

INTERVIEW WITH FREDA SCHMELKES

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**Transcending Trauma Project
Council for Relationships
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INTERVIEW WITH FREDA SCHMELKES

(Mrs. Schmelkes wears a hearing aid and has had a heart attack. Her breathing is labored.)

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Freda Schmelkes, who is a survivor. And Freda, if you would tell me a little about yourself, where you were born, the date of your birth, what your family was like?

FREDA SCHMELKES: I was born in Poland. My father was born in Poland. My mother was born in Silesia in (?). And we spoke Polish, and my mother spoke German. So I had two languages. And I had a very happy...we were eleven children. I was the youngest.

INT: And you were born July 13th?

FREDA: July 13, 1908. Yes. And I had a very nice life.

INT: You were the last of the eleven?

FREDA: I was the last of the eleven. We were all healthy and happy, and (sighs) everything was beautiful before the war.

INT: And what did your father do?

FREDA: My father, we had a factory. A leather factory. (?) in Poland. And my father was a Hasidic, he was very tolerant, but he was a very religious Jew. And we all had an upbringing, I mean Jewish. We didn't learn too much Hebrew, the **girls**. We were seven girls and four boys. The girls, you know, in Poland, they don't...they wanted only the boys should learn, and the girls, Lashon Kodesh, Hebrew, they don't need. And I was deprived of it, you know. Because here, when I came to this country, I was teaching, I started to teach here piano. Music, yes. And I had pupils who came from the neighborhood, little girls, and they knew Hebrew, they were going to Sunday school. But I knew how to daven, and I knew how to sign my name in Hebrew, and of course the whole spirit, you know. We were, it was a very religious family.

INT: So your family lived in...

FREDA: In Poland, in Wieliczka.

INT: Wieliczka?

FREDA: Yes.

INT: And your mother took care of the children?

FREDA: Yes.

INT: And...you were the last one. So all of your sisters and brothers were older. And so tell me, your brothers, your father taught them, or they were sent...

FREDA: No, they were going to Hebrew schools, to cheder, and to different...my one brother was in Hungary, because there were higher studies in Hebrew. And, but the girls were really learning languages -- French, English, piano lessons. We were all...

INT: But you were learning a cultured life. Yes, I mean, music and...so your family, your father had some money. You lived well.

FREDA: What?

INT: Your family lived well.

FREDA: Yes, we were well-off financially, and we could afford the lessons. And I had a piano teacher who used to come to the house. We were playing, all the sisters, because it was a very musical family. My cousin -- maybe you heard of him, Arthur Schnabel -- he is a big pianist.

INT: Arthur Schnabel, yes.

FREDA: So he was my first cousin. Because his mother and my mother were sisters. And so, it was a cultured life, yes.

INT: So you had teachers also who taught you the piano? Your mother played?

FREDA: Pardon?

INT: Your mother played the piano?

FREDA: My mother didn't play, but the whole family, my father had a beautiful voice. But what did you sing? Zemirot, nice, beautiful shirim, and, but...

INT: So you remember it being a very pleasant life when you were little.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: And what kind of relationship did your mother and father have?

FREDA: Very good relationship.

INT: But the girls were not given as much education as the boys, Jewish education?

FREDA: Girls got worldly education. Languages and Hebrew, we learned. We all learned how to pray, and you know, not...I took lessons in Israel when I lived there. I was going to Bialik

school. But not before. And the brothers...they got their education, their Jewish education, but they were also very worldly, you know. They were...

INT: They were worldly?

FREDA: I mean...I don't know whether I expressed this right. They were...they knew everything. They knew Hebrew, they knew Hebrew...they were learning, you know.

INT: Studying.

FREDA: Studying. That was not Hebrew.

INT: You spoke Yiddish, I would think.

FREDA: Yiddish and Hebrew, but not for daily use. We didn't speak Hebrew. Nobody spoke.

INT: So your mother and father had a good relationship.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: But how did they...who took care of the children? How did they decide?

FREDA: We were very well-off financially, and we had help always. We had help, and my mother was a **very** wonderful person. She was energetic. She gave us a good, ertzium, good upbringing. She was strict, and Father was more gentle, so to say.

INT: She was of German background, your mother.

FREDA: Pardon?

INT: Your mother had a little more German background?

FREDA: German, yes. German, the whole German literature. The whole, you know. Because, but she spoke Polish. Not good. Polish is not...but my father, they spoke Yiddish.

INT: And so they got along well, but the upbringing of the children, was that jointly, or your mother mostly, or...

FREDA: The boys with the father. The girls...but they were both, yes.

INT: But your father was more gentle, and your mother was more strict. How did they, when they disagreed, how did they come to a decision together? How did they decide?

FREDA: About what? About school?

INT: About the children, about the disagreement?

FREDA: There was no disagreement. And I will tell you, I cannot tell you too much, because I was the youngest. And my father was already older, and...listen, there were eleven children. I remember when we were going out, so they say, the grandfather goes (Yiddish), with the granddaughter. But my father was wonderful, **wonderful**. He understood when we had sometimes a disagreement, with mother, and my father always said, "If Mother says it's good, it has to be good."

INT: So he backed her up 100%.

FREDA: Yeah, oh yes. They agreed. Of course, I don't know too much about earlier years.

INT: I see.

FREDA: Because when I was a baby, my oldest brother was already marrying. Twenty years' difference.

INT: And you never asked about that. There was never any discussion about what their early years were like. Was it, it was an arranged marriage, their marriage?

FREDA: What?

INT: Their marriage, I suppose, was an arranged marriage.

FREDA: Arranged, yes.

INT: So were there grandparents around when you were...

FREDA: There were, well, I didn't know any of my grandparents, because they were all dead already.

INT: I see. Did your father start this business himself?

FREDA: No, no, no. This was, they were brothers. This was inherited already.

INT: I see.

FREDA: A leather factory.

INT: Uh-huh.

FREDA: And my father was mayor from the small city, from the town.

INT: He was the mayor?

FREDA: (laughs) Yes.

INT: And...

FREDA: He was very respected by all the goyim.

INT: So their relationships were, certainly the Jewish people, because they were very religious, but you're telling me they also had good relationships with the goyim, with the people, the Gentiles.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: And do you remember any anti-Semitism when you were little?

FREDA: Unfortunately, yes. I don't, I was not hit by anything so special, but they were always, the boys were afraid to walk. They were throwing stones, they were... (sighs -- softly) There was anti-Semitism in Poland, yes.

INT: Did you have...any special friends? Were you very close to your sisters or your brothers, or you had friends...

FREDA: We had very many friends. I have a friend...but...we got along very well with all of them.

INT: (Pause) Do you have any particular memories about your family that you could share with me?

FREDA: My oldest brother...they were telling me about stories about my great-grandfathers. They were big, you know what is a yichus?

INT: Yichus, I know. Yichus.

FREDA: Rabbis, the Tzidiczoiwa Rebbe was...a great-grandfather, and they told me stories, and they told me some miracles, even.

INT: Oh, miracles! What kind?

FREDA: They told me a story, that for instance, it was a hundred years when the Tzidiczoiwa Rebbe died. And they said that he left a will, he said that his yahrzeit will never fall on a Shabbas, and it will never rain.

INT: It will never rain? (laughs)

FREDA: Rain on that day.

INT: On that day. On his yahrzeit.

FREDA: Yeah, well...So I was in Wieliczka in Poland. And this, and I was, it was a hundred years, and I was in Poland with my mother, and we went to his yahrzeit. It was, I was so interested. It was the hundredth yahrzeit. Hundred.

INT: A hundred years.

FREDA: A hundred years. And it was true, that it was never on Shabbat, and it was never raining. I remember we took a bridczka, such a horses, it was many years ago. We were in a resort in Poland. And so we took, my mother took, my mother was the descendant of this great-grandfather. This (?). And we took such a carriage and horses, and we went till 6:00 in the morning we arrived there. There were so many candles, and they had a special, such an oil for this. I was very much impressed.

INT: Do you know how old you were then?

FREDA: I was maybe eighteen or nineteen.

INT: You were already a young lady.

FREDA: Oh, yeah.

INT: And your mother took you.

FREDA: My mother took me.

INT: And there were many people who attended?

FREDA: They were, on the train, they got a reduction on the ticket to go to this yahrzeit.

INT: It was such a special occasion.

FREDA: Yes. But we didn't go by train, because we were at that time, it was a resort, a beautiful, it was summer. Yud-aleph Tammuz. I don't remember the date exactly, but it was summertime.

INT: And what resort was this?

FREDA: Yud-aleph Tammuz. I don't know, that is the yahrzeit, I don't know. But this was a very...I had such...I was so impressed. Maybe I wasn't even eighteen. Maybe I was, I don't remember.

INT: But so you went with your mother, and you went, you had come from a very lovely resort, and you went to this yahrzeit where this rebbe who was a great-grandfather...

FREDA: Yes.

INT: And so you had yichus, and there was a sense of...almost nobility.

FREDA: Yeah.

INT: And this gave you a very good feeling. Is that...

FREDA: Yes, was proud.

INT: You were very proud.

FREDA: Now my husband's family comes also from a very, their rabbi, Rabbi Itzhak Schmelkes, and Gedalia Schmelkes, they wrote a sefer. But this was my husband's. That was the last...but my family was...We were modest. I wasn't brought up, we were very modest people.

INT: So you were well-off.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: And you had help in the house.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: What was your house like? I mean, was it lavish, or was it moderate, or what was it?

FREDA: What?

INT: Where you lived, your home?

FREDA: It was a nice house, yes. Nice house. It still exists -- my niece was there, and the factory was till not long ago she was there, so they already demolished it. But then we were, when the war was, we were working for the German soldiers, you know, we **had** to. So...

INT: So tell me, when...were there any particular philosophy of life, or anything that you were told as children that was important in your family? Ideas, feelings, that your parents tried to transmit to you?

FREDA: I cannot tell you exactly. (Interruption)

INT: You were telling me that you used to be good in gymnastics, and you were very athletic.

FREDA: Yes. I was playing tennis, and I, even with my grandchildren I played.

INT: Did you play as a young person growing up, or you learned later?

FREDA: Sports, as a young person.

INT: As a young person.

FREDA: As a young girl.

INT: What kind of sports?

FREDA: Tennis.

INT: Tennis. As a young girl.

FREDA: And ball.

INT: And what kind of ball?

FREDA: Ball, at that time, you know. It was in the house.

INT: Uh-huh. And we talked before about that your mother was more of a disciplinarian and your father was more gentle. How did they show affection in your family?

FREDA: (Pause) I don't know how to tell you. They praised us if we did something good, and...we used to kiss the hand always of parents when we and my mother...

INT: Your mother patted you on the head. So there was touching and there was affection?

FREDA: Yes, yes.

INT: And you felt loved. You felt as though they loved you?

FREDA: Oh, yes. As I said, if you are so many sisters, but we got along fine. I have one sister still. She lives in London. She's older than me and...but we got along fine. They were already, of course there were sometimes fights, you know. But my father said, "If Mother says it's red, it's red, you don't argue."

INT: (Laughs) Don't argue.

FREDA: So they always taught us always how to respect, not only the mother, how to respect and how to tell the truth and...

INT: So your father told you a lot about life.

FREDA: Oh, yes.

INT: To respect your mother, and to tell the truth, and to listen. What else did he tell you?

FREDA: In what way do you mean?

INT: Anything that comes to your mind that you remember.

FREDA: He gave us permission to go, there were lectures. I remember Bialik was in (?). And he was in the salt mines. And he had a speech in Jewish. And I came, my father was at that time sick already. And he was not going out. I had to tell him the whole lecture and how it was. And I remember that.

INT: So he was proud of you that you went and that you could come and tell him about it.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: So he encouraged you to go and to hear lectures?

FREDA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

INT: And to expose yourself?

FREDA: Yes.

INT: And were you encouraged to be independent?

FREDA: I don't know. I really cannot tell you. I don't remember. Not so much, because I was the youngest, and they all wanted to help me, and to take care, and my older sister, she was like my mother to me.

INT: Mm-hm. And so then...

FREDA: Not like independent now. Life was very different at that time. I forget, it was so many years. It's changed so much.

INT: People depended more on one another, is that what you're saying?

FREDA: No. We loved each other. And we were together, we were friends.

INT: And you see that as different from today?

FREDA: No, I wouldn't say.

INT: And...so how old were you then when, in 1933, when Hitler came into power, you were 20...

FREDA: I married in 1934.

INT: So let's see. You were born in 1908. So you were 25 years old already.

FREDA: Yes. My father was already not alive.

INT: Oh, your father had died.

FREDA: Died a few years before.

INT: What was that like for you when your father died?

FREDA: Oh. I still cannot forget it. It was a very big catastrophe. It was for me, very, **very** tragic. And he died, of course, in the house. And his heart, you know. It was not like today, you have high blood pressure, they give you a medication. It was not wrong, not right. We had a very good doctor, a friend. But for high blood pressure, they gave you eagles [sic] they gave you, then they took blood. They didn't know. It was not like today. The medicine is so much advanced now.

INT: What was this, they gave you "eagles"? What do you mean, eagles?

FREDA: To suck the blood.

INT: Oh, I see. Like leeches?

FREDA: Yeah. Oh, I said eagles. I don't know. My German, my English, I speak, but I speak so much Polish.

INT: Yes, of course. And so, was this sudden when your father died?

FREDA: No, he was sick. He had a stroke. And then five years he was sick. He had, he suffered. He didn't lose the memory, and so, but he was not...not well.

INT: Not well.

FREDA: Not a well man. And we always took **very** good care of him.

INT: But you were now in your twenties, and you were living at home. And what were you doing? You were taking care of household things?

FREDA: I helped in the house. I was studying. I played the piano and I practiced four hours a day, and I was...I had a good time.

INT: And you were meeting young...

FREDA: I was, yes. I had many friends.

INT: And when did you meet your husband?

FREDA: In Vienna. My sister, she lived in Vienna, and we used to travel a lot. And there I came to visit, and that was, the families were acquaintances, and he was introduced to me, and I met him, and then he came to Poland, and we got engaged, and were married.

INT: That quick? Just like that?

FREDA: No, it was a year before we married, before we...

INT: So what was it like when you met him? How did you know this was the man that you wanted...did you know?

FREDA: I liked him, and he was educated, and he was traveling a lot, and he was in Paris, and he spoke languages, and I liked him.

INT: And what did he do?

FREDA: He was, he wanted to study, to go to the university, but his parents were very religious, and they said that ver na goy. Because I had many in my family who were doctors and so on. They were not frum at all. And my husband studied languages. He studied, he knew very well how to learn, you know, Hebrew. But he worked in a...how do you, insurance company. He had a job.

INT: In Vienna.

FREDA: In Vienna, yes.

INT: And so this was, you met him just around the time that Hitler was coming to power. What was that like? Do you remember talking about it, being concerned?

FREDA: Oh, yes. There was always fear. We were always afraid that Hitler would come. But...my sister, one sister lived in Berlin already. There was, there were times we were always afraid already.

INT: And were there any in your family that were leaving Europe, or leaving Germany, or...

FREDA: Not many. Not many. Many, many got killed. And I lost all my beautiful sisters, brothers, grandchildren. During the war.

INT: So they believed that maybe it would go away, that it would not really happen. What...

FREDA: They were making good money in Poland. And they were happy, they were respected there, where they lived, that's all. They didn't leave. They could leave, unfortunately, but many didn't.

INT: So when you married your husband, did you go then to live...

FREDA: I lived in Vienna right away, yes. And I had my children right...Rita was born, my daughter was born in 1936. And my son was born in 1937. And so I was busy. But we had in Vienna a very nice life. Wonderful, with my husband.

INT: What was it like, your life? What was it like in Vienna?

FREDA: Well, we had many friends there, and we were often going to concerts, and there was (Yiddish) such a swimming pool, where there were dauervulle, it was a beautiful life, and we were going out. Concerts Sunday morning always, and then my husband was working.

INT: Was it hard for you to leave your mother, for you to leave her and go and live in Vienna?

FREDA: Pardon? Was it hard, yes it was. Yes it was. Hard and not hard. Because I was in Vienna every year. I had my sister there, and the Schnabel family there. This, my mother's close family. Of course, it was my mother, and when I left for a trip or someplace, before I left my mother said, "Oh, I miss you already." (laughs) I remember this. But it was not hard, because we spoke on the phone, and I didn't go for such a long time. For a few weeks.

INT: So you were very close with your mother.

FREDA: I was close with my mother. My mother was strict, as I said. But I know that she understood. She was very intelligent, and she encouraged studies, and the piano, and so on.

INT: So you learned how to be a mother from her.

FREDA: Oh, yes.

INT: What did you learn from her, and what did you learn from your father?

FREDA: (Laughs) From my mother I was always, she said, I learned to be a Balabusta. She said, "You can have things, but you have to know everything. You have to know how to cook. And you have to dust the furniture." We were helping, we were helping, although we...

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

INT: ...To be a wife and a mother. And your father, what did he teach you?

FREDA: Everything what a father can teach. (laughs) What can I tell you? I don't know how to say it.

INT: Well, I mean, I'm interested in your feelings about religion. Your strong Jewish identity.

FREDA: Religion, we agreed with him. Yes.

INT: And in being charitable?

FREDA: We started to have Hebrew lessons. So my mother, my father came from the synagogue, and they told him here, "You let your children study Hebrew, lashon kodesh?" And so on. And they were so, you know, how do you...

INT: Criticizing him?

FREDA: Criticizing, telling him he shouldn't permit this. Because my father was tolerant, and they were very Hasidic. They were...but he got along. And he said, No, they took the melamed, I learned a little bit, very little, and the melamed, it was a man, of course. And then my father was...he learned, he told us always to be good, and I don't know what to tell you. To be helpful.

INT: But you're a strong woman.

FREDA: Pardon?

INT: You became a very strong woman.

FREDA: I don't know. (laughs) After I, after my husband left for America, he left five years before me.

INT: Oh, he left when?

FREDA: He left December, 1940. The war was already, he had an affidavit and he had a ticket, and we didn't have any friends in America. So I didn't have anything, no papers. So he said when he came here, he already sent us papers, and everything, but the Germans didn't give me permission to leave.

INT: He sent you papers, your husband sent you papers, but they wouldn't let you leave?

FREDA: It was too short time, and Hitler was already there, and they didn't let me out of the country, of Poland. So I had to be there, and hiding. (sighs and breathes deeply)

INT: Your daughter, Rita, said that she remembers that when you left Vienna and you went somewhere else.

FREDA: We went to Poland.

INT: You went to Poland.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: And how were you able to get out of Austria to go to Poland?

FREDA: I had a Polish passport with my husband.

INT: I see. And so you thought you would be safer in Poland.

FREDA: My husband had a wish right away to go to America because he said, "Why shall I go from the rain, from regen in die traufe to Poland?" He didn't want to. But he didn't have the papers. He got everything in the last, last minute. And he didn't want to leave us alone. But everybody in the travel bureau, and everybody told him, "You go, so you will be able maybe to save your family. And if you stay here, you will all perish. You will all..." So, but he came to Vienna, and he was crying. He was very unhappy that he left us there. I was left with small babies. Then I became a little strong. But I was not such a...

INT: But you drew on something that you had within you to become strong.

FREDA: You have to. You have to.

INT: And so you went, you left Vienna and you went to Poland to be with your sisters?

FREDA: My sister-in-law. My mother was still alive. They sent...when Wieliczka was Judenrein, they sent out all...my mother died in Russia someplace. I don't know the place where, you know. And my brother, he knew how to drive, and he went to Hungary, and he was the first that got to Israel. We wanted to go to Israel, but you needed a certificate, too, at that time. 1935, no, 1939 already. (sighs)

INT: So how did he get into Hungary, your brother? How did he do that?

FREDA: He was driving with a Polish officer. He went, I don't know exactly. I didn't see him alive anymore. Because he died in Jerusalem, in Tel Aviv. He was in the hospital there. My brother was in, they took him to prison, and he came out, he said how the Germans, they had dogs and he was bitten by dogs, and they were, he was already, and he asked the officer, "Why do you hit me?" "Because you are a Jew." They were, it was terrible.

INT: And this was early? This was 1941? What year was this?

FREDA: 1940...what?

INT: 1940. When your brother went to prison.

FREDA: They took him, maybe it was '39 or '40. They took him to prison, the whole family, the wife and the children, were already some place sent away.

INT: And this was from Germany they sent them?

FREDA: From Poland.

INT: From Poland. But you still felt you would be better in Poland with your mother and your...

FREDA: How long was I in Poland? Not long.

INT: Not long?

FREDA: No.

INT: And then you all dispersed. You all, what happened then?

FREDA: We had a bunker in our factory there. A bunker where the family was hiding. They didn't want to keep me in that bunker, because they were afraid, because they were watching, they was going all around, that the children will talk. And we had a chauffeur who used to bring us letters, and he took me, he was a goy. He said he will save me. He will save me, he will take me to his wife, that he just got married, and he will tell him that I didn't look Jewish. I was very blonde, and Rita and Michael, and he took me, and I slept, I was there during the, and in that bunker, my sister was there, and a few died there. Because they didn't have food, and it was a bunker such...I don't know. (sighs) It was very bad. My sister, she was very energetic. She jumped out of the window, the Gestapo was running after her, and she saved her life.

INT: She escaped from them?

FREDA: Pardon?

INT: Your sister escaped from them by running.

FREDA: Running, yes.

INT: And where did she go, to run?

FREDA: She had a daughter. The daughter was already hidden in a cloister, in Hungary. It was in Hungary. And she was singing very nicely. She was going to work there. So the Germans said -- she had a beautiful voice -- "You don't have to sew, you don't have to work, you will sing for us." And I'll make it short, because it's a long story.

INT: I have time.

FREDA: She was working, and the daughter, and then she got, after the war, she wanted to take out the daughter. The daughter didn't want to go. She was there with the nuns. She had a very good life. Then she said, "Well, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Well, I will go there and I will live there in Bethlehem." Well, she was visiting me last week. They lived in Israel. They were hard lives. She was in one kibbutz, and another, the husband of my sister was killed. She didn't remarry. She stayed alone.

INT: Now this sister who ran away from the Nazis. Then her daughter was already in the cloister.

FREDA: Yes, because they had to send away the children to hide them.

INT: And when she ran, where did she run to?

FREDA: Where was she running? She was in different places. I don't know exactly.

INT: And she saved herself.

FREDA: And she saved herself, and then she went to...to get the daughter, and she came to Israel with no money, nothing. So she started to work.

INT: Was she the only one besides you?

FREDA: She's the only one, yes. I had one more, she died a few years ago here.

INT: But you have a sister also in London.

FREDA: This is the sister. She lived in Israel, and she...yes.

INT: Oh, she went to London. I see. So there were three daughters, three girls who survived. And were there any sons?

FREDA: No. No, no one.

INT: And did you...

FREDA: This one daughter, who was hidden in the cloister. This was, she was saved. But all the other ones...

INT: And did you see them being taken away? Did you see...

FREDA: We were all in different places.

INT: You were in different places. So when you left, you went to live with the chauffeur's family with your two little children, and you were there for a few months?

FREDA: Where?

INT: With the chauffeur, who took you to live with his family?

FREDA: I was, no, no, no. They were **afraid** to keep me.

INT: Oh, how long did you stay there?

FREDA: I stayed there a few days.

INT: Oh, just a few **days**.

FREDA: And then I was hiding in different, different places.

INT: Where did you go to hide?

FREDA: Different houses in Cracow I was, and I came to a house, and I said, "Can I sleep here?" I was hiding, I was not standing it.

INT: And were these Jewish people, or not Jewish people, and they kept you maybe a day.

FREDA: They kept me, they kept me a few days, and then I had to go. So I went. I was hiding during the day at the cemetery. We were going to church. I was with one woman. She said, "You are too...it's good, you would be good, but you have such sad eyes that you will...spoil everything." And...and...

INT: Help me to understand that a little bit better. This woman said to you, "You will be good"?

FREDA: I would be, I looked good. She gave me a yellow fox. I remember such a...and she took me to church. And she said...

INT: So you could pass for someone who was not...

FREDA: I could pass for, I might change my name. Kowalchek. And I changed my name, and I had different papers. And I...

INT: How did you get those papers?

FREDA: I had some friends, and my sister still was alive, and Bocknia, Wieliczka, Cracow, I had friends. My whole youth I spent there.

INT: But you were learning sort of how to work the system, how to find papers, and how to change your name.

FREDA: Yes. They were people who did it for a few zlotys.

INT: And you had the money.

FREDA: I had. It was more, but I had very little, but I had. And I had the papers. And once the Poles came and told us, do you know, to that woman who kept us, she said, "I know that you keep Jewish people." And she said, "I don't." Well, they said that they will come and they will shoot us until they give, that you have to pay contribution. I was with my sister there. And my sister gave what she had, her jewelry. And I remember my son was two years old, and he said, "Give everything, because we want to live." And he said, "You are not Jewish." He said, "I will always be a Jew." And listen, I don't even remember. I remember, but I still think of it at night.

INT: You do. Do you have nightmares?

FREDA: I used to have. I was so afraid when I came from Germany, when I came here. When I hear the bell ringing, or a telephone, I was shaking. But now I am fine. I am healthy. I am a healthy woman. (laughs)

INT: So then Rita told me that you, somehow you were...you got a paper that said that a relative was born here, or something.

FREDA: My husband got the papers for me. That my father was born in America. My husband got the papers here in America for somebody in a synagogue, I don't know where, it was in Philadelphia, he told him. You go to a...it was at that time, if you send the papers, that my father was born here, so I would be a citizen, I could come here.

INT: So how did your husband get these papers to you? You were running, you were going from...

FREDA: He got it through Switzerland. He got ways.

INT: To find you.

FREDA: To find me. We were out of touch for a few weeks. Maybe a few months. And then...

INT: The papers were sent to Switzerland.

FREDA: See, I don't even remember how I got them. You know, they came to Wieliczka, I think.

INT: And then, so you had these papers, and then what happened?

FREDA: Then I was afraid to use them. And then I was, when I was interned in Liebernau, I had a captain of the camp, he said, "We know that you are not..." that I am, I lost my citizen, my

Polish Burghershaft because of the Nuremberger decrees, but I...I don't remember. But they respected this. That I am, because my husband was here, and the Gestapo interview me in the prison, the Polish prison.

INT: You were permitted to keep your children with you?

FREDA: Pardon? I had the children always in prison. I always had the children with me. That was my luck. And they said that these are esht (?), but these were not esht. The (?) were esht. The (?), how do you call it? Stamp. Was esht. And he said, and I, through a miracle that I was saved. This captain told me, "We know that you are not a citizen. That you are not, but we will not...(German) We will not hurt you. We will keep you."

INT: So how long did you stay there?

FREDA: Two years.

INT: Two years. And so that was like from 1941 to 194...

FREDA: No. Till 1943. Till 1945. 1945 there was a transport. I was sick. I was all the time very sick, and somebody took care of my children. I had papers and they let me...come to America. But I tell you, there were many people with me interviewed in this prison, who had good papers, and they were not lucky, and they were sent to another camp, and they were wiped out.

INT: Well, your daughter says that you, she remembers that you...behaved in such a way, that they should respect you. That you held yourself in a way that they...and you see, so I was wondering if that ability to do that came from...

FREDA: I tell you, the fear and the will to live, and I wanted to meet, to see my husband, I wanted to give the children to my husband. And I didn't care, but I have to be for my children. So that gives me the strength, you know?

INT: The strength. And they didn't require anything of you in this camp?

FREDA: No. (laughs) Well, I tell you it was a miracle. And this captain told me, and I was, everybody was sent to work. Working. I was in the sick room, and I was, I had a German doctor came to see me, and somebody French took care of my two children.

INT: And what do you attribute this to? I mean, you didn't have anything. By this time, did you have money to pay, to get that, to get them to favor you, or...

FREDA: I had nothing. No money at all.

INT: They liked the way you looked. Is that what you're telling me? (laughs)

FREDA: I don't know. I didn't have money. I came here with no money. No money. I got from the Red Cross something there, and I got from a...I had a brother-in-law in London. He sent me package, and my husband was permitted to send me packages to the prison, to this camp, you know, where I was.

INT: Mm-hm. And this camp, the name of this camp was...

FREDA: Liebernau. The name.

INT: And where was it?

FREDA: In Liebernau in Germany, near...I don't know. I was permitted to write a letter once a week to my husband.

INT: And they kept you there for two years.

FREDA: Yeah.

INT: And you were given a...like a, it was like a detention camp? You were detained?

FREDA: It was an internment camp.

INT: Internment camp.

FREDA: Internierungskamp. My memory is so bad, now I don't remember.

INT: You're doing **very** well. You're doing very well.

FREDA: I have hearing aids. I don't hear so well. But I hear without them maybe better.

INT: (laughs) And so, what was this like for you during this time, when you were sick, and other people had to take care of your children?

FREDA: I was sick. I was suffering a lot.

INT: What was the matter with you, do you know?

FREDA: Yes. I had stomach ulcers. These I got already in prison. I was so thin. Like a...very, very thin. I lost so much weight. And I had stomach, I couldn't eat. And I didn't have what to eat. There was a time, we had no food, and we were very hungry. When I was hiding in Cracow, my son was a little boy, and he was hungry, he was going to, so we were coming to houses, and he had a piece of bread, he was holding. We came to Cracow, we had already bread. He was holding the piece of bread in his thumb, do you say?

INT: Fist?

FREDA: Fist, yes. Hand. And he didn't want to leave it, because he was afraid he will be hungry again. He was dirty. I washed his hands. I washed them, I did a lot for my children. Thank G-d I could. This is, now I live for them. They are wonderful children. My daughter and my grandchildren, and my son. Wonderful. It's a lot I have to be thankful. My grandchildren are wonderful. (pause)

INT: And so, when you, when they finally let you go, and you went on a transport, now this is in 1945, this was before the end of the war?

FREDA: Before. We came here in February. On the day of Purim we came. And I remember this. My husband came to get me. I was in Ellis Island. They didn't let me right away. And when they interviewed us they said that on Columbus Circle, and they asked me, "Is this your husband?" And to my husband, "Is this your wife?" And my daughter said, "How do you know that this man is my husband? Is my father?" And different things. But...I was lucky. I said, I had...zechut avot. I had something that I really don't know. I believe that it was a miracle. I don't believe in miracles, but this was, that I got saved.

INT: And do you remember what it was like coming over on the ship, on the transport ship?

FREDA: Oh, I was very unhappy. Because first I was on the ship to go to Africa, with the UNRA, with the other from the, not from Ellis Island, from that horrible concentration camp. And...(pause) But...

INT: So they had you on one ship first, and then you got changed? How did you get changed?

FREDA: And then I had to meet, the American consul was on the other ship, where there were the American citizens, and I asked...(interruption)

INT: This is interesting. They put you on one ship, and you...

FREDA: On one ship, and I was, because my papers were not...I didn't have anything on that ship. I didn't have anything. (Please, take a candy.) I didn't have even my Geburtsein, the birth certificate. And they believed me, the America consulate, they believed me everything what I told. But they were making, they called my husband. He was in Washington, he was doing, here, he was carrying on, nobody could believe, he wanted to get us over. And...

(pause)

...was crying and the American ship, music was playing and they were dancing.

INT: And they were side by side, these ships?

FREDA: Not far. You know, on the ocean.

INT: And you said, "I belong on that ship"?

FREDA: I didn't. I said, "My daughter was crying." And she said, "I want to go there. Music is playing there." But I couldn't. But the American consul came to interview who was coming with their story. And I told him, and he told me, "Tell me everything the truth. What happened, how, and what, and where is your husband?" I had the address of my husband in America, and they believed me, and they checked here. They called Washington. And they proved that he is there, and everything was...

INT: Correct.

FREDA: Correct.

INT: And you told them...

FREDA: What I said and what he said.

INT: And you said, "My father was born in Philadelphia"?

FREDA: No, my husband, we wrote such a, you know, versteckt, hidden language. "Don't tell them that this is the code." I don't remember. I didn't. That was good that I didn't tell them. Because that was a lie. My husband did it, and somebody gave him the, and there was a proof. But I didn't show this to them that my husband, not that my father was born in America. Because...

INT: But that's interesting, because that's what kept you alive with the Germans. Because they believed that you were in that detention, that internment camp. But then when it came to the Americans, you had to shift your story.

FREDA: When I came to America, I came to the...I'm sorry, I came to the...so I had to tell them, I told them everything the truth. I didn't have **any** paper with me. What I had, maybe I didn't have...but they believed me. They had the address of my husband in America. He was living in Philadelphia, Spruce Street, I remembered it by heart. And they checked, they called Washington.

INT: What language did they interview you in?

FREDA: English. I spoke English.

INT: You spoke English.

FREDA: I speak still now with an accent. But I speak quite a few languages, so I'm getting mixed up sometimes. But I read English, only English. I don't read German anymore. They believed me. And then I came on the boat, and they gave me one hundred dollars, and I repaid it back. And my husband picked me up. I was on Ellis Island.

INT: What was that like for you, when you saw him?

FREDA: (Pause) I will tell you. I was crying so much before that. My children told me that, "You will see. Daddy will come." Because I thought that they will send me back as a spy. Because they were sending from, my husband didn't come right away because he couldn't. And I was strong. My husband was crying, and I was not. Nothing. And it was Purim that day. And then he took me to Shreiber's Restaurant in New York. New York? Yes, in New York. (laughs) I don't know where I am now. In New York. And he said, "Today is Purim, you know?" So I thought, "Yes, because we came, so it was Purim for you." And I had soup with noodles. (laughs) And I will never forget how good this was.

INT: So that was very happy. And the children?

FREDA: The children, my son right away accepted. He said, "This is Daddy." He wanted to have a father so badly. When a man came over to me, and he was friendly, he said, "Well, maybe this man will be our daddy." But Rita, my daughter, she couldn't get used...

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

INT: Tape two, and we're talking about...you know, I never, I didn't ask you really. Every time you parted, you had these partings from your different members of your family. What was that like for you?

FREDA: What, from my family?

INT: Well, I'm going back a little bit. Before you went to the internment camp, and you were running and hiding and just before that even, when you would have to part from your sister, or from your brother, or you find out another one was gone, something was, what was that like for you?

FREDA: I cannot describe it. It was so painful, I cannot say. I never parted, I didn't, we didn't know that we will not see each other tomorrow. (sighs)

INT: And so...

FREDA: And I lost such...I had one niece, such a, she was my pupil already. I was teaching, and I was taking lessons, and I was teaching. She was such a wonderful girl. All my relatives. I have a big album that they send me, with the pictures of my family. Big family, it was a holiday, so we had the table. There were fifteen, twenty people at the table, like nothing. It was a nice life. And as I said, I was the youngest.

INT: So who had all of these pictures? Where did they come from? Who saved the pictures?

FREDA: My nephew, one nephew, my oldest brother's son, he lives in Givatayim. (Pause)

INT: So you have a nephew who brought the pictures?

FREDA: Who came here in 1938. He was a Jabotinsky, and he was a Zionist, and he was eighteen.

INT: Jabotinsky.

FREDA: A leader. He belonged to that whole party. And he came illegally here to America, to Israel. To Israel. And he came, and he had, he brought pictures along from his family, from my family, and so he gave me, if you would be interested for a minute, I can just show you a few pictures.

INT: I would like very, very much to see the pictures. I'm wondering, could we do that the next time?

FREDA: Yes.

INT: And I would like to maybe finish this little bit of tape.

FREDA: He still lives. He had his eightieth birthday already. Bis hundert...And he brought this, and he gave me these pictures.

INT: I look forward to seeing them with you. So what helped you survive all of this? You said the will to live.

FREDA: The will to be with my children. First, to bring the children to my husband. And the children were small little children, helpless, so I did what I could. I was sewing, I was knitting, I was...I was teaching Rita the piano. When I had an instrument. When I came to this country, I got my first...not to this, yes, to this, I'm mixed up today.

INT: That's all right.

FREDA: Not in Israel, to here. There was in this paper, this Rabbi Levine from Shemesh, I don't know. He is one rabbi who is a relative, and he read that the Schmelkes family is coming here. And the man who lived here, he worked in our factory. We were very good to him. And he read it in the paper that I came, so he came to visit me, and he invited me to his house, and I saw the piano there. So I was laughing, and I said, "Oh, a piano." He said, "You want it? I have two daughters, they don't play." They were already here. I was eight years old when they left for America. When I came here, they came to visit me, and Rita was eight years old, you see. The woman comes to her and said, "Freda, Freda." I said, "What do you think that I didn't grow? I am Freda. This is Rita, my daughter." But this is not important. I just tell you that I got the piano for nothing. And I went to my cousin, to Schnabel, and he taught me. And I wanted to work, I wanted to make zippers, I wanted to make hats, I wanted to do something, to make some money, to help. So he said, "Why don't you teach the piano?" I said, "Well, I studied in Germany." (phone interruption)

INT: So your daughter called on the phone, and she calls you many times?

FREDA: She calls me before she goes to school. When there is recess, she comes. She calls, she always says, I'm very, very...how do you say?

INT: Attentive.

FREDA: Yes. All the children, the grandchildren. My granddaughter is a doctor, now, you know. Rita told you, her daughter.

INT: No, I didn't meet her.

FREDA: She studied medicine. She worked hard.

INT: And so you came to this country, and someone who had worked in the factory came to see you, or they invited you to see them.

FREDA: They invited me, they invited me. And they were so grateful for the old times that we helped them. And they gave me the piano -- just twenty dollars transportation I pay.

INT: So, but for these people to have done this, twenty whatever years later, and they had such good memories of your family, and how your family...so your family was a very good family. They were generous, they were caring, they were helpful. How many people worked in the factory?

FREDA: Sixty. Sixty or maybe a hundred. I don't remember.

INT: But a lot of people.

FREDA: A lot, yes.

INT: A lot of people. And so your father was very kind.

FREDA: Very kind, yes.

INT: And they remembered that.

FREDA: They remembered that, and they didn't know what to do for me.

INT: But it's also... (pause) But how did they know who Schmelkes was? That was not your...

FREDA: No. My husband's family was very well-known in Cracow. And they knew that I married a Schmelkes before the war.

INT: I see. Okay. I see. So you wanted to, what was your husband doing here in this country?

FREDA: Well, the business...he was working. Yes. He was working, and we owned a camp. When my son was already bigger, he bought this, and he was working.

INT: What camp was that?

FREDA: For children. That was in Pocono Mountains. He worked here, my son worked as a counselor when he was seventeen, eighteen, a Rabbi Gellman, and he worked there, and vacation time they always worked, both Rita and him. And then my husband...was already...but when I came we were very poor. (laughs)

INT: So you helped out by giving piano lessons.

FREDA: I started, yes. So I said, "I studied in Germany," and so his niece gave me one lesson, and then she recommended me one pupil. And I had from this one, they liked me very much, and I got thirty pupils. And I was teaching many years.

INT: And where were you? You were living on Spruce Street at that time?

FREDA: No. I was living in New York that time.

INT: Oh, I see. You lived in New York.

FREDA: Then when my daughter married, her husband was from here, and so when we came, so we were always going.

INT: But when you were in the internment camp, you remembered your husband was living in Spruce Street in Philadelphia. And then he came to New York when your boat came in, and then you just stayed in New York?

FREDA: We stayed in New York. He worked in New York. And then we moved. Yes, from New York we left to Israel. 1971 we left for Israel. And we were coming here twice a year to see the children.

INT: I see.

FREDA: We had a beautiful life in Israel.

INT: And in New York, where did you live in New York?

FREDA: First we lived in Washington Heights, and then in Forest Hills.

INT: And so there were many people like yourself in Washington Heights? People who...

FREDA: There were a few -- not many -- but there were a few Germans, a few, one neighbor in the same house, she was from Vienna, also. She knew me from Vienna.

INT: And you joined a synagogue?

FREDA: Yes. In Forest Hills, we joined the Forest Hills Jewish Center, where was Rabbi (?), a rabbi. It was nice. In Forest Hills. We had many friends in Forest Hills. (Daughter Rita says they lived in Forest Hills, but joined the **Queens** Jewish Center.)

INT: And so what was...what was that like in the beginning? You said you were frightened when the phone would ring.

FREDA: Here? Well, my nerves were so shattered, and I was very...I was afraid. I was afraid the Germans are after me. I was afraid.

INT: And so how did you and your husband manage that?

FREDA: Well, listen. He was here already five years. Five years we were separated. So he was already in America, and he took me places, and...I had some relatives here in Forest Hills. I still have some.

INT: Would you like more candy? (Mrs. Schmelkes is coughing)

FREDA: No, thank you. (pause)

INT: So then your children were going to school?

FREDA: They were going to Samson Raphael Hirsch School in Washington Heights. And my son, he didn't know what is a aleph, so... (Interruption) What was I saying about?

INT: So your children were going to the Jewish school?

FREDA: Yes, and to Yeshiva University. And Rita went to music and art in New York. We moved to Forest Hills, Forest Hills.

INT: And your husband stayed in the sweater business?

FREDA: No, my husband was with me.

INT: So then what did he do after the sweater business? He was in the sweater business, you said.

FREDA: Yes. This was in New York. No, wait a minute. New York? Yes.

INT: And he remained in that business?

FREDA: He was managing, it was good, and then we had some money, and he was working very hard, and I was working. I got, first I got three dollars for a lesson, and they told me, and

then I got six dollars. I made money. When I earned the first dollar, I never knew the value of money, because I didn't need it, and I had always from my parents. When I came home, when my husband came home, and I had a dollar, I was so happy I made a dollar. But later I...I was teaching. I was teaching till I had my grandchildren, then I figured I'd spend the time with my grandchildren.

INT: And what...there was never a thought in your mind about your Jewish identity, or wanting to continue to be Jewish, or...

FREDA: Never, never, never.

INT: What helped you to maintain that feeling?

FREDA: I believed in the Jewish religion. I believed, I believed, I had such grandparents. And my parents, and my husband's family.

INT: So you came from yichus, and you came from strength, and you came from a history that you were proud of.

FREDA: Yeah.

INT: And your faith in G-d, was it ever shaken?

FREDA: The what?

INT: Your faith in G-d.

FREDA: No, never. I remember, when we were still in Cracow, and they were taking these Jews from Lodz from the city, the Germans, and they were hitting them, and my husband was still with me at that time. He came home, and he was crying so much, and he said, "Where is our G-d? (whispering) Where is our G-d?" Yes. But I always believed. You know what happened. Many people lost their...I wouldn't, no, I...I always, they said, "Gott es helfen." And this kept me.

INT: Mm-hm. And this helped you to survive.

FREDA: Yes. (pause)

INT: And when you were raising **your** children, how did you and your husband, between the two of you, how did you make decisions about what to do for the children?

FREDA: I left my husband the decision, the bigger, to schools and so on. He made the right decision. And later, when Rita went to music and art, she left the Jewish school, because it was not, she didn't make any progress, she was not too happy. And...but my son was always, my husband was leading him.

INT: And what were you working for in life? You were working for, I mean, to earn money, to send your children to school, for possessions, to have a better life?

FREDA: To help. My son, when he was a small boy, he said, "I want to make money to build hospitals, and..." This...charity was...

INT: Charity was always part of your life?

FREDA: Oh, yes. Charity since childhood. I remember my mother brought us up like that. There were many poor people in that (Yiddish) where we lived. And she sent us to poor people with soup, and chickens, and before Yom Kippur. I remember these things. And I tried to tell my children, also. But they are **very** good human beings. My son and my daughter are wonderful people. If you will meet, he is in New York, but Rita probably made an impression on you, no? Oh, boy, she is such a good soul.

INT: A gute neshamah.

FREDA: Pardon?

INT: A good soul.

FREDA: A good soul. A gute neshamah. Yes. I wear this, and I don't...hear so well. I hear, I don't hear.

INT: Mm-hm. So as you were rebuilding your life now in America, with your husband, how did you develop trust in other people? How were you able to do that after what you'd been through?

FREDA: I trust people. I do trust. I...(pause) I trust. Don't say anything bad about it, if you have no proof. We trust somehow. There are thieves, there are ganavim, here and in Israel, plenty. But there are cheaters. But I trust. Maybe I'm so stupid.

INT: But in the beginning you said that you were, every time the telephone rang, or every time...

FREDA: Oh, in the beginning, when I came to this country.

INT: In the beginning it was very hard.

FREDA: Ach. It was very hard, because of the...what I lived through. What I saw and what I heard.

INT: Mm-hm. And you began to make friends where you were living?

FREDA: There were many, yes, but, I tell you, my English is good, but my Hebrew was not so good when I came to Israel. But I still made friends.

INT: But here, when you first came to New York, and you went to live in Washington Heights, you developed a network of friends? I mean, you had no family.

FREDA: Yes, I had friends. And thought everybody was my friend. (laughs)

INT: How were you able to be that kind of person, to believe everyone was your friend?

FREDA: I think my father gave me a lot of this. This...trust, this...my mother, too, but, more so my father.

INT: Did you ever see your parents go through any hardships?

FREDA: Oh, when my father died, my mother was very, very, it was very bad. It was very bad for us. (Pause)

INT: And...your mother, she died...

FREDA: In Russia.

INT: How did she get to Russia?

FREDA: The Germans, they took her, I don't know. I was at that time hiding some place. I didn't even know exactly when and how.

INT: And so after the war, when you were here in Washington Heights, and you began to hear about what had happened, how many people had been killed. You began to get information about members of your family?

FREDA: I got letters. One of my nephews, he is also in Israel, in Haifa. He survived. He was hiding, and he wrote me a letter how they were...(long pause) shot in Plaszow. My (sadly) sisters and brothers. I know, I know, I don't know **many** things. When the older brothers, where they, but I know that they were shot.

INT: And so this nephew was the one.

FREDA: This nephew, I still have that letter, a Polish letter. He wrote me that he told me the date when his father, his mother and two sisters, when they were shot. And the family Schreiber, from my other older sister. This I know where they were shot. But the other ones, I don't know where they...

INT: That must have been very hard for you.

FREDA: It's very hard to think of it. Such wonderful people. (sighs) No more. But you have to be strong.

INT: You have to be strong. And you seem to have that within you, that you can say to yourself, "You have to be strong. You have to be strong." Where does that come from?

FREDA: (laughs) I don't know. Life teaches you a lot.

INT: And yet your life growing up was not hard for you.

FREDA: No. No. It was hard, the sickness of my father was **very** hard for me. I was always afraid, and we had, one of my sisters was isolated there in the room. We wanted to save Mother. And I slept, and when my father called me, I was told, so he called me Freydele. So when he said my name, I was already standing, and I was already near him, what he wanted. But I was...had feelings. And now I am, I am bad. (laughs)

INT: Why?

FREDA: Now I do nothing.

INT: Well, it's your time to let other people wait on you.

FREDA: I do nothing. I used to belong to Hadassah, in Israel to this, how do you call this, to Mizrahi organizations. I was Mother of the Year. I was...Dodah, you know, I have, here are the papers. But now I don't belong any places. When I came here, my husband was so sick.

INT: Your husband was sick when you came back from Israel.

FREDA: From Israel, yes.

INT: When you began your new life here in Washington Heights, there were some successes, there were some failures, there were...

FREDA: I had big success teaching. (interruption) When I came, in the beginning, but I got out of it. I wanted to, started to work. Work is the best medicine.

INT: What was that depression like? What happened for you?

FREDA: I was thinking of all of my sisters, brothers, of the family, and everything, the whole situation. The fear, and the Israel, and then we always wanted to go to Israel. But...

INT: So you got yourself out of the depression.

FREDA: No. It was not such a depression that I showed, but I was thinking a lot of...you know.

INT: Were you dreaming and having flashbacks?

FREDA: I had sometimes, but no, not too bad. No. My husband was very good to me, and I had here, the children, the children were wonderful. The children keep me...now to...G-d bless them all. It helps a lot.

INT: I think that this would be a good place for us to stop today. All right?

FREDA: To what? To stop?

INT: To stop today. I would like to come back to do some more work, if that's all right with you?

FREDA: Okay, it's all right.

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE. GO ON TO SIDE TWO)

INT: This is an interview with Freda Schmelkes. On February 20th [1995], and we want to begin talking a little bit about the role that your piano playing had in your life. Can you tell me at what age you began playing the piano?

FREDA: Oh, I started very early. And we were three sisters playing. So we were always, we wanted to practice. Our mother loved us to practice, because you know, we had this sister that's under Dr. Schnabel, he was very famous, and she wanted, and we had some talent, I think so. So we were always fighting about the piano. We had only one piano. (laughs) And I was practicing. I started, I don't know how old I was, I don't remember, but I still was a child.

INT: Maybe six, seven?

FREDA: Maybe older.

INT: Older. Maybe eight.

FREDA: Maybe, yes.

INT: And so you started practicing, and you had a teacher who came?

FREDA: I had a teacher. We lived in Wieliczka, and the teacher came from Cracow, this was a bigger town. It was a very good teacher, and he taught us in our house. Then we, when I was older, I used to go to Cracow, and I used to study piano. I had a teacher in Cracow.

INT: So you would go to Cracow even by yourself? How long a journey was this?

FREDA: Oh, twenty minutes. We had such a motor boat. And then we had horses, and...

INT: Mm-hm. You had a motor boat, is that what you said? A boat?

FREDA: Not a boat. A motor, it was not a train, but it took twenty minutes from (?) to commute from (?) to Cracow.

INT: I see, okay. So it was a public transportation.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: I see. And so there was competition between you and your sisters, who could play better, or who could practice...

FREDA: They were more advanced, but they wanted to practice. We had our schedule. Everyone had to practice two hours daily. But when we do more, when we had more time, then we, because we had not only the piano, we had house, homework for school.

INT: And so did you play for your parents? Did you play recital? What did you...

FREDA: I played for my parents, for friends, and recital, we had also recital, but not too much. But when I started to teach, I made recitals. The end of the term, I always made recitals for my pupils.

INT: But the studying of the piano, now let's see. So if you were eight or ten years old, something like that, and you were born, you told me, in 1904?

FREDA: 1908. Don't make me older! I would be ninety already! (laughs)

INT: (laughs) Okay. So we're talking about maybe 1916, 1918, that you were studying the piano?

FREDA: Yeah, sure.

INT: That was during the time of the First World War, actually.

FREDA: First World War, we went to Vienna, because the Russians were in our house. And we had, we couldn't stay in Poland. So we had to, wir haben gefluchtet to Vienna, and my father was still alive, and he was counting the children. We were eleven children. Two were already married. I was the youngest, one sister got lost. I still have memories from the First World War.

INT: Tell me about those memories.

FREDA: Tell you, well, one sister got, we had to...umsteigen, to take different trains, and it was such a mess. It was, there were so many people going. I remember, there was no room on the train. A Polish officer took me on his knees. I remember this. And once we came to Vienna, my mother was already in Vienna, because she had a sister there, and she was there. We didn't

expect that we would have to run. Run away. And the father was counting us, whether we were all there, and one sister got lost in Czechoslovakia. We didn't know where. And I remember how my father was crying. "My daughter. Faigele, Faigele." Fayla (?) was her name. And then, with our cook, because we took everything. We had a cooking woman, and we had...so she came back. She was found, and we went in the hotel, and then we took an apartment, and I went into school in Vienna, the first or second grade. We were two years, I think, in Vienna. I don't remember. Then we came back to Wieliczka, to Poland, and everything was ruined. Everything was, horses were in our apartment. Everything was...demolished, you know. But we made it back. And then we stayed in Wieliczka after the war. Till the Second World War. But, I was traveling a lot. I was going to Vienna often.

INT: To visit your...

FREDA: I had a sister, that she was married in Vienna.

INT: Right. Now this experience, of having to flee, having to run in the First World War, and go to Vienna, and you have very vivid memories of that. Do you remember what your father was saying to you when you were going?

FREDA: I don't remember, no.

INT: But do you remember, if you would think back, "What did I learn from that experience? Did that help me to be strong? What did I learn? How did I learn to get through something so terrible?" What would you say?

FREDA: I don't know exactly what you mean. What I would say, what? It was danger, it was...I was always, I was afraid. And I was still a little girl. But then in Vienna, we forgot everything. We missed our...my sister is two years older than me, we were very friendly together. We were singing. In Vienna there's such a Liederbuch, and we were singing all the Schubert songs, and sitting together on the roof, and it was very nice. And we were children. We were happy. I was even happy when I was, I told you I was in prison. (laughs) I just wanted to be safe, secure.

INT: But something maybe that you learned, could it be that you learned that you could go through danger, and you could survive it?

FREDA: Listen, I always, I had somebody that I had to lean upon. Then when I got married after the Second World War, I had a very good husband, who he was always worrying, and he was protecting us as much as he could. But of course you get strong if you live through such days, such nights, when...When I came here, after the war, I was always afraid that the Germans, that they're running after me. The fear was pretty long.

INT: Mm-hm. But you...so when you were living in Vienna, and you remember singing with your sister, which sister, what was her name?

FREDA: The oldest sister, Regina Schreiber. She was married to a very wonderful, to a very wonderful family, Schreiber. They were some, they were very big learners, they were rabbis. They were educated people. And this sister had two children, they were right away killed by Hitler. Wonderful children. There was not such a, it was a big difference in years, because she was maybe eighteen years older than me. So I had a niece and a nephew. I had a niece that they were calling me "aunt," but we were friends, we were playing together.

INT: But you had a sister who was only two years older than you.

FREDA: Yes. She's still in London.

INT: What's her name?

FREDA: Heller. Matilda Heller.

INT: Oh, Matilda is her first name. So you and Matilda would play together. Now did your parents talk about the First World War, about what was happening to your home, that you couldn't return?

FREDA: We saw it all, and we lived it through.

INT: Right. But you...but still, while you were in Vienna, you played, you sang, you had a good time.

FREDA: In Vienna we were very happy. We were little children. We had it good. We had family there, we had the Schnabels, we had my sister, and we took an apartment, and I went to school. I remember wearing, the night, Vienna was a big city. Were you ever there?

INT: In Vienna, yes.

FREDA: Yes, and the second Bezirk was the Jewish quarters. Was Bezirkplatz, and when we were in Vienna after the war, we didn't even go to this second Bezirk because my husband lost his parents, from Vienna. We don't know where they are, where they send them away. Very painful memories from that time. And...we were too, we saw too much. Too much there in Vienna. So we didn't go even to that quarter, to the second Bezirk. We were living in the first, but my husband had something, too. Because he was working for the insurance company in Vienna. And I get even a small pension, a widow's pension from Vienna, because he, he was working there.

INT: And but you see, you learned some lessons. We don't know exactly what, but how to be strong. How to survive, even when bad things happened to you, and how to rebuild your life afterwards. And...you learned how to be...to not think about some things, and to enjoy something that was pleasant, like singing or music, to sort of put yourself into that.

Now, getting back to the music a little bit. So you practiced two hours a day. There was a little competition between the sisters. After you grew up, who played the best of those three sisters?

FREDA: Oh, my sister, the other sister stopped playing. She got married when she was eighteen, and she didn't practice. She lived in a different section in Poland. In Aus-Galicia. And my other sister, she played. And it was a little competition, but no, not...

INT: But you were better.

FREDA: I don't even know. Only my sister, when she came to London, and she came to Israel first, she didn't want, she wanted to, she lost her husband in Poland, they killed him. So she wanted to make some money. And they had a factory, a clothes factory in Bielsko, her husband. And she wanted to make, but she played the piano also. And she wanted to teach. But she didn't have the patience to teach. And I was very, I liked to teach, since I was a little girl. I always, this was for me, not only fun, it was, I liked it very much. And I liked all my pupils here, you know, in New York.

INT: So you played the piano, and you would play for your parents. And your teacher, maybe in Cracow, would she have a recital?

FREDA: Yes. Yes.

INT: Yes, and you would play. And did you get stage fright, when you would have to get up and play in front of people?

FREDA: I was afraid a little bit, I had, but...it was all right.

INT: It was all right, because you were confident that what you did you did well.

FREDA: Yes, they told me I do it artistically. They give me, for confidence, my teacher, my professor, he said, "You are wonderful."

INT: So they told you that you played the piano with confidence, and that you had a good skill, and you performed well, so you felt good about yourself.

FREDA: Yes. I was not proud. That was not my nature. I was very modest about it. I always was afraid that I don't know well enough. But...

INT: You were conscientious.

FREDA: Yeah. And then in Vienna I played.

INT: Yes, now that's what we were talking about the last time, a little bit. That in Vienna, when you got married, and you continued to play, and then you were practicing **four** hours a day. And you said and there you played recitals. Tell me about that.

FREDA: (pause) We had...they were not big recitals. They were not, but I played on two pianos. For instance, the Beethoven Concerto, I told you that I heard it here two weeks ago, three weeks ago, and he was also very young, the Japanese boy who played. Wonderful, but he played with the orchestra. I was not **that** good, but it was more for pleasure.

My husband was very musical. He also, he played the violin, but not later. And our biggest pleasure was to listen to music. We were very poor, and when we were hiding from the Germans, and we were in Poland, the Germans are knocking on our door, and my husband said later, "Oh, how I wish I could hear now the Second Piano Concerto from Beethoven, the violin concerto." He loved it. He had, you know, it was such a, how do you say it in English, I don't know. A wonderful thing. Piano, music is, now, also, if I can listen to a nice concerto.

INT: Who is your favorite pianist today?

FREDA: Pardon? Before it was Rubinstein, but he was not so...and I don't even know. I forgot the name. There was a woman, she has arthritis, but she is an older person. I forgot her name. But I don't go now to concerts, because I cannot sit too long, and I don't practice. This, I cannot forgive myself. Because when I sit down, and my technique is so poor, I don't, that I know it should sound differently, so I don't practice.

(sighs) And when I lost my husband, I stopped playing. A whole year I didn't touch the piano. I was more and more...and then it's hard for me, although I love it very much. My daughter plays beautifully. She is just a pianist. And she also, she's...going to concerts often, as often as she can, she takes me along if it is not too far. But my health is not so good, so that's why I...have to, how do you say? If you can say it in Polish, German, (Polish) -- I have to limit myself.

INT: Mm-hm. So when you, during the Second World War, and with your two little children, and you went into that detention camp, where you were detained by the Germans. Were you able to play, did they have a piano?

FREDA: They didn't have a piano. But I started with my daughter when she was a baby already. And she used to sing and dance, and she couldn't talk yet. (hums) She always, she was very musical. And I was teaching her. And she was much too young. She was still a baby. But I tell you, she couldn't speak, and she was dancing, and singing, humming.

INT: So this confidence, though, that your teachers told you that you had, and they complimented you on the way that you approached the piano. Do you think that...hearing that and knowing that about yourself, gave you the confidence to carry out this charade that you told them that your father was born in Philadelphia, and that you were, had American citizenship, and they were detaining you and so forth, that gave you the confidence to do that?

FREDA: I didn't have much confidence. I was always afraid. I was afraid, the fear was in me so...you know, so deep, so...but still, I did this for my children. I wanted to bring them up. I wanted to do everything. I wanted to work physically, I wanted to do anything.

INT: And your daughter remembers, though, you see, that you did carry this out with great confidence. That's how it looked to her.

FREDA: Yes. I was always, I will speak about religion. My daughter, I sent her to the Samson Raphael Hirsch School in New York. My husband wanted to give them Jewish education. And she was frummer than I. She was not allowed to carry, and I was already, I carry, I carry something, so she said, "Mommy, you're not allowed." (laughs) I am religious, but not a fanatic.

INT: Mm-hm. And so then we get a little bit more into this country, when you came here, and you told me about how your son immediately took to his father, he was looking for his daddy, and your daughter wasn't sure right away that this was...

FREDA: She was afraid. It was a strange five years. He left, she was three. And we came here, she was eight. Five years she didn't see a man. She saw photographs I had, pictures. But she was shy, very shy. But she said she was always secure because she had me. She said I came like a chicken with two hens. Even when I came to prison, (laughs) they were laughing.

I wanted for my children, I wish now for my grandchildren, and for my children -- that gives me the strength.

INT: And so this had a great deal to do with how you lived your life. When you began rebuilding your life, it sounds as though the plans you made with your husband had a lot to do with what will be good for the children.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: Can you tell me a little about, do you have any memories about how you talked about that with your husband? Their education, where you should live, what you should...

FREDA: Well, of course, my husband didn't do anything. I let him do everything without asking me, if I didn't want to. If I didn't agree. But he was more religious. He was more demanding from the boy especially than I. I was too lenient. So he sometimes told me that I spoil him. But I still...I had confidence in him, because if you would meet him, what a wonderful human being he is. And he was so good as a child. When I was crying, they told me, "Mommy, don't. You will see your daddy. You will see our daddy." They gave, they were very good to me, as small children. They were children yet. They helped me.

INT: And how do you think that happened, that your children helped you?

FREDA: That...

INT: That your children helped you.

FREDA: Helped me. I don't know. I always told them stories about our grand, great-grandparents, and about to believe, and to be strong in life, and then they taught me. (laughs)

INT: So you told them stories about how you have to be strong. What kind of stories did you tell them, do you remember?

FREDA: First of all, I wanted very much that they shall be together. That they shall love each other, that they shall not fight much. That if you are more, I remember my father and my mother used to say, "As small as you can break, if you are together, we shall always be together. We shall love each other, we shall agree." Ach, I talk so, I am so not...I'm not quite myself.

INT: You're doing fine. You're doing fine.

FREDA: Listen, my memory is not so good, now. But from my youth I remember more than I remember...

INT: Your long-term memory is better than your short-term memory, which is what happens when one gets a little older. And so when you, you settled in Washington Heights, and your husband wanted the children to go for Jewish education. And what did you want for your children?

FREDA: I agreed with him, but he was very observant to my son especially, and my son was more free. He didn't know about religion, he didn't know aleph-bet until he came here. And usually, in our family, they were teaching the children when they were four and five already. They had special melamdim, and they had teachers. And then my husband was a little bit, not disappointed, but he wanted, he demanded more. And I was, I said, "Let him go. Let him do." But I agreed with him always. We never had fights.

INT: And so as you rebuilt your life, then you moved out of Washington Heights, and you moved to...

FREDA: To Forest Hills.

INT: To Forest Hills. Tell me about that move. What was that, why did you decide to do that?

FREDA: Because there we lived on the fifth or sixth floor walk-up. No comfort, no washing machine, nothing. I had to work **very** hard. Not only that I gave my lessons, I had to go to houses to eat, to teach. I didn't have the piano yet. And I had to, I also, my cousin, the Schnabels, she was the niece, she lived in Forest Hills, she recommended me to pupils. And I was working very hard. Very hard. They sent the children to school. I prepared lunch, I prepared everything. I washed the laundry. The up, down, upstairs, downstairs. It was not an easy life. And with money, we were not too...we didn't have too much. Until I started really to teach and work, and then my husband started, because at that time he was working in leather jackets, or something, I don't remember. And he lost the money that he had. We had to have \$5,000 or how much, I don't know. Because the judge asked him, on Columbus Circle, because he said, how much money he has, and we had some money. But it was not enough. We had to build a new life. To an apartment, to buy furniture, and it was not easy for us.

INT: What do you mean the judge asked him? What judge was this?

FREDA: What? What?

INT: Judge.

FREDA: It was a judge in Columbus Circle, when we arrived here. They didn't let...when I came from this Island, from...

INT: Ellis Island?

FREDA: Ellis Island, yes. He picked me up.

INT: Right. And then you had to have a certain amount of money for them to let you stay?

FREDA: They let me stay. And I was paroled to him, because he was already a citizen. And I came illegally. I didn't have any papers, so I had to go to Canada with my children, and then we came here legally. Three years after this I became a citizen.

INT: Mm-hm. And so you moved to Forest Hills, because you had more pupils there?

FREDA: I had an apartment on the main floor, and I had, I had it easy. We bought a washing machine, or I had washing machines. I had to do everything, so it was...The house, and to cook, and to wash, and to clean, we couldn't afford help.

INT: So your husband made the decisions, and you went along with those decisions.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: Did you ever get to a time where...

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FREDA: And I agreed, yes.

INT: Were there any mistakes that you think that you and your husband made during that time? Anything you would have done differently?

FREDA: (pause) No.

INT: No.

FREDA: We couldn't have done differently. I was fighting for...I didn't have it easy, but I took everything.

INT: Mm-hm. And...so who else could you talk to, besides your husband?

FREDA: Who had what?

INT: Did you have friends? Who else could you talk to, confide in? Besides your husband.

FREDA: Oh, I had friends. I had one very close friend. She was even a cousin. Because I sometimes think that you cannot tell your husband, but a friend you can say. So, but...

INT: What kind of things?

FREDA: She was also a survivor. She lost her husband during the war. She was a widow. She died in an accident in Israel two years ago. Was my best friend. I could have told her everything. And although we didn't live together later, but I always felt that...and then, the children grew up, and they were my friends. I'm telling you, you know my daughter, she is my friend.

INT: And this friend that you had, what was her name, your friend?

FREDA: What?

INT: Your friend, who you could tell everything to. What was her name?

FREDA: Landau. Batya Landau.

INT: Batya. And how did you become friends? Where did you meet?

FREDA: I knew her from Cracow. After the war, she married, she remarried, so she married my cousin. And then I became her cousin and her best friend.

INT: I see. And so she settled also in Washington Heights?

FREDA: No, they left in '46. They lived in Belgium during, after the war.

INT: Oh, they lived in Belgium.

FREDA: We came here in '45, and they came here maybe in '50, or '51 or so.

INT: Mm-hm. Do you, today, or through your life, did you go to see films about the Holocaust? Listen to, did you belong to any groups? Did you?

FREDA: Not here, not after I returned from Israel.

INT: Before you went to Israel.

FREDA: In Israel I had, I was in the Mizrachi, I tell you. I will show you. I said I will show, but I don't want to keep you. My pictures, that I was always chosen, and the president from the Mizrachi was my best friend, Siskind. And I was, I wouldn't say too popular, but I was, I was doing something. Now I do **nothing**. I feel no good about it. But...I can't do it. I am also physically, I got that heart attack, so that was a few years ago. Then I had this herpes (in the eye), I went through a lot of sicknesses, also. And now, the last few weeks, that I recovered now. I am fine. But I had pneumonia. That took also away from...

INT: So your health is not as strong as it had been before.

FREDA: No. Oh, I can, hardly I cannot walk well. I had a lot of arthritis. I have it.

INT: But you must have been very strong when you were raising your children, because...you worked terribly hard.

FREDA: I was very strong. I could, I was strong physically, and I was believing I was strong. But I changed now. I am not the same person.

INT: So you would like to still be twenty-five and thirty and thirty-five years old, and forty years old, you would like to still have that strength. (smiles)

FREDA: Listen. What am I going to...believe in something.

INT: But when your children were little, did you tell them as you began to hear about this one who died, and that one was killed, and as that information began to come out, did you tell your children?

FREDA: Yes. I shared everything.

INT: You shared everything with them. You didn't believe in secrets.

FREDA: Yes. I shared everything. Good and sad.

INT: And your husband believed in the same?

FREDA: My husband told me I shall not talk too much about it, because I got always excited, and I was crying a lot. And going through the street and crying and crying. He said, "Don't talk." He didn't let me talk about it. But I **needed** to. So this, he did wrong. Because he wanted me to cheer up, but I had in me such a, I couldn't, I **had** to talk. I had the **need** to talk.

INT: And your friend could listen.

FREDA: Yes. They lived through also similar things, so we could...but my husband, he came to here, he also was in Poland, and he was a little bit in the beginning, 1940. But then he had that visa, so he came here. He didn't see that what I saw, and I was left alone with two children. I was desperate. I took him to the train, I took off there, because I had to have my band, with the Magen David, and I took it off, and they saw me there, and I was, as the train started to leave, I started to run after the train. They said, "Oh, poor woman. The husband goes maybe to the west front also." They thought that, because I didn't have, I was afraid. I had to have this band.

INT: But you didn't wear it.

FREDA: I didn't. I didn't wear it, because they wouldn't have let me to go to the train. So I dared.

INT: So you dared. You had courage.

FREDA: I did. But not anymore.

INT: Do you know what gave you that courage?

FREDA: I had very good parents. A father who was so understanding. And a mother did good with us. Very good. It was such a ertziumg, it was a good upbringing. Physically she did for us, every day, cold rubs. Because in Poland we didn't have bathtubs. Yes. We had a bathtub, but one, we bathed once a week. But every day from bed to bed my mother used to go and did us this cold ubreibung, and we had to go around the table, she put a book on top of our head.

INT: So you should walk straight.

FREDA: Straight. And that gave me a lot.

INT: And what did you say before that, you had to do something to walk around the table?

FREDA: Walk around the table, and we were sitting at the table, we should not have, she threwed us up, not the elbows, she gave us a book under the shoulder, we have to have, you know, she gave us, the mother was a wonderful person. And she gave me a lot of things. And my father was so good. And when I came sometimes and told my father, "Mama doesn't allow me, she does this and this," he said, "Don't worry. It will be good." He bought me a pair of...he was very good to me. So I said parents did a lot for me.

INT: So your mother was the strength and the disciplinarian, and she took that role.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: And your father took the role of being the kind one and the good one.

FREDA: Yes.

INT: So they each took a role, and they gave to you from...

FREDA: And the worst, I was suffering a lot when my father got sick, he got a stroke, I was still a little girl, a very young girl. He died, I was not twenty yet. And I was very much upset. Very...it gave me a lot of...and to think about. I started to worry, you see? That was...And I was a young girl.

INT: So it gave you a lot to think about. What did you think about?

FREDA: I was afraid that I will be alone. I was afraid. I was suffering because he was suffering a lot. He was suffering. So I loved him so much, and when he had pains, he was singing beautifully. So I remember the melodies that he...When he was very sick, they brought him in our house, in such a wheelchair. It was maybe not a wheelchair, yes, in the chair yes, to the salon. And I was playing for him Chopin waltzes, and so. And I remember this. He loved music.

INT: So by playing the piano, you could give him pleasure.

FREDA: Yes. Yes. He told me, I remember, the tenth waltz of Chopin I played every day for him. He loved it so.

INT: Ten waltzes? Ten what of Chopin?

FREDA: Waltz, the tenth.

INT: Oh, the tenth Chopin.

FREDA: (hums the tune) I played it. He liked it very much. Nocturnos, and...

INT: The nocturnes. And so your memory of how you coped with his loss, when he died, that pain...

FREDA: Stayed long with me. I remember I used to write letters. I used to write a lot about it, about the suffering and about it. You know, that sickness gave me a lot of pain. It was...because I saw how he was suffering. And I wanted to help him.

INT: Who did you write the letters to?

FREDA: I had, I was friendly with the cousin in Bielsko also, and I wrote to myself also, I wrote.

INT: You kept a diary?

FREDA: Not exactly a diary, but I wrote such. My impressions depicted.

INT: And did you keep up that? Did you do that during the war? Did you keep a diary, or...

FREDA: (laughs) During the war?

INT: (laughs) You didn't have paper.

FREDA: Don't ask me. During the war. They were bitter times during the war.

INT: When you came to this country, did you do that again? Did you write in the diary, did you write letters?

FREDA: No, I started to write a little bit, but I destroyed it. I didn't...I didn't have the mind anymore. I didn't, I had so much different things on my mind. My sister came from Paris, she also lost a husband, and I was very close with her. She lived with me in Washington Heights for some time. And...(pause) And I was very poor. I didn't have money. I was not materialistic, but we needed the money.

INT: Mm-hm. And so as information came out about people who had died, you shared that with your children. Did you go and look at films about the Holocaust?

FREDA: When I saw one film, I had a...I couldn't sleep. And I was...I cannot see now. I read a book, when there are a lot of descriptions about, I leave it. I cannot read it. Because I see that it does something bad to me. I cannot function.

INT: Better for you not to think about that.

FREDA: I think, but not to **read** and not to see this. I didn't see that film either. My sister, my daughter was, and the grandchildren were, this "Schindler's List." I didn't. I didn't.

INT: And, but you had a tremendous ability to enjoy things.

FREDA: No, I lost a lot during both wars. They left an impression on me. I couldn't. I couldn't really laugh, so...

INT: When you came to this country, you were a more serious person than when, before the war when you were a child, and you...

FREDA: Listen. I never had, I didn't know the value of money. I never had worries about anything. And when I came here, I didn't have anything. But I couldn't enjoy life like others. Like, I couldn't **laugh**, really, a hearty laugh. Too serious.

INT: Do you believe that you became too serious then, after the war, and what affect do you think that had on your children?

FREDA: No, I was not, I was, I enjoyed my children very much. I enjoyed them from...the day they were born. I loved them very much. And I would...Christina, (her companion) this girl, she laughs. She says I am a worrier, I am a professional worrier.

INT: That's what she says about you.

FREDA: (laughs) Because, with the grandchild, if I heard the daughter, and they went on dates, you know, they were young, before, my husband slept, but I never slept before they came home. I remember my son came, he said, "Oh, I had a flat tire. Oh, Mommy, I see it's so hard to be a parent. And I will never do it..." (laughs) And Rita, once, when she came late home, they had a schedule. They had to come home 12:00, or I don't know, 11:00. It depends. And I couldn't sleep before they were...

INT: So you were the worrier.

FREDA: I was the worrier.

INT: And your husband, what? He went to sleep, he didn't think about it?

FREDA: He thought, yes, he always thought. But he was working hard. And he was...he was freer. His mind was, although he suffered, because he lost his parents. He never took out even the pictures. They were young people, two young people in Vienna. And one sister who survived, she lives in Brooklyn. But he was alone. He was...such parents. They were wonderful in-laws to me. They loved me so much. They used to write letters from Vienna, that I am better than a daughter. They have a daughter, and I was, I **was** good to them. I used to send packages from when I was in Poland, they were in Vienna, there was no meat, there was no butter, I used to, every week I used to send packages to Vienna, to them. I did what I could.

INT: So your ability to be capable of joy and happiness was kind of limited to your children. But even so, the music, you were able to enjoy that music?

FREDA: Yes. My daughter played. I was teaching her. My son practiced a little bit, and he sees it isn't enough, and he wanted to play baseball. He was, he had friends, he was different, a boy. But with the daughter, I was always a friend. She's a wonderful daughter. She's a wonderful human being, and so is my son, and that keeps me. And the grandchildren are also very good.

INT: So you never tried to protect your children from hearing anything or knowing anything about the Holocaust. You told them...

FREDA: I told them everything. They should know it. They want to know it. Rita was writing such in school, I don't know whether she did show you this. I have it, I can show it to you, what she wrote about her life. About the Holocaust.

INT: I would like to see that.

FREDA: Yeah, she was a young girl, when she was in, what school was she? No, she was here already, a teacher. When she was writing this.

INT: And so what do you think gave you the ability to cope with the difficulty of life here in this country? How were you able to adapt and to rebuild your life? What is it that helped you to have the strength to do that?

FREDA: (pause) I don't know what to tell you. I know, I was surrounded, I had a good husband, and I know he was protecting me always.

INT: How did you know that? What did he do, that made you...

FREDA: He always was, you know what it means, Aufmerksam? Attentive. He was always, he knew what I needed.

INT: Oh. And what was that, that you needed from him?

FREDA: We were talking a lot. If I had something. We had very much in common. And I loved his parents, and he was very grateful. (pause) It won't take long. I want to show you this, what Rita wrote.

INT: I want to see that. And so just before we finish with this tape, is there anything else that you would like to tell me, knowing that the purpose of this study is transcending trauma, how you were able to get beyond what, the trauma of the Holocaust, and to rebuild your life and to become successful?

FREDA: I believed. I had hope. You know what is bitachon? In Hebrew?

INT: Tell me.

FREDA: Hope. Hope. And I believed. I believed that it will be better.

INT: Mm-hm. You also had a skill. You had practiced and studied and worked very hard, and you had a skill in the piano, and that gave you something to teach.

FREDA: Oh, yeah. That gave me a lot. That piano. First of all, I'll tell you, I'm not materialistic, but you need the money and I was happy that I made money. I made quite nice money. Rita was even later my assistant teacher. I had a pre-instrumental course with little children six years old. I took a dollar for an hour. And she was singing, she helped me. She was a little girl, but she always helped me. And then she was my assistant teacher. I couldn't take so many pupils. She was a young girl, and she was teaching already.

INT: When you had the most pupils, how many did you have?

FREDA: I had over thirty.

INT: You had over thirty pupils.

FREDA: Yes. Yes. And I had to go to some of them. In the beginning, I had to go, ride to Forest Hills by train, by subway. Then I had my piano, so they came to my house, but I used to go, and I had the stomach ulcer, and I used to suffer a lot giving the lessons, and they gave me a glass of milk because it helped me. I don't talk about it anymore; I don't remember it. But it was not good. Because I had stomach ulcers during the war. I developed them. I lost a lot, a lot of weight. And when I came here I went to a doctor, of course, my husband took me. And I had x-rays. I was even in Germany in the hospital, and I was on the sick list. That's why I came before the war ended. I came with wounded soldiers here. With American and Canadian soldiers on a trip, on a Gripsholm boat. I was on a sick list, yes. The German doctors, they put me, because I was quite sick. But I was still, I could eat. I had appetite, and I was, I still was healthy. When I had my heart attack, I say it was, I had now no one else. It wasn't pneumonia. I keep myself strong.

INT: So you have, there's a little piece of you that doesn't give up the hope, and doesn't look at the very bad side of things. You tend to look at the hopeful side, that it's going to be all right, and I will make it all right, and I'm not going to think about it being so terrible.

FREDA: Very often I have enough already. I have enough. I don't want to live too long. No. But listen, as long as I am healthy, and I can do it, but I'm not so hopeful. I won't...I lose my hope. When I don't, you know...but it's all right. Now it is all right. (sighs) I would like to help people, to do something, and now I am so helpless myself, and that gives me such a, you know, it depresses me because I was very active. I was working, and now I cannot do much.

INT: So you were very vibrant and healthy and active, and you liked to give and take care of people, and that gave them a lot of pleasure, because it gave you a lot of pleasure as you took care of them.

FREDA: I'll show you some cards, what my pupils wrote to me. When I was sick, I still keep them. I have them, because please G-d, they wanted me to teach them. I then gave up, because I should teach. I was, I liked them very much, and I understood, I had girls, and I had mothers. Also mothers and daughters and sons. I was teaching grown-ups, too. And they were so grateful to me. These mothers.

INT: Were you strict? Were you a strict teacher?

FREDA: No. No. No. No, I was never too strict.

INT: Mm-hm. But we're talking about the fact that you're being able to take care of it, give to other people, made you feel happy. Now you have a daughter, and you have grandchildren, and people who like to do little things for **you**, to take care of **you**, which gives **them** pleasure.

FREDA: Yes. Like my grandson, like he called this morning. He called the other day, he wants to come. Then he's apologizing. I come when...And it is also, they don't make too much

money. In films, they don't make too much money. But they're very happy. They were interviewed, now they go also to Israel. They have these festivals. So their film is playing there. Yes, I have here the tapes. Yes. Now, they are writing another film. They are very busy. But I know that they love me.

Now is a grandson here, that he is in California. He came here for eight days, Rita's youngest son. So he comes and he says, "I want to see you." And he comes and plays Scrabble with me. He does...

INT: Is he here now?

FREDA: He was here.

INT: And he left already?

FREDA: They left. They didn't want to disturb you.

INT: Oh. I didn't know that he was here already, because I wanted to interview him.

FREDA: I can give him a ring.

INT: But he left already.

FREDA: No, he is in Rita's house.

INT: He's in Rita's house now.

FREDA: Yes, I can call her.

INT: How long will he be here?

FREDA: Eight days.

INT: When did he arrive?

FREDA: Friday.

INT: So he'll be here still Friday?

FREDA: I think till Friday or till Sunday. I'll give him a ring.

INT: Yes? Will you do that? All right, so I'll stop the tape now, and you'll give him a ring, and we'll see if we can find some time to speak with him. Good.

(END OF INTERVIEW)