married and he has two little girls and let me see, that's Sophie -- is it Sophie Androse? Yes, I think it's Sophie Androse Rodbell. And -- and his second child is Phoebe Hilton Rodbell. So -- her family is from up there -- from -- from Maine, her mother's family is from Maine and her father's family is from New Hampshire.

Q: And Philip does what?

A: And Philip is -- well he's a -- he's a forester -- an urban f --

Q: Oh, that's right, you told me.

A: He's an urban forester.

Q: Right. You told me he goes --

A: So he takes care of the trees in all of Massachusetts in the towns and the -- and the parks in between the towns. So it's a very interesting job. He's supposed to get news and information out to the population -- to the general population.

Q: Yeah.

A: And he's organizing the various towns and he gets -- he tries to gets grants that he can give to the various towns or can divide. They can ask his office for money to rebuild and build woods or are -- parks or street trees or areas around town.

Q: Were -- were any of the boys or all -- all of the boys Bar Mitzvahed?

A: None. None of them were.

Q: None of them?

A: No.

Q: And you said -- and you told me before that none of them -- none of the children -- well, the three that were married --

A: No.

Q: -- have married Jewish people?

A: No.

Q: And that -- how do you feel about that?

A: I feel fine about it. I feel very fine about it. And I think it has to do with -- with something very stupid and -- and of course goes back to my background, that I feel that there's more secure, if they're not all Jewish -- the children. And that -- you know, this is going back to Hitler, I mean. Nothing like this might ever happen in the same kind of way



as it happened in Europe in the -- in the 40's, but y-you can only protect yourself against what you know, and this is what I know. So -- so -- however limited it is. And I do not really -- I would not -- I do not really believe in any religion -- in religion per se, I should say. So I would not like any of the in-laws to be religious, and they're not. None of them and their families are in any way religious. But the danger exists in my mind, you know, that -- that one of the children will end up religious. It's up to them, they can go a -- whichever way they want and it's their choice.

Q: Sure.

A: I think the important thing here is choice and I do not choose it. I did not choose -- choose the people they married, either. And so I -- you know, that's their business.

Q: Do -- do you think that your -- your experience -- the experience of the -- what -- what happened to your family, your parents, did it affect in any way, your belief in God?

A: I cannot say that has. I cannot think that I was ever religious in any which way. When we were in Holland, the Franks and us, there was -- you know, in the -- not right away, but when times got bad -- w-we got there in '33, I don't know -- I think about '38 or nine or something, they set up a -- a Reform kind of temp -- you know, religious group. There was no Temple, but there was a religious group. And I think that the Franks and us were in there. I remember sitting in a class and -- and learning some Hebrew letters and things, which I don't remember anything about. But the Franks hadn't been in any of that, either. Neither one of us had been -- as far as I remember it, in any way involved. I remember my mother -- my mother lighting a candles on Friday. And she knew the browhouse -- the re-- the

religious things you say when you light the candles. And she must have learned it somewhere. Now, whether she learned it at her father's knee, did her mother do it? Yes, it might hav -- be so. But I can't remember it.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It's very likely that she learned that, you know, from her mother. But I don't even know if Huntz was Bar Mitzvahed. I imagine he was -- of -- or Paul was Bar Mitzvahed. My pay -  
- my -- my Uncle Paul.

Q: Yeah.

A: I imagine it -- it was -- they were, but I -- I have no proof of that. I really should ask me Israeli cousin. I have two real cousins. One of them Huntz's and one from my Uncle Paul. One from my Uncle Huntz and one from my Uncle Paul.

Q: Right.

A: And one of them lives in Israel and I don't -- we don't get alan -- long very well. And -- and one [indecipherable] lives in Holland, we are very close. I don't know if she would know if my Uncle Paul was ever Bar Mitzvahed.

Q: And Martin's becoming a scientist --

A: Martin -- Martin was Bar Mitzvahed.

Q: Yeah. But did he becoming a scientist affect his association with religion and God?

A: No. He was never religious either and neither were his parents. He was Bar Mitzvahed, it was understood. It was like a ritual, but -- but it was not -- they never -- they did not go to

Temple, except on Rosh Hashanah. They did go on Rosh Hashanah, because the whole family went.

Q: Right.

A: They have the huge family in Baltimore. One reason Marty said he left Baltimore with me, after we were married, was because he said, "You have nobody on your side, but I have this huge family, you're going to be drowned and we don't want that." He was -- he obviously wasn't that fond, you know? He liked his family. He liked his family and unc -- cousins and uncles and aunts, was huge. 150 - 200 people, I mean, you know. But I know his grandmother, Sara Rodbell and I don't know her own na -- Calman -- no, wasn't Calman. She -- I knew her very well. She's the one who came from po -- from Lithuania and then came from -- via -- with her husband, from Warsaw. She was anti-religious in the worst way, because her mother was married, of course, they -- her father was one of these itinerant rabbi's in Poland. And he died of pneumonia or something, you know, in Poland, because he had to travel from one place to another and it was very cold. And his mother married some family of his here in Baltimore. That's why -- her mother rather, married -- so when she -- the mother -- my grandm -- his grand -- start over. Marty's grandmother, named Sara, married -- came to this country, Baltimore, when she was 12. And her father had died in Poland and her mother married a relation of the father, here in Baltimore. There were five children when -- when she came. This woman came here with five children and she had three more with this fellow from -- this family member that -- that she married. Calman -- his name was Calman. And this Calman was in Shul the whole time. And so Marty's

grandmother, Sara, saw her mother work and work and work and work. He never contributed anything to that family, except more children. So -- so she hated religion with a passion. It killed her father and it did nothing for her mother. On the contrary, it kept the second husband in Shul the whole time.

Q: That's funny, I have a similar story in mine --

A: Really?

Q: It was my mother, yeah.

A: Yeah. But anyway, so that grandm -- so -- so Marty's grandmother was anti-religious, so her f -- his father didn't get any religion because his -- the father of -- her -- his gran -- Marty's grandfather, the father of his father, was a wonderful guy and he wasn't religious in any way, either. Very lively fella. So --

Q: So this is anoth-another kind of very broad and very difficult question to answer, but can you tell me at all about how this whole compendium of experiences, both the horrible things that happened in the war and the wonderful things that have happened -- how they have shaped your -- your view of humankind?

A: You know, I have to tell you -- aside from getting, I hope wiser and -- y -- with age, after have -- after having assimilated everything that happened to me in my 72 years, I cannot think that I've changed very much, you know? I think that after all I've been through over these 72 years, I think I'm getting easier on people. I'm much easier on people. I mean, I forgive them nearly everything. Because I know how hard it is to live. Just to live is difficult. I mean, if you think about the irony of what we build up and -- and work at and it's

just so we die in the end. I mean, it's just ridiculous situation. We're put in such an ironical situation by being born or after being born, of having to deal with the fact that we have to take everything that goes on in the world very seriously, because after all, it's our life and we have to function within it. And in the end, just to die. You know? It is really a very ironical situation. I mean, I -- I think of these people on Long Island who recently died, who had this fantastic collection of paintings. I mean, they went all over the world, they collected, they collected, they collected. They spent billions, millions, you know, collecting, collecting. And when they died, people didn't even know what to do with the stuff. They just put in on auction, it went all over the world, it di -- so what, you know? I mean, it just is -- it is really ironic, it is so ironic. So what can you do? What can you do? I'm -- I'm trying to figure out what you can do. The only thing you can do that is worth something in life, is be good to your fellow man. The other travelers who happen to be on this earth, accidentally at the same time that you are. You know? And trying to help them, if you're better off than they are, in their trip across the years. I mean, it's just the only thing you can do. And also the only thing you can do is -- is take care of the people that you can reach. You know, it's as if your arms have a certain length and they stretch out as wide as they can and they hold whatever they can and they -- they do good to the ends of their fingertips. I mean, that's the only thing you can do. And I think that is a Jewish thing. Although, I must say, I've met many, many Gentiles who have exactly that same feelings. And -- and in my basically being Jewish, you know, I think, who knows about their forebears? Who knows who they were? There must be some Jewish in them. Because you know, it is -- it is amazing, at the

interfaith council. I mean they're nearly all Jewish -- I mean they're nearly all Gentiles and they have exactly the same outlook. So maybe it's not Jewish after all. Maybe it's just being a good human being and -- and trying to [indecipherable] the best you can while you are living. So I do.

Q: I think that's a good place to stop, huh?

A: -- and some people -- now you're missing the beginning of the sentence.

Q: Yeah [indecipherable] something here, what's going on? Oh, okay.

A: I'm re -- you know, I'm thinking about the very beginning of things when -- when Jews were a tribe in the desert -- everybody was Jewish, right? There was nothing else, except maybe the pagans. But mostly it was -- anybody who was religious probably was Jewish or something. Some kind of offshoot of that. The essernine -- the essene sanines and you know, people -- various tribes in the desert and -- and here comes Jesus -- Jesus and he comes along and he has some other ideas. And montruism, where you [indecipherable] montruism, you know, where you can't see anything in front of you, you have to do it all in your head, the abstraction of God, it's very difficult. And they weren't allowed to make false gods, such as the golden calf and etcetera. And he comes with something that's easier. He's there, you can go via him to God. You can see something, you can hear something. It was easier. It was much easier to understand, to get to the same thing. So people changed. They went with that. Some people didn't and we're the offshoots of the people who were stubborn as hell. Who didn't change. And we've had a hard time ever since.

End of Tape Four, Side B

Beginning Tape Five, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Barbara Rodbell. This is tape number five, side A.

A: And they weren't allowed to make false gods, such as the golden calf and etcetera. And he comes with something that's easier. He's there, you can go via him to God. You can see something, you can hear something. It was easier. It was much easier to understand, to get to the same thing. So people changed. They went with that. Some people didn't and we're the offshoots of the people who were stubborn as hell. Who didn't change. And we've had a hard time ever since, because I think that the ones who did change, maybe were worried about themselves a little bit. And they had a kind of a feeling of, "These stubborn people, why -- what's the matter with them, just sticking -- they're old fashioned." In a way, it's old fashioned. I mean, it's a -- it's something which passed by that's a new thing now, you know? And I can understand it very well. It's much easier, it's so much easier. And then the Catholics came. And then somebody explained the whole thing. Peter came and he explained the whole thing. He explained it his way. Jesus had nothing to do with it. Who knows what Jesus said? And all the apostles added -- each one added their own way.

Q: Yeah.

A: And explained it their own way. And here were these stubborn people who wouldn't change. Darn them. And here we are. We're stuck with this heritage of not wanting to change.

Q: There's a -- a couple of really quick factual questions that Arwin asked me to ask you, which I forgot. One was -- wa -- Manfred was Jewish, is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: Were all of the people who were in the underground Jewish?

A: In -- in our group, yes. In our group only, yes. I mean -- then there were other groups where nobody was Jewish.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Right? During the war, as I say, everybody worked together. As soon as the war was over, this all broke up, you know. I mean you had -- you had people who went -- stayed in their religious groups and then you had the ideology people. You know, people who were just like -- you have to remember that in Holland, there used to be -- not any more, but there used to be 64 political parties. Because Dutch are very individualistic, you know. And ea -- everybody thinks their own way and they have their own party. So it's not true any more, I think that there are 12. But is -- it's -- it's still 12, you know, it's a lot, yeah.

Q: All right, I th -- I think we should stop.

A: Okay, please.

Q: I think that's -- that's good.

End of Tape Five, Side A

Conclusion of Interview





