

INTERVIEW WITH MARGIT SHIPEK

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**Transcending Trauma Project
Council for Relationships
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INTERVIEWER: Today's interview is with Margit Shipek, July 26, 1995.

MARGIT: Shipek.

INT: Who is a survivor of the Holocaust. Margit, would you just please tell me what your age is and your date of birth?

MARGIT: I was born January 11th, 1914 and I'm 81 years old.

INT: Okay, where?

MARGIT: I was born in Vienna, Austria.

INT: Can you tell me how many years...I'm going to ask you now about your family, your husband. How many years were you married? You know, at what age were you married and...

MARGIT: I was 38.

INT: When you got married?

MARGIT: Yeah, when I got married, and my husband died in 1988, and we were married 38, 38, 36 years.

INT: Did you remarry?

MARGIT: No, no.

INT: And what was the level of education for yourself and your husband?

MARGIT: I have twelve years of education. My husband had probably less. He was from Poland.

INT: He was from Poland.

MARGIT: Yes, yes, he was three years older than I was and he probably had less because there people had, twelve years was a lot of education in Europe, you know? People only went really for eight years to school, that was considered enough, and believe me it was. Education was very, much better than here. Even though it's so many years ago, especially it was many years ago because we went to school for six days, not for five. We went, they had sixty minutes school for our classes, not forty-five or

whatever they have here. There was a lot of homework and school was a serious thing, not play.

INT: No play.

MARGIT: No.

INT: You met your husband in...

MARGIT: Here, here.

INT: Here.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah.

INT: So did you have any employment before you left?

MARGIT: I went to school to become a designer and dressmaker. But at this time, you know, they have the guild system in Europe you have to go through. I went for three years to school and then I had to make a master course. After this I was supposed to be able to open my own business. You cannot do this any other way; not like here you go and open up a store and open a business. No, you have to. So I did work as a dressmaker, yes, and then I went to England.

INT: Okay, how old were you when you left Vienna?

MARGIT: 24.

INT: So that you worked, you had a chance to go to school, join the guild system and work making clothing.

MARGIT: Yes, making clothing, but in the shop and I brought it home. We had the business and we had a man's hat store. And when I wasn't working, I was working in my father's business.

INT: I am going to be asking you about that part of your family coming up too because I know it's really interesting. When you came to this country did you have reasonable socioeconomic status here? I mean were you comfortable?

MARGIT: My sister was here and we lived with her. She was not in a very, she has only been there a few years herself, but my younger sister and I came from England and we lived with her. And I worked here also for two, three years. I borrowed some money and I bought a business here in town. It was very cheap at that time. A woman wanted to go out of business and I bought this business. And I was at that time in 1949, I was 35 years old and I bought this business and I had that business. I had it for 30 years.

INT: So you came with skills too.

MARGIT: Right, I had skills, yes, I knew how to run a business. I knew how to run this business. I knew, I mean I was pretty well adept of things like this, you know.

INT: And then you have one daughter you said.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: What is her name?

MARGIT: Ruth.

INT: Ruth, and what is...

MARGIT: Ruth Bender.

INT: Bender. Ruth Bender. And how old is she?

MARGIT: She is now 42.

INT: Okay, and she's married?

MARGIT: She's married, two, she has two children. One is a girl, one boy.

INT: And their ages?

MARGIT: Fifteen and eleven.

INT: And their names?

MARGIT: Jamie Melissa and Scott Andrew.

INT: And Scott is the youngest?

MARGIT: Youngest, yes, yes.

INT: And your son-in-law's name is?

MARGIT: Is Robert Bender.

INT: Robert, okay. And I understand they have a very popular store.

MARGIT: (laughs) Produce and fish business in Overbrook Park.

INT: Overbrook Park, okay. And where do they live?

MARGIT: They live in Broomall.

INT: Okay. Let's see. What about religious affiliations for yourself?

MARGIT: I never belonged to a synagogue. My husband came from a religious background and was very disgusted with being religious. You know it was hard for him in Poland. He refused to go to synagogue. But you see I remember a synagogue from a different point of view from here. Here it is a social point, most of the time it's where you make friends, where you meet people.

INT: You mean here or in Europe?

MARGIT: Here, here. In Europe it was just the opposite. You go there because you want to pray. I do not come from a deeply religious family. My father was quasi-religious. My mother did not come from a religious family. We kept all the holidays. We knew we were Jews, but we were not, how should I put it? Not very religious, no. We were not even kosher at all.

INT: So, did your husband belong to synagogue and not you?

MARGIT: No.

INT: Neither of you.

MARGIT: He didn't want to go to synagogue. At the Conservative ones, he did not fit into it. The Orthodox ones he didn't fit into it either, you know. (laughs)

INT: I understand.

MARGIT: Something in-between. And he was a Holocaust survivor.

INT: Was he also?

MARGIT: He was a real Holocaust survivor. He was in Auschwitz. He had a number. He was in several other concentration camps. He somehow, he was the survivor, I'm not the survivor, he was the survivor. Never got over it.

INT: Did you belong to any Holocaust organizations?

MARGIT: Oh yes, the Association of Holocaust Survivors.

INT: You belonged?

MARGIT: That I still belong to.

INT: Did he belong?

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: Any other organizations, Hadassah --

MARGIT: No, not really. Well, now I belong to ORT.

INT: ORT.

MARGIT: I didn't have time for these things. You had to go to meetings so I never...

INT: You were in business.

MARGIT: Working six days a week. In fact I was really always a Zionist. In Vienna I belonged to a Zionist organization, but before it was forbidden, you know, there was a time that you could not belong to any of those things before, before Nazis.

INT: Before Nazis even.

MARGIT: Yeah, because...

INT: You felt it then too.

MARGIT: you have the fascist regime a little bit and...

INT: Did you do it in secret or...

MARGIT: Before that, when it was forbidden you couldn't go. We were also social democrats, that was the things really but Jews had to be either Christian democrats or social democrats. Here when you say socialist, they think communists, yes.

INT: It was a liberal way of thinking.

MARGIT: Yeah, it was a liberal way of thinking. Of course social democrat. The other day a woman asked me to sign a petition about social democrats and do you know I didn't sign it because I couldn't see the reason. It's never going to go anywhere.

INT: It's different now than it was then.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah, you see it's never going to go anywhere. And I told them, "No, I'm not going to sign it." Then I said, "I'm a coward." (?) But it really bothered me.

INT: I'd like to now talk about what it was like before the war.

MARGIT: Yes, yes.

INT: Yes, what was it like for you growing up in Vienna?

MARGIT: We grew up in a district that was mixed, Gentiles and Jews next to each other. I went to school with Gentile children and there was Jewish children. And they knew you were Jewish. And anti-Semitism in Austria it was always rampant, but not so that they spit in your face, but you know, everybody who would say, "Oh, I have a Jewish friend," you know this idea of anti-Semitism, you know. (laughs)

INT: So it was subtle, it wasn't overt.

MARGIT: No. But it was, it was nice growing up in Vienna. It was a nice city, the schools were good. Life was pretty good. It was not wonderful. We also had depressions, we didn't call it depression, we didn't know it was a depression, you know. (laughs) But it was pretty good, yes, I can't complain about this. My parents both came from Czechoslovakia. We had relatives in Czechoslovakia. We didn't go on vacation, none of us, really. We visited one grandmother, the other grandmother, that uncle or that aunt. But it was a good life until 1935, '36 when the fascists came in and then it was getting worse. Still not so much anti-Semitism, but as soon as Hitler marched into Vienna, everybody was a Nazi.

INT: It was quickly turning?

MARGIT: Yeah, from one day to the next.

INT: What about your parents? Were they both living during the war?

MARGIT: My parents, they left. They were living when I left in 1938, never saw them again.

INT: Were you an only child?

MARGIT: No, I have two other sisters, one is still alive and the other one died.

INT: And what are their names?

MARGIT: Edith was the older one.

INT: She's the one who is still living?

MARGIT: No, she died.

INT: Yeah.

MARGIT: The other one is Ilse.

INT: Does she live in Philadelphia?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: And what was it like growing up? Were you close?

MARGIT: Jews were mostly close with family. She was mostly close with family and that's all we did, we visited this uncle and this aunt or I don't know, a hiking trip with family or so on and it was comfortable. My mother was also working, we had a housekeeper who was our second mother. She brought us up, really. My mother went to work every morning and came home at night. She had a business. And we went to the store after school. We grew up somehow there too, you know.

INT: So after school you would go to the store...

MARGIT: Yeah, we went to the store.

INT: You went to the store, your parent's store. Did you work there or did you just sort of sit there and do your homework?

MARGIT: No, there we did our homework and my mother made us do something with our hands because a child couldn't sit around and just read, you know.

INT: Now tell me once again, what was the business?

MARGIT: Men's hats.

INT: He manufactured or sold?

MARGIT: No, just retail. At that time all men wore hats. Even little boys, they all wore hats or caps or something.

INT: So you were comfortable economically.

MARGIT: We were comfortable, middle class.

INT: And what about your social networks and did you have friends other than the relatives that you were close with?

MARGIT: I had school friends. Later on we had friends that they belonged to some kind of a group, a hiking group or something like this.

INT: Were they all Jewish or were they mixed?

MARGIT: Most of them were Jewish. But later on when you got older, when you went to school you had all Gentile friends and we lived in an apartment house where on the same floor there must have been ten apartments and maybe three Jewish families. But the children in the other apartments, they were all our friends.

INT: So it was mixed and there wasn't discrimination?

MARGIT: It wasn't, no, no, no, that wasn't.

INT: Did your parents belong to any organizations?

MARGIT: No, no, my father went to the synagogue, my mother did not. No, no, my mother did not attend.

INT: And you said you observed the holidays.

MARGIT: Oh, we observed all the holidays.

INT: What about Shabbat? Did you observe Shabbat?

MARGIT: Oh, the store was open. My father went to the synagogue later on, not so early in life but later on he went to the synagogue. But Shabbat was not observed by us, where there were some people who surely did, but we did not. No, Jews in Vienna were very assimilated, extremely assimilated. You did not make any waves. I still talk about it that my daughter once got a mezuzah, a little one. And I said, "Are you going to wear this?" And she said, "Why?" And I caught myself, you know, I didn't live in Vienna anymore. There you didn't wear a Jewish star or a mezuzah, you didn't show that you are Jewish openly, you know. It was something you were so assimilated that you did not want to wear this thing.

INT: Was it assimilation or fear?

MARGIT: Maybe it was fear but we didn't know it was fear. We were as assimilated as the German Jews who were more German than the Germans but we were assimilated.

INT: What about Zionism for your parents? Did Israel, did Palestine ever (?)

MARGIT: My parents did not. That was too early. It was too early but we were very ardent Zionists, not that we were going there because at that time it was almost impossible. But I had relatives who went there in 1935 to Israel and have lived there since.

INT: I think in those days there were Zionist youth organizations. Did you belong?

MARGIT: Oh yes, yes. No, I did not. No.

INT: Do you remember anybody who did?

MARGIT: Yeah, I had friends who did.

INT: But you didn't feel that there was (?)

MARGIT: No, no, no. I was not old enough to join and I was a very shy child.

INT: Shy?

MARGIT: I was. I am not anymore.

INT: No?

MARGIT: Now I am still, it depends. But when it comes to talking, I start talking, I can't stop. I was very shy, extremely shy.

INT: What do you think made you shy?

MARGIT: I don't know. It was just my nature, I guess.

INT: Were your sisters more outgoing than you?

MARGIT: My older sister was not and my younger sister I still say she's shy, but she was more outgoing than I was.

INT: What about your parents?

MARGIT: My mother was a very quiet person.

INT: She was quiet also.

MARGIT: My father, so, so.

INT: Was he domineering?

MARGIT: No, no, not really domineering, no.

INT: He took care of the discipline of the children?

MARGIT: Ah.

INT: I mean, do you remember?

MARGIT: Well, it was both. No, my father, he did and he didn't, both, you know, both parents took care of this. My mother was not the Jewish wife who was sitting in the background. No, no, she was not. She took care of things. She was part of the business, she took care of money, she was a modern woman. She was more modern than many women I know now, in her outlook.

INT: Was she a role model for you because you became a businesswoman too?

MARGIT: Well, I guess that the mother can influence very much.

INT: Were there any other influences that you think you got from your parents that gave you a sense of values that you carry with you?

MARGIT: Well surely there was a very, how shall I say it? A way of moral thinking. You didn't do this because it will hurt somebody else.

INT: So concern for other people.

MARGIT: Concern for other people, yes, very much.

INT: So you were very conscious of that growing up, that you were sensitive to others.

MARGIT: Yes. Not though in a selfish way. Maybe that wasn't so great.

INT: Why do you think that?

MARGIT: Because you're taken advantage of sometimes, you know, you really, I don't know.

INT: Then or in later life?

MARGIT: Your whole life, I guess. (laughs)

INT: Is that what you're saying?

MARGIT: Yes, because somehow I still think, I'm not very, how should I say this? Something that means in English where I'm not pushy. Sometimes I should be.

INT: You feel you should be.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: You said your grandparents lived in Czechoslovakia. Were both parents born there?

MARGIT: Yeah, my mother was born in Czechoslovakia, which is now Czech, and my father was born in the part that is now Slovakia.

INT: And do you remember time spent with your grandparents separately or did you always go there with your parents?

MARGIT: No, well I used to go with my mother, but my grandmother lived in a small city in a town in Slovakia which was rather primitive, I would say too, compared to what I was used to in Vienna, but it was a change. But she was a very old woman, to me who was a ten-, eleven-year-old girl and I had really nothing to say to her. I did not know

how to communicate, really. But she was a very nice, now in retrospect I know she was a very nice old lady who loved me, but I didn't notice, you know. (laughs)

INT: Did they live into the war years?

MARGIT: No, no they died much before that time. My grandmother must have died in the early 20's or something like that. My grandfather I never knew. The maternal grandmother I only knew very slightly, and she died at a ripe old age, but in the 30's maybe and then my grandfather I didn't know either. My mother was born in 1878, just so you can imagine my grandmother when they were born.

INT: Yeah. So you have a generation there too.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah.

INT: What about your sisters? How did you all get along with each other?

MARGIT: My older sister, I am the middle one and we were all six years apart so there was a twelve year difference between my oldest sister and my youngest sister. She came from a different generation somehow.

INT: How do you mean?

MARGIT: Well, children, people, when I was a child I was a child much longer than she was.

INT: Do you mean she grew up more quickly, she didn't have a (?)

MARGIT: Yeah, times are different now. She lives here in the same building and we are now very close. But there was always a sibling rivalry, there was always when there are three girls, my G-d.

INT: Did you fight over boyfriends?

MARGIT: No, no, I didn't have any boyfriends as early as she had. (laughs) I was very shy, very small, very immature looking for my age. I was thirty-five when I had this store. Nobody believed that I was the owner. I had a woman working there, they always thought she was the owner, that I was the employee.

INT: Because you were so quiet?

MARGIT: I was quiet and I was younger looking. I was slight, short, didn't open my mouth. And people said, "Is your boss here?" "I am the boss." "You're the boss!" They didn't believe me.

INT: But you had this for 35 years.

MARGIT: But later on, but later on, but in the beginning was, later on people believed me. But so I was older, I was maturing very late.

INT: Did your parents treat the three of you any differently?

MARGIT: No, no.

INT: You're not aware if there were favorites or somebody got treated better?

MARGIT: No, maybe the oldest sister was closest to my mother but I've noticed this is always like this, that the oldest child is mostly, especially if it's a girl closest to the mother. But no, she wouldn't, no. She said that I was a difficult child. Yeah, it was that I was a poor eater, and that I was skinny. And after the war when there wasn't so much to eat and that there wasn't, you know there was always the idea I wouldn't get enough to eat, and then when I was a child I didn't want to eat and so you know, and this way I was difficult, I'm sure I was.

INT: And your sisters were not, they ate and they did all the things they were supposed to do?

MARGIT: Yes, I was a reader. I grew up straight (laughs). Not tall, but straight.

INT: So you didn't have boyfriends?

MARGIT: No, no, until much later. Also the times were bad. We used to belong to some organization, a hiking club or something like this, but it was nothing romantic, let's say. It was for boys and girls.

INT: What about your sisters? Were they dating boys?

MARGIT: My sister was engaged for sometime in Manchester.

INT: Your older sister?

MARGIT: And my younger sister was only eighteen when the war broke out.

INT: So your sister married someone from Vienna?

MARGIT: Uh-huh.

INT: And they were living in Vienna.

MARGIT: They were living a couple of years.

INT: Before the war.

MARGIT: Nobody married early at this time. There was a shortage of living space. You couldn't find an apartment, you couldn't get married.

INT: Were there enough Jewish men around?

MARGIT: Oh yeah.

INT: Plenty of partners.

MARGIT: Yeah, but they didn't have jobs because it was such a bad time and the young men when they lost a job they couldn't find a job anymore.

INT: Were you conscious of any kind of blaming the Jews in Vienna because it was bad times? Did you feel that anything was going to happen?

MARGIT: Well, no, it wasn't. No, it was not, no. And people, as I said, they really didn't know the times were bad because it was something to do with the war. I mean, this part of Europe lost a war and lost Austria. Hungary was a big empire then; Austria was a little place with a big city. You know, it was the same thing in Germany. Why was there Hitler? Because of this Versailles, it was cut up so badly, Europe. Somehow you didn't see there "Jew" on a wall or something. It was an unspoken thing, but you knew it was there that nobody liked Jews, that's it.

INT: You just knew. If I were to ask you how you knew that --

MARGIT: It was somehow in the air. It was there. Nobody liked Jews very much. Only after the war, when, after the war I went once to Vienna, twenty years later. And I talked to somebody in a park and they said, "Oh, I had a sister-in-law who was Jewish. She was very nice."

INT: That's an example.

MARGIT: That's the typical thing, you know. I had a sister-in-law who was Jewish, you know this is an anti-Semitic remark.

INT: It certainly is. If I were to ask you what one of your earliest childhood memories were, start with a positive one.

MARGIT: Well, I had a happy childhood, I couldn't say I didn't have a happy childhood. I was very well taken care of. I was dressed, my mother made all our clothes, on top of everything else, and she always saw that we were dressed and felt nicely. We had this housekeeper who loved us like we were her own. We loved her as if she would have been mother and I didn't have to do a thing in the house. (laughs) I have to tell you this because later on I had to learn. I did nothing, nothing I had to do and neither did anyone of my sisters do anything. And we were brought up like middle class girls, Jewish girls.

INT: What about emotion? Was there a lot of hugging, expressions of love?

MARGIT: Oh yeah, well, my mother was very affectionate but we were none of us kissers, you know. This kissing -- when someone meets somebody for the first time, they kiss you.

INT: Do you think that was Viennese or was that your family?

MARGIT: America, the kissing, very American. The not kissing is European.

INT: The Europeans don't. They hug?

MARGIT: Now more than ever. They did not do this. You did not do this.

INT: I mean with the kids, I mean like if your mother would be hugging you --

MARGIT: Oh yeah, or sitting on somebody's lap. Not really, I remember an uncle wanted to kiss me.

[Tape 1 - End Side 1] [Tape 1 - Side 2]

MARGIT: Jewish families are mostly affectionate. Most Jewish families are affectionate, don't you think so?

INT: Yes, I think so.

MARGIT: Yeah, but these are not, I mean not overly there. I mean there was not this fighting about the (laughs) children all the time.

INT: Is that European also, do you think?

MARGIT: I think so. We don't have to say it. I have this wonderful child.

INT: Do you remember your parents having disagreements?

MARGIT: Oh, like everybody.

INT: Not anything that was serious?

MARGIT: No, not in the family they had disagreement. I had a good childhood.

INT: A stable family?

MARGIT: I had a stable background, yes.

INT: There were no family difficulties?

MARGIT: My father had a nervous breakdown.

INT: He did have a nervous breakdown?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: Tell me about it.

MARGIT: He was also, how should I say it? You see he was sent to learn a trade when he was fourteen years old from Czechoslovakia to Vienna. And he was a fourteen-year-old little boy, never grew very tall and heavy, and that is, this must have been something to him.

INT: So did he have this nervous breakdown before he met your mother?

MARGIT: No, after.

INT: After, but was that when you were a child?

MARGIT: When I was a child, yes.

INT: Can you tell me what you remember about that?

MARGIT: It was traumatic for the whole family because he was still young. He was then in what they called in Vienna, a sanatorium, and it took some time until he got well but that was all.

INT: So he was away for a while?

MARGIT: Yes, yes.

INT: Was it a year, or months or years?

MARGIT: A few months.

INT: And was he sick again at all?

MARGIT: No, no, he was all right. But he was a rather weak person. He had this tendency to be melancholy somehow. He had a hard youth, I guess.

INT: How did your mother take all of this?

MARGIT: She just did. Absolute hero. My mother kept everything to herself.

INT: She was strong?

MARGIT: Strong. A little woman just like me, not any taller, not any heavier, but she was so strong.

INT: And did she talk to you and your sisters about what was going on with your father?

MARGIT: No, we knew, we knew.

INT: Did you talk about it at all, or was it just understood?

MARGIT: Yeah, it was understood, maybe. We visited him in this, yes.

INT: You visited him?

MARGIT: Yes, sure. No, it was not hushed up.

INT: Did anybody else have any health problems?

MARGIT: No, my mother wasn't, I don't remember. My father wasn't physically ill either.

INT: And you, were you healthy as a child?

MARGIT: I was healthy. Yes, I said I was skinny, but very healthy.

INT: And you said that you celebrated every holiday. Was Passover a big thing?

MARGIT: No, no, we always had an uncle, somebody who was always invited but there was no family to invite. My mother had sisters, they did not, they were not religious, didn't keep the holidays. An uncle we had, my mother's brother came because his family didn't keep it. My mother's side of the family was not, this side was not very religious. My father's family, they had others, we usually had somebody for Seder. I always fasted for Yom Kippur and I still do.

INT: You don't go to synagogue, you just fast? Was that true then, too, that your whole family fasted?

MARGIT: The whole family fasted.

INT: But you didn't go to synagogue.

MARGIT: My mother did not go.

INT: Your father went.

MARGIT: My father went. But we did not go, and we all fasted, and we were not allowed to do certain things on Shabbat and we were not allowed to do certain things on Saturdays, on Shabbat because, I don't know, knitting or crocheting, you didn't do things.

INT: Did you ride?

MARGIT: Everything was in walking distance, you didn't have to go ride. If you went somewhere on Sunday, we used to visit my mother's sister or my uncles or my father's brother. But didn't have to ride that much in these days. But we kept all the holidays very strictly. I mean we were not kosher.

INT: You didn't keep kosher.

MARGIT: No, we didn't keep kosher.

INT: In the synagogues then they were all Orthodox?

MARGIT: No, mostly, they were Orthodox and Conservative.

INT: Orthodox and Conservative.

MARGIT: They did not have Reform.

INT: They did have Conservative synagogues?

MARGIT: Yeah, but Conservative was much more like Orthodox than here. The women did not sit together. The women sat on the balcony.

INT: So that even though it was Conservative the women were separated.

MARGIT: Yes, the women were separated, yeah, yeah, sure. And I don't know, well, there is only one synagogue in Vienna now but there were many synagogues, especially in this particular village. But as I said, it was not a social point.

INT: It was strictly religious.

MARGIT: It was strictly religious, yes.

INT: Okay, let me just ask you what kind of values you came away with from your family?

MARGIT: Materialistic things were not important.

INT: What was important?

MARGIT: Important was that you were healthy, that you were happy, that you were decent, that you were polite as children, very important to be polite as children. I mean entirely different from children nowadays that you grew up into somebody that worked and looked after themselves, that you would not take from anybody, independent.

INT: You didn't have to take charity.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah.

INT: What about education? Was that important?

MARGIT: Education was also important but not as important for girls as for boys. Very few girls that I knew went to college. Even teachers, the girls who became teachers did not have to go to the university.

INT: Did all of your sisters finish twelve years?

MARGIT: Yes. And my sister went to a school for, how should I say it? Commerce. She wanted to work in an office. She never worked in an office but she went to business school. It was a different, entirely different life as now. There are so many different generations between. All our values have changed since then, didn't they? My values have changed too now. I'm materialistic now, too, I think.

INT: Now you are?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: Before the war started what was a typical day in your life like right before the war started?

MARGIT: Well, I used to go to work and come home. We used to, or if I did not work at that time I used to go to my father's store and work there. And in the evening we would go home, not go out anywhere, if you didn't have some kind of a social thing. I used to go to the theater a lot and even as a teenager I did and it was a usual bourgeois way of living.

INT: It was more intellectual than social for you, would you say?

MARGIT: Yeah, I read a lot, I belonged to a library and I read a lot and I went to the theater or to the movies sometimes but more to the theater than to the movies, and concerts. There was a lot of cultural life in Vienna, much more than it is now, than it's here.

INT: Did you go alone or did you go with family or friends?

MARGIT: No, I used to go with girlfriends, or my sister and her husband. No, it was always much easier, it was cheaper to go to a show or something. Here it is very expensive. And there you could go standing room when you were a teenager. You wouldn't go any other way. That wasn't the way of going -- to sit. I guess I was a groupie for a while. It was the thing to do. Sometime there was a classical actor and we would run after him after his performance. I had a much nicer youth, I think, than my daughter had from the cultural point of view. I enjoyed going to the theater and reading. Who reads now?

INT: So your daughter isn't as "cultured" as you?

MARGIT: I mean I wouldn't say that she's not cultured. The culture, here, is different -- The Beatles. I used to say, "How can you listen to this thing?"

INT: Would you say that you were of the same mold as your family of origin? I mean were you different, were you rebellious or did you do what they wanted you to do?

MARGIT: No, I was a little, I am still opinionated. (laughs)

INT: Tell me about that.

MARGIT: I was rather opinionated but I still am, I can't help it.

INT: What were you opinionated about then?

MARGIT: There were certain ideas. It's, it's, I wouldn't have let go of those ideas, well, I thought this was it. That was it.

INT: Do you remember what ideas particularly? Were they political or religious?

MARGIT: Well, at that time they were of the social democrat, you know, even kids were social or politically interested. There was not, when it came to voting there was not a person who did not vote, you know. We were politically interested and naturally this came down and crashed down. What could you be interested in if the party that you liked was forbidden when you didn't, couldn't show that you were a little bit on the left side, liberally at least we walked in a May march or something. You couldn't do that anymore, you know.

INT: Well, were your parents social democrats also or were they upset that you were so politically involved?

MARGIT: They were not, I was not really involved; my ideas were.

INT: Your ideas.

MARGIT: Yeah, because I was too young to be involved. When I was older there was no such thing as political parties of that order. When I was 21, they put the vote in there was the fascist party, fascist regime in Austria. But it was when I was a teenager, oh, we were very much involved, you know, you say you're not doing many things, but talking a lot, you know. (laughs) But later on it didn't come to anything. And I'm still a liberal person. As a matter of fact when I came to this country I was such a bleeding heart, you know. (laughs) Do you know what that means? I remember we went through North Philadelphia and I cried, how can people live like this? When I came from England, there you didn't see Black people. Now you go to England it is worse than anywhere else, but I came here I was absolutely aghast, how can you let people live like this? But somehow you forget to see the, the people, the homeless people in town, yeah.

INT: You can become insensitive to people who live on the vents.

MARGIT: You walk past them, yeah. Here in this corner here there is one on each corner but you get insensitive to it.

INT: Do you still vote in the election?

MARGIT: Oh yes. This is important to me, maybe people don't vote in the primary, but no, an election, it's still important to me and there is such a wishy-washy attitude toward politics here. It's not in Europe. People are very politically minded.

INT: There are few people who vote here.

MARGIT: Hardly anybody.

INT: The percentages are very low for voting.

MARGIT: Sure, and there if you didn't vote somebody came and got you.

INT: Yeah?

MARGIT: Yeah, I remember my older sister used to go with some young man and they would go from door to door where they knew people had not voted and made the people go and vote. When they were older took out a car or something and got them there, but everyone voted. So we were really politically astute about these things. I have never talked to my granddaughter about such things because I know that she wouldn't know what I'm talking about.

INT: Sad as it may be.

MARGIT: Yeah. I don't think my daughter even votes all the time. She did not learn it from me.

INT: 'Cause you tried to make it very clear to her about how important it was?

MARGIT: Yeah, and I did. I did, sure, it's important.

INT: I feel the same way too. If there hadn't been a war what would your life have been?

MARGIT: I would have found somebody probably to get married to, or somebody would have pushed me to why don't you get married. And at twenty-four I wasn't ready for marriage, believe me, I was not. I could never, I could not see myself getting married.

INT: Is that because you said you were immature?

MARGIT: I was immature, but my sister was twenty-nine when she married. My mother was twenty-nine when she married. It was not the time to get married early. But I would have married, but as it turned out I didn't marry, I only married fourteen years later because I was not settled.

INT: What about professionally, I mean, do you think you would have done anything differently?

MARGIT: I probably would have done something, opened my own business or something. Maybe at that time, you know girls got married and stayed at home too. It was my mother who did not, yeah.

INT: Would you say you would have done that?

MARGIT: I don't know. I don't know. Maybe I would.

INT: You didn't do it here.

MARGIT: No, I did not. I stayed home for six weeks when I had a child. But then I was a completely different person. I had to look after myself. I had to make my own decision. At that time I did not have to make any decisions. You know that's what it was. Only then when the time came to make a decision I made it fast.

INT: When the war began you said you were twenty-four?

MARGIT: I was twenty-four, 1930. Well, the war broke out in 1939 but I left in 1938. Hitler annexed Austria in 1938.

INT: '38.

MARGIT: 11th of March.

INT: And at that time you were twenty-four?

MARGIT: I was twenty-four.

INT: What was it like when Hitler came in? Was anybody, did you know he was coming? Were you waiting for it?

MARGIT: We didn't know that it was coming so fast.

INT: What was it like? Do you remember what it was like that day?

MARGIT: I remember the day from like, well, all at once you could not. They were marching into Austria. Everybody who was an illegal member of the Nazi party took the swastika from the back of their lapel, put it on the front of their lapel, you know, next door neighbor or somebody, your friend, anybody. All at once it was Hitler, Austria. It was really awful. You could not, I didn't go to school anymore. But the Jewish children couldn't go to school anymore. Later on when I had left, my parents couldn't keep the store open. They had to sell it. We were forced to sell it for nothing, for a few dollars. We got a small sum of money and that's it.

INT: You remained for about a year?

MARGIT: I was about six months. I left in November, 1938.

INT: How did that affect you those six months?

MARGIT: Well, they were all terribly depressed, did not all try to do something to get out of the country because we knew we had to get out. Did not know what to do. The only way for most of us, if you had relatives in America, you had to have an affidavit. You know what an affidavit is? We didn't have any relatives in America. You had to have a permit to go into England. Well, I got the permit to go into England. I went as a maid. Our neighbor was a friend of ours said, "Why don't we go together?" She was going to go as a cook, but I was going as the parlor maid. We did get a job. It was very easy. The English people, the English always had the foreign maids. They all went back home to Germany and to Austria. They thought there was going to be something wonderful for them. So they were looking for maids. There was the Daily Mail, which is the London newspaper had pages of ads for maids. So I decided to go. There was no future. There was no future for anybody. We thought we would bring our family out. We did not.

INT: So you went with a neighbor.

MARGIT: I went with a neighbor who was a few years older than I.

INT: So it was just the two of you. And what happened to your sisters?

MARGIT: My younger sister was at home. My older sister was married at that time when she went to Italy for a few months and from there to England for a few months. From there onto America because her husband had an affidavit. My younger sister came with a student permit that some Quaker ladies got her.

INT: To America.

MARGIT: No, to England in spring of '39. And when she came, she also became a maid. There were thousands of Jewish girls who were maids in England. It wasn't as bad as it sounds, you know.

INT: Well, it sounds wonderful that you got out.

MARGIT: Now we got out, the idea that we were maids did not bother us that much. We were laughing. It was an adventure. For me it was an adventure, an absolute adventure. And when we talk about it now I went to a part of England, in the South of England, Surrey. It's not far from London, about an hour. And it was a small town. It was a typical upper middle class English family, so cold, so as we thought of England, so un-Austrian, you know. (laughs) It was an adventure. I did not, that's why I said I never had to do anything at home. All at once I had to scrub a floor. I remember this housekeeper we had, begged my mother not to let me go, that I would never live through it. I lived through it because things were not that complicated. Europe was a land all kinds of tricks of the trade, you know.

INT: So you started to --

MARGIT: Sure, sure, and we were, it was in a nice part of England and there were many refugees in this small city in this small town, village.

INT: Did your friend stay with you in Surrey also?

MARGIT: Yeah, we stayed together but I only stayed there for about ten months because then I didn't want to stay there anymore. And they found a friend there who went to London and I went to London. Her husband had come, who was in concentration camp at that time already, and she went to London to pick him up. She got him out of the concentration camp somehow. That wasn't Auschwitz yet. They took Jews in 1938, Jews, social democrats, communists.

INT: You're talking about from Vienna.

MARGIT: From Vienna, yes.

INT: They put them in a concentration camp. Now which ones were they put into at that point?

MARGIT: That was Dachau.

INT: Dachau.

MARGIT: And my cousins went Mauthausen in Austria. But at that time you still could get out if you had some kind of a way into any other country. I know people who

went to China, Bolivia when there was absolutely no future but they went because they wanted to get out.

INT: What happened with your parents?

MARGIT: My parents stayed there. They couldn't get out. We couldn't get them out. My mother learned English.

INT: To try to get to England?

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: Were you communicating at that point?

MARGIT: Until the war broke out in September 1939 we could.

INT: So the Nazis came in and they occupied for almost a year or nine months and then the war broke out?

MARGIT: Well, no. Well, they occupied Austria. Then they attacked Poland and Czechoslovakia.

INT: When they were occupying you got out?

MARGIT: Yes, I got out before the war. I got out before the war but not before the occupation.

INT: Your parents couldn't get any kind of affidavits?

MARGIT: They could not. They were sixty years old. They could not get anywhere. Who was going to employ them in England? So they had to go into the ghetto.

INT: There was a ghetto in Vienna?

MARGIT: There was a ghetto in Vienna. They lived in one room.

INT: I didn't know that.

MARGIT: They lived in one room with, I think, with my, I'm not that clear about it, but there was my uncle and aunt and they lived in one room, I think. My uncle was sick, the uncle was over seventy. My mother and father went there and my mother never complained.

INT: You knew this from the letters that you were reading.

MARGIT: Yes, she only worried about us, she never complained. She said she learned, she's taking English lessons that her old head can't take it. And my father was very upset but he didn't write much.

INT: Did he get sick again?

MARGIT: No, he didn't. He did not write letters. He always sent a few notes. My mother, with help by this housekeeper that who really took her life in her hands because she was not Jewish and she helped my mother sometimes.

INT: She was bringing her food in the ghetto.

MARGIT: Yes, then my mother, we lost contact, she wrote to America when my sister was there. My sister sent the letter from America to England and we knew had that kind of contact. And then we lost contact with them. America got into the war in 1941 and there was no more contact with Germany. So we, we think they were killed. They were sent to a camp but we don't know to which camp. We think that they died around '42. We went to the Red Cross, there was never anything.

INT: Because they were older.

MARGIT: Yes, they were older. My father's brother, and his wife were sent a long time before my parents. And we were in England with a packed suitcase because we were considered as enemy aliens at a certain time there during the war. We were afraid of being sent to a camp.

INT: Because you were from Austria?

MARGIT: Vienna, yes. We were afraid of being sent to a camp in England.

INT: Not because you were Jews but because you were from Austria.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah. Island of Men was not a concentration camp, a camp for people, for aliens, but we were never sent there.

INT: What was it called again?

MARGIT: Island of Men. It's an island. And there they had camps for enemy aliens but I was never sent and I had this friend who came with me who was with me, the cook, she was sent.

INT: She stayed there for a while?

MARGIT: She stayed there a couple of years, yeah, they were treated very well. I mean they lived in former boarding houses and so on. They were not confined to any area but it was an island. They couldn't go anywhere.

INT: How do you think you were saved from going to that place?

MARGIT: Later on you had to go to, I had to go to a tribunal. Everybody had to go to a tribunal, and they looked at you and they figured (laughs) I wasn't very threatening at that time, and in London, it was different. She was still in the country. It was different there.

INT: It was easier to get picked up in the country than in the city?

MARGIT: Yes, I guess so. Yes. But you know you get used to war and the war in London was not so great. We used to write letters to my sister in America. She would write, "How can you write such funny letters?" Because life goes on. Yes, and we never, I must say we were not really that worried. Trust, you know, we lived in England. England lived forever, yes. Not hardly almost didn't, but we were not really that worried that we would sleep in the street in a bunker.

[Tape 1 - End Side 2] [Tape 2 - Side 1]

INT: Today's date is August the 2nd, 1995. Margit, as I was listening to the tape of our first session I realized that there were some areas that I needed to explore more feelings about your parents. I was wondering about your mother, if I were to ask you to paint a portrait of her both physically and of her personality, what could you tell me?

MARGIT: She was a small person, very quiet when she needed to be, could always show her temper, but she was really the stronger one of the two. My father was the weaker one. She was extremely strong and how should I say? In a quiet way she managed us all, including my father, and she had a lot of strength. I guess she had it from her mother. Her mother had twelve children and a sick husband and managed a big business. Although she didn't do the cooking and washing, I guess my mother had the same strength and I think she was the one of all, she had four sisters and five brothers and I think she was the strongest of all. And I've talked to a cousin who lives in Israel who said that same thing. My father, on the other hand, was the one who was, he was a weaker person. He was also weaker in his health and did not have that willpower that she had. He liked a good life. My mother never, hardly ever went on a vacation. Maybe she went every two or three years for a week to her mother to visit, but I never remember that she went on a vacation. It wasn't done.

INT: Why do you think she didn't?

MARGIT: Because she knew she had to go to work, and see to it that everything was done and that was the way that she looked at her life, I think. And she was not dissatisfied with her life, I'm sure she wasn't. She saw her sisters, after a few weeks or so, and that was enough for her. In the same house that we lived, there was a movie. I never thought I'd go to that movie. She was satisfied. She loved to read. She came home, after dinner, she'd read before she went to bed, played solitaire or something and she'd ask us to all play solitaire and was very satisfied. She was very well educated, from her we learned all the poems by German writers. Well, we learned them in school, but

she made us remember them and she read the same books as all three of us, you know, and the six years later the same books, but she was a very well educated person coming from a small town in Czechoslovakia and she was brought up speaking German. She was not a Slav, you know they were not. And knew all the songs, we used to come to visit her sister, who lived here in, before my mother was married she came and they went to the opera, she knew all the operas. And from her we somehow learned a love of reading of music, of art. How she got it we really don't know. But my father came from a small place and he was not interested in these things. He liked to have a good time, you know. Not really what one now considers a good time. He went with his brother or to Germany for a cure or something like this. He always found a place where to go to, or went to his parents or went to Budapest to his brother. He knew how to amuse himself better than my mother.

INT: He traveled?

MARGIT: Well, somehow you know, we didn't consider this traveling, going to see your brother somewhere, this is visiting family. But he somehow liked the good life. And my mother considered a good life to be with her children. She didn't talk about it, never praised us very much, but we knew that she thought of us very well.

INT: How did you know?

MARGIT: For instance she would trust us to go somewhere by ourselves. "How come you trust us? Other mothers don't." She said, "I know what I've got. I can trust you."

INT: That's praise.

MARGIT: Sure it was praise, but she would sometimes say, "Why aren't you tall and skinny," or something like this. You know, we would laugh. Well, what would we do with a mother like you and a father like ours, how could we be tall and skinny? We were somehow not unhappy, but short. So we would tease her. But she was very proud of us, not a bragging person. Not what we call a "yekke." She was a very nice lady.

INT: Did you all feel close with her?

MARGIT: Very close, yes, we were very close with my mother. We were pretty close with my father too. My father was very, how should I say, outgoing. He would hug and kiss us. The next moment he would be mad at us, but that was his nature. We knew him. He would for instance say terrible things, punish me for something, then five minutes later would come and say, "Come on, I'll go and buy you a book," because he knew that's what I liked. He said I was the favorite child but I don't think I really was. (laughs)

INT: You don't think you were?

MARGIT: No.

INT: Why don't you think you were?

MARGIT: Well, I really got the brunt of his bad humor, I don't know why. He wanted me perfect, probably perfect. And I couldn't think of the word, I said I was shy. I was not aggressive. You could push me in a corner and I would not say a thing. That's one of my very worst points.

INT: Why do you think that's a negative?

MARGIT: It's a negative because I do not stand up for myself.

INT: You don't?

MARGIT: No, never did.

INT: But do you think that goes back to something from your family?

MARGIT: That goes back to the times, girls are not brought up to be aggressive.

INT: Assertive, let's say.

MARGIT: Assertive, yes, assertive. Neither one of my sisters is assertive. Even my oldest sister, she was much more quiet than I, but otherwise we were very much alike. My younger sister is not assertive, really. But that's the way we were brought up.

INT: Was your mother assertive?

MARGIT: Not really. Well, women at that time, you have to think back, that would be eighty years ago, a woman was just there.

INT: But she was running the business, wasn't she?

MARGIT: She was running the business, but on the outset my father was the one who signed the checks.

INT: He signed the checks.

MARGIT: That's all.

INT: What would you consider to be assertive? What would you have seen your mother do, for example, when you look back, how could she have been more assertive than she was?

MARGIT: Well, I really couldn't think of anything right now.

INT: Was she pushed around?

MARGIT: She swallowed a lot.

INT: She what?

MARGIT: She swallowed a lot.

INT: From whom?

MARGIT: From my father.

INT: Like what?

MARGIT: Who was, (pause) what should I say? (pause) I can't say it right, (pause) now maybe it comes to me, but right now I couldn't think about it. He was very temperamental, very up and down in his moods and she covered it up.

INT: She protected him?

MARGIT: She protected him.

INT: From whom?

MARGIT: From everybody, from the outside world because he was a weak person.

INT: You said he was melancholy.

MARGIT: He was melancholy, yes.

INT: He did have that period of being ill and having to be in a hospital. Well, that must have been hard. You said your mother was very strong during that time. How did you see that strength?

MARGIT: Well, she would not let us feel that he was sick. She would say, "Your father was in the hospital and you have to go and see him because he wants to see his children." She would go every weekend. We would go during the week or so. We had employees in the store, they would take us. It was quite outside the city, and we would go there. And she would say he'll come home, he's going to be all right. And when we got older, the children, we knew we had to treat our father very softly because he had (pause) I didn't know.

INT: Can you describe his behavior?

MARGIT: He would get into rages about nothing.

INT: Rages?

MARGIT: He would get into rages, yes, because I wouldn't eat dinner.

INT: Something insignificant.

MARGIT: Yeah, insignificant. Practically everyday, well, they had our lunch, that was our dinner in Europe, when they had this, in our business we had some room in the back where we ate. And I came home from school and I was a poor eater like some children are. My daughter was also a poor eater later on and her father didn't like it. But he would get into a rage about it. So my mother would say to me, "Go away. Come back in half an hour. Go to our neighbor. He'll simmer down." I'd come back, he used to say, "Oh, come on, I'll buy you a book."

INT: So it used to pass, these rages would pass.

MARGIT: It would pass in a very short time, but we got so used to it. On the other hand, I'm sure it did something to our psyche, to all our psyches.

INT: How do you think? What kind of effect did that have that you never knew when he was going to go into a rage?

MARGIT: We were rather careful with him whatever we did. We didn't answer back. Nobody answered him back. Maybe if anybody would have answered back he would have found out that there were other strong people in the family. He only had a loud voice.

INT: Do you think that you became less assertive because of being insecure with your father?

MARGIT: I don't think so. The people I know, there were hardly any of the girls there that were assertive. It wasn't the thing. A woman has to be quiet.

INT: So you mean assertive as the ability to speak up for yourself. And your mother was protective of your father even with you.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah.

INT: What do you think gave your mother the strength to get through this marriage with a man who had these kinds of moods?

MARGIT: Because at that time you did not leave a marriage, one didn't leave. Maybe she would have wanted to leave the marriage. She didn't talk to us about it, but one didn't. It wasn't done and to take the children away from somebody, I never knew anybody was divorced, never. No, I don't remember anybody, no. But they were not always good marriages in these families. But nobody, nobody ever got divorced, no. There wasn't even the question of it. This just never came to anybody's mind.

INT: Did she ever have anybody to talk to? Did she have friends or her sisters?

MARGIT: I don't know. Maybe she talked to her sisters. I don't know.

INT: To get some support.

MARGIT: They had a good relationship otherwise. I mean there was nothing.

INT: Did he explode with her too sometimes?

MARGIT: No, not so much with her. But he looked at her, I think he was a little bit afraid of her.

INT: But you said she swallowed a lot. What you meant by that?

MARGIT: No, what I meant is see, first of all, that either high up in the air or down low, down in the dumps. It's very hard to live with somebody like this. You never know what's going to be next, but they were married a very long time and she always took care of him, very faithfully. And he considered this was coming, that I'm sure.

INT: That it was coming to him.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: A very self-centered man.

MARGIT: Very self-centered man, yeah. And he loved his children.

INT: When you say self-centered, can you give me an example?

MARGIT: Well, he was always thinking of his health and he had to go and have some cure. But we never thought there was anything to cure, but my mother would say, "So why don't you go with your brother to this spa in Germany," or this and that and he always went. He didn't have to be talked into it.

INT: And your mother always stayed home and took care of the business?

MARGIT: Yeah, that was, that was how she worked.

INT: She was very capable?

MARGIT: She was very capable, yes. And she was very capable, but not only did she take care of the business, she took care of controlling a household and three children, and making her children's clothes, and see to it that they went to school and how they looked, and did their homework and all the things were done, but she was only one of millions of women.

INT: Who were doing the same thing.

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: So were a lot of Jewish women in businesses like that, running businesses?

MARGIT: No, she didn't run it by herself, and when he was all right he ran it too, but I mean there were plenty of women who worked like this. Her mother did.

INT: Her mother. What kind of business did your grandmother have?

MARGIT: They had glass and porcelain and wholesale in Czechoslovakia and her husband, my grandfather, fathered 12 children, but he was really a sick man.

INT: In what way was he sick?

MARGIT: He had rheumatoid arthritis and was in bed a lot for very many years before he died. And my mother actually was closer to her father than to her mother. The father was the softer one in the family who was, he was the one who when he went away would bring every daughter a little something. I have opera glasses that my grandfather bought for my mother and she gave it to me when I left for England like I was going to go to so many operas or theaters, but I still have this. And this must be an antique. It must be probably 100 years old. And she said he was the softer one, you know the one who had the feeling for his, for the girls, but maybe for the sons. I don't know everything, I know about the girls. My grandmother had to be strong, too, you know she had to, it was not only a family of ten kids, twelve were born but ten only lived; but there were always people who learned a trade and they lived in the same house, journey men who worked there and ate. She had a few people working in the kitchen. She ran the whole shebang. A little woman like me, only more rotund than I am and knew whatever was going on, whatever was going on she knew. And I guess my mother learned all these things from her that you had to be strong, that you had to do the things that are required and not talk about it.

INT: Which child was your mother of the ten surviving children?

MARGIT: She must have been about the sixth.

INT: She was in the middle.

MARGIT: She was right in the middle, yes. One child was born who died soon after. One brother committed suicide because he thought he had cancer when he was in his twenties. So, but the others lived until up 'til Hitler then. (pause)

INT: They all died?

MARGIT: Yeah, but there must have been, my mother was in the middle and she was sixty in 1938 so the others were probably older in their seventies, well into their seventies. There was a big difference between the first and last.

INT: How many of them stayed in Czechoslovakia besides your mother?

MARGIT: Two sisters and two brothers, my mother and five children lived in Vienna, the others lived in Czechoslovakia.

INT: So she had some of her siblings nearby.

MARGIT: Yeah, the others lived in Czechoslovakia.

INT: That's what you said that during Passover, some of them came.

MARGIT: Yes, and stayed with us.

INT: Okay, that was really good. The other thing that came up when I was listening to the tape was you said that the women in Vienna married late.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: Is that true of --

MARGIT: It was an economical thing.

INT: Can you explain?

MARGIT: Yes, but there was no housing provided after the war, you know. Not enough housing.

INT: After the First World War?

MARGIT: After the First World War you couldn't find an apartment. And my sister was somehow engaged to her future husband for five years. They could not get married because they couldn't get an apartment. The people lived in apartments only. It's a different system than here. People didn't have a house, you had to be somebody to have a villa or something on the outskirts. But in the city there were no small houses, there were only apartment houses. And she married because her sister-in-law's future husband's sister got married and left the apartment. They had one room. Her father-in-law had two bedrooms, they had the other bedroom. That's how they got married. They could not get any other place. I had a cousin who got married, she got a furnished room to live in.

INT: She was lucky, huh?

MARGIT: She was lucky to get a furnished room and young people were mostly in their late twenties when they got married.

INT: So there was a real reason why people didn't get married.

MARGIT: Yeah, and then there was the depression, a time when young people could not get married because they didn't have enough money. If they didn't want to live with their parents or if they didn't want to be dependent on money from their parents they couldn't get married.

INT: And most of these couples did not want to live with families.

MARGIT: No, they didn't. Maybe there wasn't even a chance that they could, the apartments were too small or my father-in-law's sister married a young man in an Austrian Province. She had an apartment there but I really don't know anybody who got married very young.

INT: Okay, there are a couple of other things that I wanted to go back and try to get a little more detail about.

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: Part of our study is looking at the transfer of Jewish identity between generations, so I'd like to ask you more about what it was like growing up and being Jewish.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: Okay, so you said that you fasted on Yom Kippur and you celebrated the holidays, but was any synagogue attendance involved?

MARGIT: No. My father did.

INT: But for you?

MARGIT: No.

INT: You didn't do it.

MARGIT: It was also not the thing.

INT: The thing you mean in the Jewish community in Vienna.

MARGIT: Yes, in Vienna.

INT: Only the men went.

MARGIT: We were so assimilated. The children, we went to visit my father on Yom Kippur, let's say. He was there, we went to visit him.

INT: In the synagogue.

MARGIT: In the synagogue.

INT: You did go to the synagogue.

MARGIT: We stayed for twenty minutes and we left.

INT: You went home?

MARGIT: Yes, went home. My mother used to go to the synagogue the first year she was married but then, you know they had to sit on top there.

INT: Yeah.

MARGIT: The women were gossiping, she said she can do it at home, she can pray at home. She was not going to be bothered by these women so she didn't go. It wasn't a thing like here. Synagogue was strictly a place to go for prayer. If you don't believe so much in prayer you didn't go. So we didn't go. I don't remember going. We had religious classes in school.

INT: You did.

MARGIT: We did, yeah.

INT: In the school.

MARGIT: In public school we had religious class.

INT: Jewish classes?

MARGIT: Yes, because religion was very much a part of the life, it permit the government. That was not a way here that the government does not have anything to do with religion. There were Catholic classes, the priests came to school and we had a teacher come into school who taught us to read Hebrew, not that I can do now but at least they had it. And taught us the Bible and siddur. That was part of the curriculum.

INT: Was this every day?

MARGIT: No. Once a week, yeah. It was part of the curriculum, a couple of hours we had this, I think, in the afternoon. And then, no, you had to do this until you finished school. There was always religious class.

INT: Is that where you learned most about Judaism in the public schools?

MARGIT: Yes, that's what you learned about. And so you could not say you don't want to send your child. There were always things in the paper, the people were atheists and the communists didn't want to send their children to school. They said there was no such thing as an atheist. They had to go to school to these religious classes, whatever they were, you know. I only went with one child to school in twelve years that was a Protestant because they were Catholic, 95%.

INT: Well, that was pretty liberal in those days.

MARGIT: Sure it was liberal. And another thing, Vienna was a very liberal city. The mayors were, some of them were social democrats and it was a very liberal city. We had welfare well before America did. And unemployment. Unemployment benefits we had well before America or any other country, maybe Germany did, but that I don't know. But the social services were very much in demand.

INT: Were you the only one that fasted in the family other than your father?

MARGIT: No, everybody fasted.

INT: Everybody fasted.

MARGIT: Everybody fasted.

INT: How did you reconcile celebrating the holidays without any other kind of religious connection?

MARGIT: Well, that's how we were brought up, that's it. That's what my father said. It's Yom Kippur, and you fast, and you do not listen to the radio, you do not read, but you sometimes cheated a little bit.

INT: Rosh Hashanah?

MARGIT: Rosh Hashanah we had.

INT: Your store was closed.

MARGIT: We had, the store was closed. We also kept Passover very strictly.

INT: So for eight days you didn't eat bread?

MARGIT: We did not eat bread, I still don't eat bread and we did not eat it. Now we mix it, my sister and I, we somehow say okay, that's okay. But at home, we did not change the dishes. We ate out of the same dishes, and if came somebody, "My G-d, you don't change the dishes?" But we didn't, but we knew so well that we were Jews.

INT: Did you read books about Judaism as part of your reading and your culture?

MARGIT: Not really. No, but we knew this was something.

INT: You just knew.

MARGIT: This was impregnated into you. You knew you were Jewish but that's it. My father didn't let us forget. It had been taught, preached. No, he didn't preach, no. But it was part of our life that we knew. Well, there was Tisha B'av, I think.

INT: Tisha B'av.

MARGIT: Yeah, which is now this weekend, I think, when you don't eat meat.

[Tape 2 - End Side 1] [Tape 2 - Side 2]

MARGIT: We knew that we were Jewish. As I said, we did not show it. I mean we never wore a Jewish star or something Jewish. But everybody, all our friends in school knew we were Jewish. We wouldn't come to school on a Jewish holiday. It wasn't like here, like they close the schools for Jewish holidays.

INT: Did anybody ever call you names?

MARGIT: No, I don't think so.

INT: Now you just said before that a non-Jew would say, "I know somebody who is Jewish."

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah, it is quiet. It was quiet but it was not, I don't, I was never called a name, no. I cannot say this, that I was called a name. That what happened behind my back, I don't know.

INT: Before you moved to England, what was going on with the family, was it understood that everybody was going to look for an affidavit to go?

MARGIT: Well, but everybody who was Jewish was looking for an affidavit from America, an affidavit that came only from America. We didn't have anybody. We had a cousin three times removed who lived there. And she said yes she would. It turned out that they didn't have the means. They had to have means.

INT: Money to pay for the affidavit?

MARGIT: Not only the affidavit, you had to show that you had insurance and things, that you could take care of this person. An affidavit meant that you are not a burden to the American state.

INT: So people in America had to have the means to show that they were going to support the people coming.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: I see. And then when you got the affidavit to go to England it was because you were --

MARGIT: That was a working permit.

INT: So the English who wanted the maids, they just said we'll take you to work.

MARGIT: Yes, yes.

INT: How did your parents feel about their daughters going?

MARGIT: They didn't feel good about it but they knew by that time they were all so trained to think that we had to leave, that there was no future for anybody in this country. I didn't want to leave because I had never been anywhere, but then it was oh well, it was an adventure.

INT: And did you speak English?

MARGIT: Well, I had one year of English when I was fifteen, very rudimentary English.

INT: Do you remember how you felt going to a new country?

MARGIT: You know, everybody took English classes before we left, I didn't. I said, "I know how to read." Well, if you can read you can learn, and I did.

INT: You could read English.

MARGIT: I could read English because I did this year of English and learned, "little robin red breast bird sat up on a tree," things like this, stupid nursery things. I still remember them. But I could read. I could pronounce with that terrible accent that lasted till now. But I could read. I could say r-o-u-g-h means rough or something, you know. I knew.

INT: That's a hard one too.

MARGIT: I mean you had, if you can read you can learn. If you can't read that's why I can't learn Hebrew because I cannot read Hebrew and that's why I don't. I go to Israel, I stay there four weeks, (?) come there with six words, come back with four. Two I've forgotten in the meantime. I mean I cannot remember this because I cannot read the language. Another thing, I had French in school for maybe five years and I was pretty

good. If I would have gone to France I would have learned in a very short time to speak. So somehow if you learn and know another language it's not so hard to just learn a third language. You know I had no problem at all with the English, not at all. First of all, when I got there I borrowed some books from the people who I was working for and I read a book with a dictionary. I wanted to read.

INT: You wanted to learn.

MARGIT: I wanted to read. I wanted to learn English. It didn't take me long at all. I came to this country speaking with an English/Austrian accent. My older sister said you'd better change it, change this. People won't understand what you mean, you know, overly polite and all this. And I have never lost my Austrian accent.

INT: I think it's sexy. I like your accent.

MARGIT: You like it? Well, it's about the only sexy thing about me. (laughs) Sexy was never my thing.

INT: Do you remember how you felt about leaving your parents?

MARGIT: It was bad, it was very bad. I remember going to this train station. It was dangerous to go to a train station because that was the SS, you know.

INT: Were they picking up the Jews?

MARGIT: Oh sure, they were picking up the Jews.

INT: They were still picking them up.

MARGIT: They were picking them up from the beginning. My younger sister was working in town in the center city and she had to scrub the pavement once, that's what they made the people do. Scrub the pavement. I mean ridiculous things. They would pick you up wherever. It was dangerous. My mother and father could not go with me to the station, my older sister did it, she went with me. And this was hard.

INT: Were they wearing the yellow stars then?

MARGIT: No, not yet, this is before the stars. But they knew by looking at you that you were a Jew.

INT: So your parents couldn't even go to the train station to say goodbye. That must have been a very painful time.

MARGIT: It was bad and I went with this friend who was, she was really good to be with. She was always laughing about nothing. Nothing really bothered her too much. She'd say, "You'd better do what I want you to do and don't be fresh to me because I

pushed you in the carriage when you were a little girl," you know. (laughs) She meant well. And after a few months I had enough of her. She also was a nymphomaniac and I couldn't take that. And I always wondered how did my mother let me go with her. But my mother trusted in her children. And she was, I used to laugh. We went across the English Channel and she was not feeling well, and went down to the cabin, but I stayed upstairs. Up there on deck when she had come up she had a date with a young man who visited her next Sunday. She was nine years older than I was. And she was attractive and very attractive to men. They knew what she was, you know. And well, it was in the beginning it was okay, but later on in my life I couldn't take her. We were life long friends.

INT: Well, I think when you have that experience together it's a very bonding experience.

MARGIT: Oh yes, it was really bonding. We got to, to London. First of all, we got held back at the border of Germany and Belgium because they suspected somebody was carrying money or something and they took us apart. They took us absolutely apart, her and me. But I got into the train but she missed the train and I sat on the border of Germany, no, in Belgium was the port, I think, where we took the boat to England but I thought I'd never see her again.

INT: Where did you see her again?

MARGIT: But she came then and she, I waited for her. I waited. And she came with the next train or something. But we got to London and they had a bomb threat, I don't know which train station we landed. And then we had to wait and we were supposed to be picked up and couldn't be picked up so we had to go ourselves to this little town, Surrey, in the South of England. And the Irish, you know the Irish had the bomb threat. That was our entry when we got to England. This was in 1938, it was the 5th of November and this is a holiday. They light bonfires. I can't think of the name of the saint or something.

INT: So you were really lucky to get this work permit to England.

MARGIT: We were lucky. We were lucky because later on it was not so easy and we got to these people who were not so horrible to us. The woman was not a nice woman, as it turned out.

INT: When you got to Surrey did they meet you at the train? Did they know you were coming?

MARGIT: Somehow, this I don't remember. This I don't remember how we got there. We got there somehow and they gave us our room, which we shared.

INT: She was a cook and you were a maid.

MARGIT: I was the parlor maid. The woman trained me as a butler trained parlor maid. You know, when you are young you can take anything. (laughs) We used to laugh our heads off, we used to laugh together hysterically about this.

INT: Making fun of them?

MARGIT: Making fun of them.

INT: Were they aristocratic people?

MARGIT: No, she was from a very rich Scottish family, I think, and so straight. He was a nice man. He was retired. He was maybe 48 years old, I don't think he was a retired officer. He had been in India and in China and he was a nice man. I was the maid. He considered me that I was once not a maid. He was a nice man. He was just, I remember he used to pick me up. The boys used to come home on vacation and they went with their father in the car when I had my day off and I walked trudging down to the train station. I remember I was going to go to a little town, he picked me up. But on the way back they let me go down there, so I wouldn't get out of the car in the front of the house.

INT: Did they ever refer to the fact that you and your friend were Jewish?

MARGIT: They knew about it, no.

INT: There was nothing?

MARGIT: Nothing. The English, this I must say about the English, no. He helped me. I brought a camera along. My brother-in-law had bought a very expensive camera. You couldn't take any money out, you know. You came out with, I think, thirty pounds at that time, or thirty shillings, I don't know, a very small amount of money. And he wanted the money in England. I took the camera and they wanted me to sell it. I wasn't supposed to have brought the camera into the country but I didn't know this. He helped me to sell the camera but he put in an announcement, an ad, in the paper to sell it. Somebody read this and they sent somebody from the government, I don't know from Scotland Yard, I think. But the criminal -- yes! They looked at me. They looked at me. They knew I wasn't a criminal.

INT: That it was your camera, it wasn't stolen.

MARGIT: I should have had to declare it. But I didn't know this. What did you know?

INT: So did you sell it?

MARGIT: I sold it but not for the price that I should have sold it. But it was okay. I didn't have to go to prison. It was a very bad, it was a very bad time, believe me.

INT: So you were scared, you were nervous.

MARGIT: Yeah, sure, sure. Yeah, I was an enemy alien at that time and doing something like this. You see, he meant well, you know, by advertising he didn't know it probably either, you know.

INT: So he protected you.

MARGIT: He protected me, yes. Well, he said that I was a refugee and this and that.

INT: And during this time you were still writing to your parents?

MARGIT: Yes, I was writing to my parents, yes. I think I did. I have some letters of my mother. And if I want to have a good cry I read them. I try not to, but, but until 1939, when was it? September the 1st, 1939, that was, the war was declared in Europe.

INT: I believe you said that in her letters she was just concerned about you, she said everything is good with us. She just worried about you.

MARGIT: She was worried about my sister and myself. My sister came in the meantime and stayed in the same village.

INT: Did you get to see her often?

MARGIT: She was working for a very, very prominent person. She was the between maid.

INT: What does that mean?

MARGIT: That's the maid that does all of the other things that the others didn't do. This is called a "tweenie." The family where she worked, he was the exchequer during the war. Exchequer is like the finance minister, he was really somebody. And the woman, there were only two people and they had a house with 33 rooms. And they had a butler, and a cook, and a parlor maid, and Elsa, who was the "tweenie," and they were all from Vienna. So it wasn't so bad, you know.

INT: So how often did you see her?

MARGIT: I saw her once a week.

INT: On your day off?

MARGIT: Yeah, we had one afternoon a week and every other Sunday afternoon, I think too.

INT: Did they pay you a salary?

MARGIT: Yes, but very little, because they really took advantage of us. But what could we say? We couldn't say anything. In London you could have gotten more. At that time I wasn't ready to go to London.

INT: So how long were you in Surrey?

MARGIT: About ten or eleven months at the most, I have a book that has everything, every move I made.

INT: You have a diary?

MARGIT: A book. From the, I don't know who gave us this book, I guess Scotland Yard. You had to register right away when you, every alien at that time had to register with the police right away if you were supposed to be a resident for some time, you had to register with the police. From the first time if you moved you went again to the police. If you got a job you went to the police and they really knew where you were. I still have this book.

INT: Is that because you were an enemy alien and that they check you?

MARGIT: Then I was not an enemy alien anymore. They still checked on you. They check on the aliens. Maybe that's not such a bad idea. Because later on I went to a tribunal. I was told I'm now an alien and a refugee of Nazi oppression, I think they called it. I moved from one furnished room to another, I had to go to the police. They had to know wherever you are.

INT: Where did you live in London?

MARGIT: When I went to London, for a few weeks I did not have a job, so I lived in a furnished room.

INT: What happened that you felt you had to leave there, because it took a lot of guts to move to a big city.

MARGIT: Right, I picked up a friend there who was gutsier than I am. She said, "Come with me to London."

INT: So you left your other friend.

MARGIT: Yeah, but her mother came and she stayed there with her, I think, but I don't remember anymore.

INT: Her mother?

MARGIT: Her mother was old. Her mother was old when she got out. I don't know how they got her out. And she came as a maid, her mother was also in her sixties, which

was considered very old now, but at that time I thought it was 150. But she got out and the mother. I was accused by this woman that I lied, that I had broken something.

INT: The woman you were working for?

MARGIT: Yes, once that I had done other things and I thought I don't have to take this. I can go to London. London was the Mecca for everybody.

INT: You were assertive.

MARGIT: At that time, yes. And I went, I went to London. There was a committee that helped the refugees. Are you familiar with London?

INT: I've been in London.

MARGIT: Bloomsbury. Bloomsbury, that was the liberated part of London, and as a matter of fact it was called Bloomsbury Place and there you imagine you met everybody that you knew from first grade on. (laughs)

INT: Jews?

MARGIT: All Jews, yes.

INT: Was Bloomsbury a Jewish section?

MARGIT: It was not a Jewish section, but this place there was an old house, and they made it, a committee like the HIAS. It wasn't the HIAS, but there were mostly German and Austrian refugees.

INT: In Bloomsbury.

MARGIT: Yeah. Czechoslovakian refugees went another place, but they somehow helped you. Also I never got any money from them, I think, no, sometimes they did help you with money. But somehow my people, they heard something what was doing, about what's going on and we always thought the war will be over in five minutes, yes?

INT: What year was this?

MARGIT: 1939.

INT: When you went to London had you still been hearing from your parents or you stopped hearing?

MARGIT: No, I did not hear anymore because the war started and I was still in Hazelwood because I remember we carried those gas masks. There was an alarm and we

had to try the gas masks but nobody knew how to handle it. They were absolutely useless. Excuse me for one minute. (interruption)

INT: Margit has just shown me her certificate of registration that she had to have the police sign off on every time she moved or got another job.

MARGIT: Yes, yes.

INT: And also her identity card. And then you were saying when you came to America...

MARGIT: To America we did not have a passport, we had alien travel papers that was called "Nansen pass"-- passport. And with this we came to America.

INT: Let's wait, we're not going to be in America yet. We're still in England.

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: Okay, so you're now in London. Did you live in Bloomsbury or just stopped there?

MARGIT: No, I didn't live there.

INT: Was that a social network, a support system?

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah.

INT: How did they help you?

MARGIT: Well, somehow socially they helped us. You know we, there were other people. We knew there were thousands of other ones and I found a job through the paper with this Jewish family. And you know this (shows registration book) permission granted for employment as resident domestic servant with Mrs. Landau that was 1/1/40. So I was only there maybe for five or six weeks without a job and then I started this job.

INT: Doing what?

MARGIT: Doing? I was like a mother's helper they called it. They were very nice. They were really very nice to me. They knew I was Jewish, they were Jewish. The woman had come to England in the First World War and she, as a child she knew what it was to be a refugee and so it was, see it says here (pointing to registration book) that I moved many times, I moved from where I lived to this place.

INT: Were you living with the family before you had your own room?

MARGIT: No, no, I lived with the family first for, I don't know, when did I move? I only lived about a year and a half there, then I got a job in a big dress manufacturing company, C & A they were called. I think that they are still in business. They had cheap merchandise.

INT: Then you had a room of your own.

MARGIT: Then I had a room and then later on we had an apartment.

INT: We?

MARGIT: My sister and I. My sister also.

INT: When did your sister come?

MARGIT: She came a little bit later to London. She came a couple of years later maybe and we stayed there together. We had an apartment. We were established.

INT: You communicated with her when you were in London. She still was in Surrey...

MARGIT: Oh yes, yeah, sure.

INT: And then you knew that you were going to eventually get together.

MARGIT: Yeah, we knew we would because she got the job in London and we were both living there. This is my husband's (registration) book; this is mine.

INT: So that you were there for a year and a half, and living with this family and then you got a job in the factory. What year was that?

MARGIT: That was in '41. '41. You see, this is very easy to add up. Everything is in this book.

INT: You went to work in '41.

MARGIT: On the first, on June, 1941 I went to work there. The National Service Department Employment Exchange it says here. And I explained to them (the Jewish family) that I wanted to have my own life, and they understood I was a Jewish girl who didn't want to be a servant all the time. I was in contact with these people and went to the weddings of the daughters and you know, corresponded later on with them. They were very nice to me and it was not traumatic at all. It was traumatic not to hear from our parents. My sister worked in the city in the west end of London and not far from the Red Cross. She went practically every other week to see. They had lists of people that were sent away, that were found, that were saved. Nothing showed up. That was the sad thing. The war, the bombs that came a little bit later when I was working as a mother's helper in a place a little bit outside of London, we had the worst bombing in London and

it was bad. But you know what? The English, they are so cold, they don't show any emotion. It helps you. I always said, if there is a war I'm going to England again because you didn't see anybody cry. The parents would come to work and the house next door to them was bombed out. Their mother was bombed out. It was matter of fact there, you know and I couldn't really understand it because we were a little bit more emotional, but it was good to be with them. You know there's a war on, that was the thing, you know. Everything was, "You know, there's a war on." That was the excuse for everything.

INT: Did you go to bomb shelters?

MARGIT: We had a bomb shelter outside. It would have helped like nothing. It was made out of bricks over the sewer system. You could hear the water running. It was not safe at all. But we only went only a very short time, we'd rather die on the fourth floor. It was cold. We were cramped together, there were lots of people. And we were lucky nothing happened.

INT: So that wasn't so frightening because you were with the English, right?

MARGIT: Yes, it wasn't, it wasn't, I tell you that wasn't because we were with the English.

INT: That's amazing.

MARGIT: They're not such emotional people. And they considered everything, well there's a war and you have to expect everything. And you went through such hardships. We were okay, we were only two people, two young girls. I went shopping on Saturday. A whole Saturday I shopped and my sister did the cleaning and the washing and cooking while I shopped. When you had a family I don't know how you did it. And they had these small amounts of maybe two eggs a month and an ounce of meat. We were terribly rationed. But nobody really had to die. It wasn't a good diet because we hardly got any meat. Very little protein. When we came here, my sister said, "How come you're so fat compared to me and I'm living in America and you came from England?" (laughs)

INT: So did you stay in the factory until you came to America?

MARGIT: Yes. It was a good job. I was in the, in the patent department, in the sample department. They made the samples for this factory, which was a very big factory.

INT: What kind of a factory was it?

MARGIT: They made clothing. You know, if you did not go into this factory, you had to go into the land army. You had to have an essential job. This was considered essential. My sister worked a short time as a welder, Rosie, the welder, yeah.

INT: What did you have to do as part of the land army?

MARGIT: Well, you work on a farm, I guess. I didn't want to do that because well, the men had all left, you know. And the girls went to work on farms and the boys went into the army. And they needed people.

[Tape 2 - End Side 2] [Tape 3 - Side 1]

MARGIT: So how could I have gone to be a farm girl? (laughs)

INT: From the big city.

MARGIT: Yes. Not only that, but what did I know about farming? I weighted 100 pounds, maybe.

INT: What did you do in the factory?

MARGIT: There was a man who was making a pattern for a certain size. He'd cut this and I had to sew it together. I had learned this in school.

INT: When you were in the guild?

MARGIT: Yeah. I learned this. And you had to do it and there was somebody there who timed every seam that you made. How long does it take, because later on it went into the production and that's where they had sitting there each girl made another thing.

INT: Assembly line.

MARGIT: Assembly line, yes. So we had to do this. But we had to do this very well. This coat had to look like it was from a very expensive place, because the sample had to look good and had to be figured out. I learned a lot there.

INT: Why was that supposed to be essential?

MARGIT: Because people need clothing. It belonged to Dutch Jews.

INT: Really?

MARGIT: Yeah. And they still, I don't know if the factory is still there but there is a retail store, C&A and it's all over Europe. Canda was the name of the company. C&A, all over Europe, they were in Switzerland in every town they had a C&A.

INT: Did they hire a lot of Jewish refugees there?

MARGIT: No. There were not many. The designer was a German Jew and then there was I, my sister was for a couple of weeks there too with a young boy from Vienna, he was also there. We were the only Jews. I don't know if the other departments had any.

INT: So what kind of life did you have other than working?

MARGIT: Oh we had, our social life. We had friends.

INT: Did you still go to Bloomsbury?

MARGIT: Now after that you didn't get Bloomsbury.

INT: Didn't go anymore.

MARGIT: No, this was like a house to help -- a committee to help people but no, we had friends. We had the cousins, at that time already they had been there and quite a big circle of friends, we had. We didn't go to the theater, to the ballet, (laughs) that's for sure.

INT: Were these all Jewish refugees from Vienna?

MARGIT: Mostly from Austria or Czechoslovakia, but you see, one thing I didn't like about it and later on I thought about it, the English Jews were not interested in helping us.

INT: Oh really?

MARGIT: No, they were not. They were afraid, I guess, first of all they never showed their Jewishness off very much or that they had magnificent synagogues. I never went into one but I have been told they had. But we were never asked, "Why don't you come for a Seder," or something like this, never. Nobody ever did. When I was working for this Jewish family naturally there was, but we knew people, some other Jewish people, they never wanted to be associated with us, because we were too obviously Jewish, I guess.

INT: Do you think it was that, or that they looked down on you because you were refugees?

MARGIT: No, I don't think so. No, I don't think so that much. I wouldn't know, because I really didn't have that much contact with people, social contact, you know, that they didn't look down, they didn't want to have anything to do with the refugees because then everybody will know that they are Jewish, too, also.

INT: So you felt that the English Jews were not proud of being Jewish.

MARGIT: No, at that time it didn't come to me. Later on when I thought about it, that we were not made welcome by the Jews. My sister still corresponds with some, these two people, almost fifty years from England were Gentile blue collar people.

INT: So the Gentiles were more welcoming than the Jews?

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: So there were no English Jews that befriended you.

MARGIT: No, nobody. No.

INT: So you all supported each other.

MARGIT: Well, we lived like in a ghetto. We were like a ghetto, these Austrian Jews.

INT: One building?

MARGIT: No, no, we lived in a small building, you know, four apartment buildings. No, there were buildings that only refugees lived. We didn't want to live there, you know that was really like a ghetto.

INT: That must have been really isolating for you to be there and have nobody--

MARGIT: We were not part of the country.

INT: You were not part of the country.

MARGIT: No, no, the country didn't want to give us citizenship either. It took a long time until my cousins got citizenship. Later on they got it. England ignored us.

INT: So what do you think gave you the strength? I mean, it was a very down situation, the war kept going on, you didn't feel accepted and you didn't know where your parents were.

MARGIT: Hope, that we'd get to America where my sister at that time already was.

INT: Was that what saved you?

MARGIT: That was it. We never even wanted to get involved with somebody.

INT: You mean romantically?

MARGIT: Romantically, yes, because we knew we wanted to go to America, both of us. You know you lived from day to day in a situation like this. We didn't know whether we were alive the next day or whether we'd have a roof over our head.

INT: Because of the bombing?

MARGIT: Yeah. So it was just a careless way of living really. Live today. You do it today, never thought of tomorrow.

INT: Describe what you mean by living carelessly. What did you do?

MARGIT: We were not going to make any plans. No, we did not have any plans. We also could not travel a lot. We could only travel twenty-five miles from where we lived. So we couldn't travel, you know. And later on they lifted this a little bit but we didn't have any money to travel anyway, you know. (laughs) We couldn't even travel in England. What I saw in England was thirty years later.

INT: You've been back?

MARGIT: I've been back to England several times.

INT: Did you visit anybody?

MARGIT: Yeah, my cousins.

INT: But nobody you knew during the war?

MARGIT: No. Nobody. No, just relatives. We went to a bar mitzvah, and to weddings and so on, but we did not, we did not. We didn't, I didn't remember the names of the people. I forgot this. This is a chapter that was closed.

INT: While you were going through this situation, which was very unsettling, did you ever recall your values and religious beliefs from your life before the war?

MARGIT: Well, I don't know, because we thought when you go through this, you don't really know what's happening to you, you know. History happens only in hindsight and when I think back now, my G-d, how could we have been so cheerful, but we were. And we still, we tell our friends stories how it was. We laughed and laughed until we had tears because some things were funny to us. People say, "How come it was so funny," you know. Well, first of all, everything that was not sad was funny to us, somehow, you know, if it was on a little edge of fun in it we made a lot out of it, and if you have a good sense of humor, which we both had, it was okay. We lived once in an apartment we shared with some friends, and my sister and I lived there, and there was a hole in the ceiling because there had been a bomb, not where they had bombed, but the plaster had come down and you could see the two by fours or whatever they call it and there was a mouse. Every time it rained, around the same time, every night there was this mouse which we called Henrietta, you know. (laughs) It was Henrietta. That's our mouse, you know. We wrote to my sister about it and she said how could you ever find something funny in this? But you made up your own fun. It was funny that this mouse came every night at the same time. Now when I think about it I still laugh, because it amused us. We were satisfied with very little, that's what I want to bring out. You are set up in a situation like this, you cling to any little thing that you think it's good for you. Laughing was good for us. We didn't do it consciously but we laughed a lot.

INT: It was a way to cope with your situation.

MARGIT: Yes. You know we met cousins two years ago, and five years ago we went to a bar mitzvah and we were talking about old times, naturally, what else? And they say, "Do you remember when you made the dinner party? You had a chicken and we all came for a dinner party?" And I said, "Yes, and we didn't even know what kind of death the chicken had died?" Because my sister got it from one of her people who she worked for and he brought it for a Christmas present, I think, and there must have been at least twelve people for one small chicken. But they remembered it, you know. It was an occasion. We had such a good time with the chicken. "You made such a good thing." The chicken was so good because we didn't have many chickens during the war.

INT: And you remembered it.

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: It was special.

MARGIT: I still don't know how it died, believe me, I don't know.

INT: It really doesn't matter. (laughs)

MARGIT: Nobody died of it.

INT: I just wanted to go back to the Jewish piece here. Did anything Jewish come into your lives during this time? I'm getting the feeling you just sort of lived your life and being Jewish was just something--

MARGIT: Being Jewish was part of all that. I mean not consciously. We knew we were Jewish. There's a holiday, we fasted that we probably went to work or something.

INT: You didn't take off work--

MARGIT: Because it was Rosh Hashanah or something. You couldn't do it, no. Not that we didn't, never said that we were Jewish. We worked with all these Gentile women, but I never hid it. I never did. I would never have said I'm not Jewish, but we did not flaunt it.

INT: On Passover did you all get together and have a Seder?

MARGIT: No, that we did not have.

INT: You didn't.

MARGIT: No, some of the friends we had were not really brought up that way.

INT: They were not? I'm sorry?

MARGIT: They were not brought up that way and I really don't know what was with the matzos, I don't know.

INT: So you're saying that they were even less religious than you.

MARGIT: Well you know, the Jews in Czechoslovakia were also very assimilated and somehow lots of them felt what really is it good for, you know, you think why did G-d do this to the Jews, but I never could think that way because I'm not deeply religious. When you're deeply religious you say, "G-d, why did you do this to me?" But I am not deeply religious. I don't blame G-d. I don't know if there is one, you know. It happened. I had a conversation with one woman, a Jewish woman who asked me the other day, "Do you know," did I read Mein Kampf? I said, "No, I did not read Mein Kampf because I don't want to read Mein Kampf. I know what it's all about. I don't have to be. I know all about what happened through Mein Kampf." So she says, "Do you know what Hitler said? Hitler said, who made him become so big?" I said, "So what did he say?" She said, "The German Jews." This was said by a Jewish American woman. I said, "What do you mean the German Jews?" "They wanted him to be so big?" I said, "You read the wrong book." What could I say? What could I say to a foolish woman like this?

INT: It's shocking, isn't it?

MARGIT: Isn't it shocking? German Jews. The German Jews had it worse than we did, because the German Jews always thought that they were G-d's gift to, to everything because they were Germans. In their opinion they were Germans first and then Jews, so did the Hungarian Jews.

INT: Really? Hungarians first and then Jews?

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: But the Austrian Jews didn't feel that way?

MARGIT: Lots of them did too, yes.

INT: Because they were so assimilated they felt comfortable.

MARGIT: They were so assimilated. Well, the Germans will say, "We were in the First World War. How can they kill us? How can they send us away?" They were the first ones to run.

INT: They must have been shocked when the Germans came marching in.

MARGIT: They were so shocked. But you know what? We weren't shocked because we expected it, but we were foolish. We didn't listen to the German Jews who came to Austria selling soap and all kinds of things that nobody wanted because they didn't have, know how to make a living; we did not believe them.

INT: So you knew because the German Jews were coming in and saying this is what happened to us and nobody paid attention.

MARGIT: Yeah, and nobody wanted to. Even my relatives in Czechoslovakia, they came to Vienna to see how we did fare, these five siblings fared there and my mother said, "Do something about it," then my aunt said in Czechoslovakian, I remember she said, "We are not afraid."

INT: They didn't want to believe that it could happen.

MARGIT: They didn't want to believe this, you know, that's what I said. We were very foolish that we did not believe. I don't know where we could have gone. I had friends, they went to Bolivia at that time because two of their brothers were in concentration camp and that was in May, 1938. There was also Dachau.

INT: But before 1938 nobody left. I mean even though the winds of war were coming.

MARGIT: No, the winds of war were coming.

INT: Nobody left then.

MARGIT: Nobody wanted to believe it.

INT: Nobody wants to leave their home, you know?

MARGIT: No, no. And that was their livelihood, their homes, their roots, everything. They had been there for hundreds of years and so, where my grandparents lived.

INT: It's understandable why people didn't want to believe such a thing could happen.

MARGIT: No, they did not want to.

INT: Who would have ever thought?

MARGIT: That's what I say, that was foolish of us that we didn't do anything. But hindsight, no good.

INT: Nobody did anything and when they tried to get out they were turned away, right?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: I mean they went to St. Louis.

MARGIT: Yeah, sure.

INT: So once you could try to get out other countries didn't want the Jews anyway.

MARGIT: Yeah. Everybody believed in Roosevelt. You know, I remember when Roosevelt died. I was in a bus going to work and there were some English women crying because Roosevelt had died. It came up later Roosevelt wasn't so good for the Jews.

INT: Well, he was good for the United States but he wasn't good for the Jews.

MARGIT: Yeah, and he knew it. But my sister absolutely idolized Roosevelt. She was so upset.

INT: When she found out the truth, huh?

MARGIT: Yes. But people went to China. They went to Shanghai, the Jews didn't have it so bad either. I spoke to people who lived in Shanghai, they said it wasn't that bad. You know first of all it's an entirely different atmosphere, I mean nobody is Jewish there. It wasn't so bad for that they say. They came out, they left.

INT: They left after the war.

MARGIT: They left but they said it wasn't really bad.

INT: It was safe, I guess, you know.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: You go where you can to stay alive.

MARGIT: Yeah. This was the only thing, stay alive, not what you have, what you will have, what you didn't have. Stay alive, that's what it is.

INT: Margit, we're going to talk next about the end of the war and how you left. Do you want to do that a little bit?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: Okay, so you were in London working, how did you find out about the war being over?

MARGIT: The 9:00 news was a must.

INT: You were following the war on the radio?

MARGIT: In London, in England it was a must. Whatever you did you dropped. At 9:00 you listened and we heard all these wonderful speeches by Churchill, and to listen to Churchill was like listening to an actor. He was really a wonderful speaker and he boosted the country with his speeches. And well, we hoped. We knew about D-Day, you

didn't know everything. You didn't know what happened in the next county, if it was bad, you know, but you knew what was going on.

INT: Did you know about the Jews?

MARGIT: No.

INT: About camps or deporting people?

MARGIT: No.

INT: Nothing.

MARGIT: When I came to England it was Kristallnacht. My sister was in Austria. She doesn't let me forget it that she was there and I wasn't, but Kristallnacht was a very bad night. It was on, November 11th, or 7th when we came to England. It was in the paper, but we didn't read the papers and I didn't know about it and the people did not tell us. They did not want to tell us, you know. Later on we found out about Kristallnacht. It was really bad, but we really did not know anything about the Jews, about the concentration camps we didn't know much. Later on there were just little things.

INT: In the English papers.

MARGIT: Yes, so it was not easy. We only looked for names. Did you hear anything? That's all we talked about, did you hear where they sent people. My mother did write to my sister that they sent my uncle away. My uncle and his wife away.

INT: When was this?

MARGIT: It was, it must have been in the '41, '42.

INT: I thought you said your mother--

MARGIT: But '41 she couldn't write anymore but she got some letters.

INT: Up until '41 you were still hearing from her.

MARGIT: She wrote to my sister in America, she always wrote.

INT: She was in the Vienna ghetto then?

MARGIT: Yeah, '41. End of '41, 7th of December was the war declared here, so she could hear 'til then. Later on my sister got in touch with my uncle in Hungary, then my parents wrote to him and he sent the letters to my sister, because Hungary was not in the war at that time until later when the Russians came.

INT: So when is the last time you heard from your parents?

MARGIT: We got a few letters we got from Hungary from my aunt at the beginning of the war between the United States and Europe.

INT: Before Pearl Harbor.

MARGIT: Right, before Pearl Harbor we heard my sister could get mail from Vienna.

INT: But afterwards you did not, you did not hear anything.

MARGIT: No, no. And then a few letters from this uncle in Hungary, and then later on he was deported too and we did not hear at all, not 'til the end of the war, but we think they were deported in 1942. You know I had a book, it was called A "Toten" Book. A book of the dead. Who was deported from Vienna or Czechoslovakia to Theresienstadt. My sister has one and I have one. I sent mine away to Albright College in Reading because they have a museum.

INT: Were there names of people you knew in that book?

MARGIT: Names of people I knew, but my parents were not in this book.

INT: Where did you get this book from?

MARGIT: From Vienna somehow. There was only one edition and we sent for it, I didn't know, my sister sent her money there. I tried to offer it to the Museum in Washington. They did not answer me. But, so I heard from somebody that Albright College in Reading has a Holocaust museum, so I sent it to them.

INT: Was it printed in Vienna?

MARGIT: It was printed in Vienna.

INT: And you got it after the war.

MARGIT: After the war.

INT: It's all the people who were deported?

MARGIT: Thousands of people, my uncle, some of my relatives were in this book.

INT: And does it say where they died or their fate?

MARGIT: Some died in Theresienstadt, some say that they were deported.

INT: So this was just from--

MARGIT: It was only from Theresienstadt but it had dates you could check that somebody had died. One of my uncles died there, my uncle and his wife died there. His brother was sent away. His wife died there. And it's really the Germans are very thorough. You know I sent for some papers for my husband who was in Austria in Mauthausen, he was in Dachau, he was in Auschwitz. I got all his hospital papers years and years after the war.

INT: Amazing.

MARGIT: I mean with all the case histories. Not long ago I threw this out, I did not want to look at this anymore.

INT: And even during the war they kept all those reports. Isn't that amazing?

MARGIT: All the records. And now, I don't know if I told you, I got a letter from Vienna offering me citizenship again after I signed a paper that I would never return. When I got my passport, there was a big J on it. I signed the paper I would never return. Now they offer me citizenship. You know what I did with that letter?

INT: What about property?

MARGIT: Property, no, we never got anything, but my parents sold our business for pennies.

INT: When they left.

MARGIT: No, not when they left. Before they had to close. They could not run their business anymore. So they had to sell it to an Aryan. We knew a man, he used to work for my father and we sold it to him for a pennies. No, we once applied to, we didn't even get names.

INT: Okay, so you were in London and you heard on the radio about the end of the war.

MARGIT: We went right to Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus and danced.

INT: You were so happy.

MARGIT: But we almost got crushed. (laughs) We went home very early and we were with a couple we knew from Vienna and everybody was delirious, but it took us one year from that day to get to the United States.

INT: Describe that process of getting to America.

MARGIT: My sister was here. I had an affidavit which was not good enough because my cousin didn't have enough money, so my sister somehow through friends, she met somebody who was really a nice man and he sent a lot of affidavits to people. And my

younger sister had one, I don't know from whom anymore, and we tried to get here but there was no passage.

INT: You couldn't get a boat?

MARGIT: You couldn't get a boat.

INT: Because there wasn't any space?

MARGIT: There was not enough space for people like us that were safe in England. And there were lots of mines still, there were minefields in the ocean. They had to clear this too.

INT: Were there priorities for passage for people who were in deportation camps?

MARGIT: Well, the deportation camps only started to send them out in 1946. There were some people who came here in 1946, but we also got out in 1946. We came by plane. It must have been one of the first planes. My husband came in 1949 but my brother-in-law came in 1946 with a troop ship, which did not carry troops, which carried people -- refugees. Yeah. But it was hard. I spent all the money I ever saved in this seven and a half years on that plane.

INT: That was a lot of money.

MARGIT: I was told that I had to have fifty dollars to show, which turned out it wasn't true. My sister had to telegraph me fifty dollars.

INT: Amazing.

MARGIT: But we came with a lot of luggage which she sent us, which was really silly. We could have saved (laughs) a lot of money.

INT: By not bringing all that stuff with you.

MARGIT: By not bringing all that stuff. We asked our sister in a letter what should we bring? She said bring everything. She didn't think we had so much stuff.

INT: Where did your sister live?

MARGIT: My sister lived at that time in Strawberry Mansion. She had an apartment, yeah. Had a little store on 31st Street in Strawberry Mansion. My brother-in-law tried to establish a business and my sister was very artistic but something, I don't know what started it, some earrings. He went to sell those earrings and this business still exists.

INT: Jewelry business?

MARGIT: Yes, costume jewelry. My youngest sister still runs that business. It's fifty years.

INT: It's still in the same place?

MARGIT: No, they moved many times.

[Tape 3 - End Side 1] [Tape 3 - Side 2]

INT: So they have the business and they lived in Strawberry Mansion.

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: And you flew to the states.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: And you were ecstatic that you were coming to the United States.

MARGIT: Yes, yes.

INT: So what was that like? What was it like landing and --

MARGIT: Oh, landing, it was a shack there in Philadelphia Airport.

INT: You flew Philadelphia direct?

MARGIT: No, no, we came directly to Philadelphia. London, Shannon, I remember where we ate the best tomato soup, we still talk about it, with a little bit of cream on top. And we must have landed a couple of times, Greenland, I guess, and it took us 24 hours. It was a propeller plane, actually, in 24 hours and we landed here in Philadelphia at the airport. There was a customs check, that was all. I had brought wool. You know, everything was rationed. Wool and we all knitted and I had brought wool because this was something, a commodity there, you know. I had to pay duty (laughs) on the same wool I sent back to England later on because I didn't need anymore. You know, but they needed it.

INT: So you and your sister came together on the plane.

MARGIT: Yeah, we came together.

INT: Were you excited?

MARGIT: We were so excited, yes, and so was my older sister and her husband who was always a very good friend to us, and he took my younger sister to show her center city. She went into Nan Duskin, and got a job, three days she was here, (laughs) because

she had come from London and they always wanted somebody from Europe, you know. She was a milliner and she worked there for a year or so, and then she worked at Pullingham and Sion.

INT: What did she do there?

MARGIT: She made hats.

INT: She made hats. And then what happened to you?

MARGIT: Well, I walked around for three weeks raring to get a job and I got a job in a salon, in a very nice salon and made clothes, worked there for, well for three years almost. Then I bought a business for \$2,500. I bought a store on 17th and Walnut Street. I had some money but I had to borrow some money from my sister.

INT: How long did you live with your sister?

MARGIT: We lived with her all the time, yes.

INT: All the time, you all lived together.

MARGIT: Yeah, we all lived together.

INT: Did she have any children then?

MARGIT: No, she didn't have, she never had children. She didn't have children; her father-in-law was also living with her. We lived there maybe a year or so in this apartment and then they bought a house in Overbrook. Not in Overbrook Park, in Overbrook and they had a house.

INT: And you lived with them in Overbrook also.

MARGIT: Yes, until I got married in 1952 and my sister married, my younger sister married in 1960. We all lived together, and my sister was our mother and we had to force her to take money from us. We earned a living. We earned something, but we forced her to take money. She didn't want to take any money. My brother-in-law spent more on restaurants and theaters than we paid my sister, that's for sure, because we always went.

INT: All of you together would go.

MARGIT: All of us.

INT: You were one big happy family?

MARGIT: My brother-in-law schlepped four women, at least. Three, and I had a girlfriend who still whenever she introduces me, she says, "Her brother-in-law took me along too." We were all one happy family.

INT: So you were supportive.

MARGIT: It was very, they were supportive. And we were supportive of them. I used to come from work when I went to work there in the evening.

INT: In the store?

MARGIT: No, they had a wholesale business at that time. So we made all this jewelry and we worked there too. I mean we were supportive of each other. Then my younger sister married and her husband became a member of the family, became a salesman in the company, made him a partner.

INT: So you worked in the salon.

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: How many years did you work?

MARGIT: About three years.

INT: And then you decided you wanted to do your own thing.

MARGIT: I wanted to do something else. I was working in my thirties.

INT: What was there about you, this person who says you are not assertive that could (?)

MARGIT: Well, I was talked into it, probably. Now that I think back I was talked into it, because there was no future in that salon and I was always going to be making clothes. So what. But I wasn't that keen on that anymore, but I felt I knew about business. I grew up in a business. I was with my sister in her business. I knew, I thought, well, I could do it. I bought an existent business. I didn't buy a shell, I bought an existent business.

INT: What kind of a business was it?

MARGIT: It was hosiery and accessories. It called it at that time Dorothy's Hosiery. So I made it Margaret's Hosiery. And didn't really know much of that side of the business, but I had a very capable woman working for me.

INT: And she was from the business originally?

MARGIT: Yes. She was only a part-time person. It didn't take me long to learn this, you know, for me. You know about business, you know about business. But it was, we worked it up and my husband came into it. I must say he worked it up.

INT: After you bought the business you got married?

MARGIT: Yes. I had waited for three years.

INT: Okay, now, from the way you describe yourself I don't understand how you had the wherewithal to do what you did, to go into a business even if you had to borrow the money. I mean what was there inside you that decided to take a risk?

MARGIT: I grew up in a business. I knew how to handle people.

INT: Still, this is a new country and--

MARGIT: But it wasn't a new country in 1949 for me. I was here three years. I spoke English.

INT: Well, that was a big step.

MARGIT: I spoke English.

INT: And you felt it was just a natural step for you.

MARGIT: Yeah, it was a natural step and the other people, you know this so-called "grines," we called each other "grines."

INT: Newcomers, yes?

MARGIT: They all went into business, eventually, and some of them did not speak English and still don't speak English.

INT: So newcomers, it was like you wanted to work.

MARGIT: You wanted to do something for yourself, and you know I have known dozens of people who were chicken farmers. Did they know about chicken farming? No. But I said the chickens understand Yiddish too. That's why they picked up chicken farming. But some of them became extremely successful. Miles Lerner, I think he was a chicken farmer in Vineland.

INT: Right, right, from Vineland.

MARGIT: Yeah, look at him now. There are some extremely successful started out as chicken farmers.

INT: Well, one of the things we're looking for in this project is looking at what made people have the strength to do that. 'Cause that's a big risk to take.

MARGIT: That's a big risk, but if you don't take a big risk you will never become anything.

INT: So in other words you felt it was worth--

MARGIT: From a materialistic point of view, you must think of that. Well, if not a materialistic thinking person, you say, oh well, I'll make out, this is enough for me. But the Jews who came from the other side at that time had to be materialistic, because they did not have enough education for this country to become lawyers and doctors. A lawyer could never become a lawyer, had to go through law school again, yes. I know plenty of lawyers who came here who became salesmen of some piddly thing. And I know a few doctors, yes, who had a year of internship, or something.

INT: Were there any agencies that helped you in Philadelphia to get settled?

MARGIT: We didn't go because my sister took care of us and we didn't have to go to any agency.

INT: So you didn't (?)

MARGIT: No, I did not have to. No, I did not have to. We were not in that respect because we did not have to do anything.

INT: What about other friends?

MARGIT: Lots of people did, went to the HIAS or to the Jewish employment or something. And I feel very sorry for the Russians now because they have a hard time.

INT: Well, they have some support networks.

MARGIT: When the older ones, when they come it's harder, some people in this building stay with their daughter, they cannot find anything.

INT: It's hard to move from one country to another.

MARGIT: Very hard. It's even harder when you came as a refugee, but it is very hard to move from one country to another without speaking the language, without knowing all the mores, what's going on, how, what you should do. We laughed when my sister told us the story about somebody was promising to send him, get him a job and came to visit him. They say "I see you" and they waited for him to come because they didn't know the meaning of, "I see you" doesn't mean a thing. It's like, "how are you?" Does it mean anything? No. And it is very hard, but we were so lucky coming to our sister who knew everything, who taught us everything, you have to expect this or that.

INT: So she held your hand through everything.

MARGIT: She held our hands through it.

INT: And your social networks was through your sister?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: You didn't have to work at meeting people.

MARGIT: No.

INT: Were there refugee organizations meeting?

MARGIT: There was the Central Club it was for Germans, the Germans had started it, and we was there for a short time, but we did not feel comfortable. I didn't feel comfortable.

INT: Why? Because you were Austrian?

MARGIT: The Austrians and the Germans never got along.

INT: Oh really?

MARGIT: Never.

INT: You didn't feel comfortable, you said.

MARGIT: No, we had our own. You didn't have to have an organization. We knew lots of people. We knew, now they must all have died. Now, I don't know anybody from Vienna but at that time we knew lots of people. We always go back to the same people.

INT: So you had that social network.

MARGIT: We had a social network here and in New York.

INT: Did you and your sisters, here in America, try to find out where your parents were?

MARGIT: We tried.

INT: How did you, where--

MARGIT: We had a lawyer who tried to find things and he said that they were sent away in 1942. If it's true I don't know. The number is not important.

INT: How did you and your sisters deal with the grieving process for your parents?

MARGIT: We talked a lot about it. We didn't hide it. We talked about it.

INT: Do you feel that being together helped you to go through the mourning process of their loss?

MARGIT: Oh yes. I always said it was made too easy for us. There they were, then they were gone. You didn't have to see them go. You were not notified that they weren't. I always thought it was too easy and I've always had a guilt feeling about that.

INT: I'm sorry!

MARGIT: I had a guilt feeling about it. I read every book that came that you could read and I said, why do I read this? It tears me up. My sister said, "But don't read it." I said, "But I have such a guilt feeling that I had it so much better than these people who went in concentration camps, that wrote all those books. There's one woman, she travels around with her story. Her name is Gerta Weiss."

INT: Yes, she was on television.

MARGIT: My sister knows her and I've heard her speak and always gives the same speech (?) to the word, to each word. I mean she tells the same story but she really, she's a very nice woman.

INT: Have you met her?

MARGIT: I met her, yeah. My sister has her book and she's a very nice woman that she can go through this every year, I don't know. But I know people who speak in schools about their experiences in the concentration camps and it tears them up, every year they tell me.

INT: Really?

MARGIT: But they feel they have to do it.

INT: They have to do it. It's important to tell the story.

MARGIT: It is important to do it and not people that they used to speak; that do not have that much education because then they didn't live long enough there to have an education, you know. Some of them they were thirteen, fourteen years old when they were taken away from their parents and sent to concentration camps, didn't go to school afterwards, but they do it every year.

INT: I guess you feel yourself fortunate that you were able to go to school.

MARGIT: Well, I am, that's why I say I'm not a Holocaust survivor.

INT: Well, you still are. Look at the story you're telling me about the disruption of your family and your career.

MARGIT: From that point of view I am, but from the point of view of suffering I am not.

INT: Well, everything's relative.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: And did you and your sisters and your brother-in-law stay close?

MARGIT: Yes, we stayed very close. My brother-in-law died very young of cancer. He was 52. And my older sister lived with my younger sister, it was not a good idea but she did live with her. She was later on sorry because she didn't have a life of her own, but we were very close, yes. That's all we had. And that's why these families are all very close. There is this Association of Holocaust Survivors, I belonged to it. I am not close to them. I stick out there, I am the "Yekke." I'm the only person who is not Polish or Dutch or something. So I stick out, but if this is somewhere in the Northeast I'm not going, but when my husband was alive we went. These people consider this organization as their family because some of them do not have a family, you know. They really, they stick together. For years, this is already 45 years old, I think, this organization.

INT: Yeah. Now there's children of the survivors that have their own group.

MARGIT: Yes, yes, the sons and daughters.

INT: They have a support network also.

MARGIT: Yes, yes. That's their family. They have nobody. When they die out, well, I don't know. It will have to be told by the children. My daughter knows. My daughter knows and a little bit my grandchildren know, but they know about their grandfather. He had a number there and but they will forget.

INT: When all of you were living together what were the feelings about religion?

MARGIT: Well, we had kept. We had Seder.

INT: Did your brother-in-law go to synagogue?

MARGIT: A wishy-washy Jew, but he went to synagogue with his father.

INT: And what about your sister? Did she?

MARGIT: Well, she later on went. She went to the synagogue here. She was a member here of the Beth Zion/Beth Israel.

INT: That's your younger sister.

MARGIT: And my older sister was always a member. I was never. But my younger sister is still a member there.

INT: Oh, good.

MARGIT: But her husband was the president of the synagogue. He was the first non-American president.

INT: But they couldn't get you to come, huh?

MARGIT: It doesn't do anything for me, I always said to my older sister. "I go with you, but it doesn't do anything for me," but she would say, "Aw, come with me," and I would go with her for company.

INT: And you were saying that when you were living all together you celebrated Passover?

MARGIT: Oh yes, we always celebrated Passover.

INT: But you didn't go to synagogue for Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur either?

MARGIT: No, we didn't, no.

INT: Did anyone attend synagogue?

MARGIT: My brother-in-law and his father went, my sister never, we did not go. Later on she went to the synagogue, but at that time when we all lived together, no, we did not go. Maybe it was a matter of money, synagogue is expensive. It might have been a matter of money, I never thought about it. But no, I never really wanted to go. My husband definitely didn't want to go. And I said I'm not a widow, I'm not going by myself.

INT: I was trying to learn when you were living together if there was any more feeling of religion.

MARGIT: Well, we were Jewish.

INT: And you believed in G-d.

MARGIT: Well, somehow. (laughs)

INT: Did you believe in G-d?

MARGIT: Well, I don't say I believe in G-d. I know there's something. How could a child be born? Where would a child come from if there wouldn't be something higher, you know?

INT: Because you think children come from G-d.

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: That children are a miracle.

MARGIT: Otherwise I won't tell you any lies. I'm not very much of a believer.

[Tape 3 - End Side 2] [Tape 4 - Side 1]

INT: Let's begin talking about you're opening your business in 1949.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: And that was in 1949.

MARGIT: 1949.

INT: You continued to live with your sister until you were married?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: Okay. So what was running a business like?

MARGIT: Well, I learned all about this business which I had never been in, these women's accessories, I knew about costume jewelry because my sister was in the wholesale business and I used to help out there. But I learned it by doing things, you know, you are not business oriented, it sounds hard, it's not that hard. If you know a little bit of business you'll learn. I used to be good with people, you know, one on one. I have been told by people that I meet now that came to my business, they always said, "You were always so good with people." I didn't realize at that time, but people used to talk to me about their families, and bring me their children, and later on grandchildren. I was good with people and I enjoyed my work very much. I liked to go to work in the morning, until later on when it did not work out so good. At the end when we were there thirty years, it just, not that we were tired. It was just, I think nasty in town. You know, we had holdups, things like that.

INT: So it wasn't the business was not making money, it was just the extraneous stresses of living and having a business in an urban environment.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah.

INT: Okay, so let's talk about how you met your husband.

MARGIT: Well, I met my husband--

INT: Excuse me, what was his name?

MARGIT: Henry. Well, it was really not Henry. His name was Chaim Shipek. Can you hear all these things in the back of my throat? He changed it then legally and then he became Henry Shipek, very easy to pronounce. But I met him through some friends of my brother-in-law, well everybody wants to marry off an unmarried Jewish person, and I met him and I met some other people too. And I had some kind of a relationship with a friend of, with somebody I met by going to have new glasses done, the optician. The optometrist. We had a platonic relationship for several years. He was very nice, typical bachelor, never wanted to get married. Good enough for me, I wasn't going to get married. I was an old maid with no plans to get married, let's say.

INT: You were.

MARGIT: Yeah, I was. I did not want, I had a very nice life, but, well then I met this man and that man, it never worked out. And then I met Henry and I always had that desire to help somebody. He needed help, you know. He really needed help. (laughs) I must say he really needed help. And I guess it appealed to him too, but we walked around each other for maybe two years. And then one day I said, "Well, let's say yes or no," and he said, "Yes." I asked him, because I was forced to ask him. My family, get somewhere, this is not going anywhere. And we somehow got engaged in, let's say in fall, not really with the ring. Also he gave me money for a ring and asked me to get it because he was at that time in New York and I was here and he knew I knew people who sold real jewelry. But I said I don't want a ring. I never liked diamonds. I never liked jewelry. You can see I never wear anything. And I put in a bank account, the money. You know, you tell this to somebody, a woman doesn't want a ring? No, I didn't want the ring. My sister said, "You always want to be different." Okay. A good description of me. That was in fall. We got married the following February. I had a small apartment on Chestnut Street and it worked out all right. He was working in a knitting factory in New York and somehow that wasn't good. He had to do night work. And then he came and worked with me in the store.

INT: Explain how he came to Philadelphia.

MARGIT: He was living in Camden, that's how I met him. He was brought over from Germany where he had lived after the camps and brought to Camden. You know that time each Jewish community had to take care of some refugees like they do now with the Russians? He was brought to Camden and that's how I knew him. He didn't like Camden so he went to New York, really didn't like it in New York, he then came back again.

INT: Came back to?

MARGIT: To Philadelphia and we got married at that time.

INT: But how did you meet him? Did somebody fix you up?

MARGIT: Well, there was a friend. Yeah, somebody fixed me up. Brought him to the store to look at me. But no, he was personable, very quiet, very introverted all his life.

INT: When you say he needed help, in what way did he need to be helped?

MARGIT: He needed somebody to love him.

INT: And how did you know that?

MARGIT: He didn't have anybody in the family, of his own family, you know. And you knew that somehow you had that feeling, this man needs somebody. And I always had that feeling for people with a little bit different somehow.

INT: Did you fall in love?

MARGIT: I wouldn't say fall in love. I cared for him and he cared for me. And we lived together for 35 years.

INT: Do you know why you were hesitant about getting married?

MARGIT: I did not meet the right person maybe too.

INT: Who would have been the right person?

MARGIT: I don't know. I don't know. I was never romantically inclined. Oh, yes, I was, I had a terrific crush on a man eighteen years older than I.

INT: When was that?

MARGIT: Oh, that was when I was about nineteen or twenty. He was very nice to me, but he was married with children. I visited his family, but I told you I was not very mature. I still had this crush and that was a real romantic crush I had on somebody. He knew it, but he did not take advantage of it. No.

INT: Tell me something about Henry's life, where he came from.

MARGIT: He was born in a small town in Poland and a family of, I think, seven children, I never knew. And not prosperous, but you know, like all these people lived in these shtetl. When he was about fourteen, I think, they moved to Warsaw and his father died when he was, I think, twenty, of prostate cancer, and all his life he was terrified of it.

INT: Henry was terrified of it.

MARGIT: He was really, really terrified and he also had problems with it but it never came to cancer.

INT: He had problems with his prostate, is that what you're saying?

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: Did he have prostate cancer?

MARGIT: No, he did not. He did not have prostate cancer. He died of colon cancer, but that had gone to the liver. But he was terrified of prostate cancer because his father had died at an early age, I think. I really don't know how old the father was. He was the second youngest, I think, of family of sisters and brothers. I never found out how many. He never wanted to talk about this.

INT: He never would talk about his family of origin.

MARGIT: That there was only one sister that he talked about.

INT: And you don't know why he wouldn't talk about the others.

MARGIT: He didn't want to, he didn't talk much about her either. He did not want to talk about his life.

INT: Do you know why?

MARGIT: It was painful because--

INT: Because he lost everyone?

MARGIT: He lost everybody. The mother was still living at the time of the Holocaust and she also died. But there was a whole family, there must have been nieces and nephews I never knew about. We had a picture of his sister because her brother-in-law was living. We found him by chance, he had those pictures of his sister. We had it enlarged and that was the only thing he had, you know. Nothing else. And he must have had a pretty good life, I don't know. He worked, they had a little, how should I say it? They had some knitting machines and they did it from home. That's how it was done, and I remember people did this also in Vienna on a small scale. And they worked for a small company. And then the war came and he was able to slip out of Warsaw when the ghetto was being made, you know, he was able to get out of it. And he must have had some Aryan papers. You know, some people had it. And he lived in the woods. But then he became sick. As it turns out, he had appendicitis, which turned into peritonitis so he had to go to a hospital. He was not far from Cracow where this Schindler thing was, you know. And this camp was called Plaszow, and he had to go to this camp because there was a hospital that Jews could go to. It was a camp for Jewish people. Schindler was also not far, in this same area, but he was not connected to Schindler. He never

talked about, no. So he had to go into this hospital. He recovered from this, how do you say, peritonitis, which had a scar and this was this big. You could put your thumb into it, badly done, probably, too. And from there they took the people to Auschwitz, you know. That's how he got into Auschwitz, because of this. In Auschwitz he stayed I don't know how long, a long time, until they came to the death march, and from the death march they went into Austria. Some death march from this is Auschwitz with the border of Germany somewhere in the east, east, I guess.

INT: Was that near the end of the war?

MARGIT: That was at the end of the war. That's when they knew it was over and they made them march. But they called it the death march because so many people died. He survived it and I don't know how much he weighed, hardly any, a skeleton. And got into Austria and there into Mauthausen or to Dachau, I'm not positive. I don't know. And from there he was liberated.

INT: Did he ever see his family again?

MARGIT: No, he didn't, no.

INT: Once he left he never saw them again. He didn't know what happened?

MARGIT: Yeah, I don't think he knew what happened. No, no, he didn't.

INT: Did he try to find any of his relatives?

MARGIT: Oh yeah, still and he was lucky enough to find, when he was liberated and brought into an American hospital in Bart Ischl, Austria, where he--

INT: Where?

MARGIT: Bart Ischl it's called. This was a spa or something. The American army had at that time established a hospital for these people and he was there, I think, a year and a half.

INT: In the hospital.

MARGIT: Yes, with a leg in traction because from all this he had a leg that was swollen this much. There was also mental things too, because I got later on the medical records and it said that he had mental problems, down and depressed and well, how else could one be?

INT: The medical records were from this spa. It was a hospital?

MARGIT: Yeah, from this hospital.

INT: You got this from Germany.

MARGIT: Yeah, from Germany, years later they still had them. That was the amazing part. In Munich, I think they had them. I don't know how they got from Ischl to Munich, but they had them. I got them. I had a cousin in Vienna who did it for me and she had connections. But he needed the records, because you know the Germans paid reparations, but you had to show that something happened to you. Not enough that they kept you as workers in these as slave workers in these camps, and let you die of hunger and all kinds of things. Now he had the proof.

INT: He was able to do that?

MARGIT: He was able to do that since he got this, the lowest range of the reparations.

INT: Why was it the lowest?

MARGIT: Because he wasn't sick enough.

INT: So they based it on how sick he was?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: For the reparation, how much he suffered.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: The fact that he lost all of his family and--

MARGIT: That is nothing. That was nothing, and there were lawyers here who made a good living from all of this, all of the Holocaust survivors, because they all applied for it. Some got more, some got less.

INT: What year did you say he entered Auschwitz?

MARGIT: It must have been in 1943.

INT: How old was he?

MARGIT: Thirty, thirty something.

INT: What year was he born?

MARGIT: 1911.

INT: Did he ever talk about his experiences in Auschwitz?

MARGIT: All the time.

INT: All the time.

MARGIT: All the time. He said they were working somewhere, they were sent to work, into work somewhere. He worked as a carpenter. He always thought he would like to become a carpenter. Luckily he didn't, he wouldn't have ever made a good living, because he was not good at it. (laughs) But he had to do it.

INT: Did he have these skills before or did he develop them?

MARGIT: He developed somehow good enough for what they did there. But they were sent to work in units, you would do this, do this and this. He was lucky enough to become a carpenter because it was inside somewhere they did something. I don't know what they made, I forgot, probably bunks or something. You know they slept in these bunks. He said there was a young boy there whom he somehow befriended and looked after him. That young boy was his lifelong friends afterwards. Years later he would tell how Henry once kept two potatoes for him. This young man found two potatoes somewhere in the field and gave them to him to hold. In the evening Henry gave him the two potatoes. This was something, I said, "So why shouldn't he?" But what did I know? Because if you had something you held onto it, you didn't give it back. This was the way things were. Two potatoes were so important that this young man was a friend for life.

INT: Because he shared it with this young man.

MARGIT: No, he didn't share, gave it back to him.

INT: He gave back both potatoes?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: Did you meet this young man?

MARGIT: Oh yes.

INT: Does he live in America?

MARGIT: Yeah, though he is not so young anymore (laughs) but at that time he was, yeah, the whole family.

INT: Did he live in Phila?

MARGIT: He lived in Vineland. I'm not in contact with them. As long as Henry lived we had some kind of contact.

INT: So lifelong friends because of that experience. That's wonderful. So what other kind of stories did he tell?

MARGIT: When he told how awful it was, how they slept three or four people in one bunk, one practically on top of the other. And how little they had to eat because the soup they gave them in the beginning; the best thing was when you were in the end of the line because you got the bottom of this. It's such stories, I'm sure the children who listened to these stories made faces, you know, because they thought so what, how come?

INT: Your children?

MARGIT: No, I mean all of these children who had to listen, and I know there was a big family and they all talked about these things. Everybody was somewhere.

INT: You're saying in general children of survivors?

MARGIT: In general, yeah. Well, I don't know, Ruth, she knew these stories. As a matter of fact the other day, they had this HBO play it's called, I don't know what it was called. It was about Gerda Weissmann.

INT: Yes. I saw it on television.

MARGIT: Yes. My daughter made a tape of it. I don't have a VCR because I am not mechanical, so she played it for me on Sunday. She had to run out. She said, "Well, here it is. I can't sit here and watch it," because she didn't want to cry in front of me. Well, I sat there, I cried too. I heard that story a million times, but when you hear it -- it was very well made, I think the way it showed and illustrated all these people walking and running and on the trains and all of this. And the woman really suffers through it every time she tells it.

INT: I'm sure that's true.

MARGIT: So I remember, my grandchildren weren't home. It was just her, and she went back and forth and she's a grown woman. She couldn't listen. She listened from the kitchen. She didn't want to watch.

INT: Do you think it was too painful?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: Do you think she felt that way because her father is a survivor of the camps and from hearing his stories?

MARGIT: Well, I'm sure she did because these children grow up as Holocaust children. Some are very active now, some of them because that's what they heard. That when the relatives came together that's all they talked about. If they were in Germany in the camps

or in Poland in the camps or they were in Siberia, which wasn't much better. They all talked about their experiences, and I remember sometimes my daughter would say, "Oh, the violins are playing."

INT: That's the way she was coping with this.

MARGIT: Yes, that's how she coped with this. And that sometimes I reminded her that she said, "The violins are playing." She said, "Mom, that's all we heard." They did and it's good. Because they understand, and I know my son-in-law would have walked out as soon as it started. I can't say he isn't a caring person, you know, but he doesn't know a thing.

INT: He doesn't.

MARGIT: He doesn't want to hear this, I think. Neither did his mother or father. And my father used to, my husband used to insist on talking about it and my daughter would say, "Why do you talk about it in front of them? They are not interested." I used to say, "Never mind. Let him talk. They should."

INT: Were they American?

MARGIT: Both born in America, but only first generation. Their parents came from Russia and suffered enough.

INT: Pogroms?

MARGIT: Sure they suffered, pogroms, being poor, and not being allowed to do this or that, they suffered much more than we did.

INT: So your husband talked about it even though he didn't have good listeners. He just needed to talk.

MARGIT: He needed to talk, yes.

INT: Did you feel that that was therapeutic for him to talk?

MARGIT: I think so, I encouraged him to talk about it because he was a very, an introverted person and needed to come out with something, you know. And he did. It didn't help too much. It always bothered him. He always thought this is the root of it, you know, and we used to tease him and his friends. You know, they had these movies about the Nazis. Loved to watch it, to see the Nazis being defeated. It's only a movie and I walked out because I couldn't stand to hear the words, the talk in German. And they would cherish even the silly ones, "Hogan's Heroes," or something. You know, just to see what could happen to them, you know. It's hard to understand.

INT: You said his friends. Was that from the survivors' group?

MARGIT: Mostly people we knew from the survivors' group. Yeah, yeah. And we did not always go there because it was in the Northeast. But, we knew a lot of people there and they all talked about it, you know. It was their -- they still talk about it, 50 years later they talk about it. All made their lives, made lives in this country and in other countries and some recovered better than others.

INT: Did Henry have nightmares?

MARGIT: Oh, he always had nightmares. He used to wake up suddenly (gasps) like this. And I would touch him and say, "Well, it's only a dream," like you'd say to a child. He didn't always talk about it.

INT: The dreams?

MARGIT: He had nightmares. He had nightmares years and years later. I always had nightmares but there were things, silly things like I couldn't get my passport or something, but that passed away. At a certain time I didn't have nightmares anymore.

INT: When Henry was in Auschwitz did he stay well?

MARGIT: Luckily he was very well. He stayed well.

INT: That must have been really hard to stay well.

MARGIT: He was strong. He was strong (?)

INT: It amazes me how people stay well when they haven't had food and it was so cold.

MARGIT: Cold. They had to stand out in the, in the cold for hours, for sometimes they called "appell," you know, they counted them.

INT: Roll call.

MARGIT: Roll call. And I know a husband of a friend of ours who was there before the war in Auschwitz. They stayed one night for five hours in the cold winter.

INT: They actually kept him in the factory the whole time because he had the skills.

MARGIT: He was inside most of the time.

INT: Was he worried about being gassed?

MARGIT: I don't know.

INT: About being killed?

MARGIT: I really didn't know. At that time, I don't know if they were near these gas ovens. I don't know because they had big camps. And I think they knew about it but I don't know if he was worried. You feel when you're in such a situation you only think from one hour to the next, I guess, and what happens next -- you couldn't do anything about it anyway. I think that's how it must be. Luckily I was never in this situation. I was always in a situation like anybody else, like everybody, I wasn't taken out of it, and, so well you had to think this way now.

INT: You told me before I put the tape on that Henry said he didn't think you could survive.

MARGIT: No, no. He said because I was not assertive enough and oppressive enough. He would let them do with me whatever I wanted to.

INT: Do you feel that's true?

MARGIT: Yes, I do, yes. Yes, because he said the Polish Jews made it, because they were always used to a hard life. The Hungarian and French Jews died like flies, he said.

INT: Because?

MARGIT: Because they were not used to this life. First of all they lived a life like anybody else. The French Jews all together, I mean, not the ones who were sent to this camp did not make it and the Hungarians too because...

INT: Because they were more assimilated, they had an easier life than the Polish Jews.

MARGIT: Yes, had a much easier life. In the shtetls they had to fight for their lives.

[Tape 4 - End Side 1] [Tape 4 - Side 2]

MARGIT: You see the people in France didn't know anything about this. I'm sure there was anti-Semitism. In France it always was, they don't like Jews. But it was not so open; there were not that many. But in Poland there were millions of them. In Russia and Poland there were the most. So they really were not used. They were used to being hunted.

INT: So would you say that he survived because he was just tough? Because you couldn't stand up to the Nazis. No, he was physically strong too. And mentally strong also because anti-Semitism was so prevalent in Poland?

MARGIT: Yeah. And this, this, how should I say it? That you had to do something. You had to do it yourself. Nobody could help you, you had to help yourself. So like all the others who came out, they all said the same thing, you had to be strong.

INT: And did he talk about any other experiences like sharing with the young man and how they helped each other.

MARGIT: You know, he said there was a girlfriend. How was she a girlfriend? Women were on the other side of the camp, but they saw them, some are going to the fields or wherever they worked. But there were some kind of a wire or something between. There was one girl he liked, I guess, and he gave her sometimes something he found, you know, something to eat. We met this young woman; she wasn't so young when we met her. She lived in Canada, married and lived in Canada and somehow got in contact with her. And we went to a place, she went to a bar mitzvah in Brooklyn and we went there to meet her. You know it's many years ago.

INT: So how did you get in touch with her?

MARGIT: I don't know how he got in touch with her.

INT: You remember meeting her.

MARGIT: Yeah, I remember meeting her and there was this woman, let's say she had something to do with the Nazis and she was not so nice from our point of view but she lived through it. And she called him once and she married also to a very well-to-do man here in America. And he said I have to meet her, all of a sudden. He never met her because it didn't -- she called him once somehow. You didn't talk about it if you had something to do with Nazis. But you could understand it. It saved her life, but there they made friends.

INT: In the camps?

MARGIT: In the camps, yes. It didn't last. Only this one young man which really lasted. But, there are lots of people that he met and found later on also. He found some relatives, first cousins after the camp. They had been in Siberia and ended up in Germany in Regensburg, Bavaria. And there was a camp outside, a DP camp, Fern White or something and where are all these people congregated. They came from all over into Germany to go somewhere, they didn't know where. Most of them wanted to go to Israel, so did Henry. But Israel was not, you couldn't go there, only after '48 and that wasn't so easy. So you came to America, which was easier at that time.

INT: What date did he come to America?

MARGIT: He came in '49.

INT: How long was he in the hospital?

MARGIT: For a year and a half but then he went to Regensburg. That's where he found his cousin. And he stayed there, probably, I have to think about it.

INT: Where did his cousins end up?

MARGIT: They also ended up here in America. They all lived in Massachusetts and I'm still in contact with them, by telephone only, but I am in contact.

INT: So he came to America in '49 and went to Camden.

MARGIT: There the Jewish community who looked after people. There were a number of people in Camden who he met and they were friendly. I'm still friendly with some of these people he met in Camden or later on when he actually came to Philadelphia. He had a trade. He was a knitter from home. So he got a job at this time, '49. I guess it wasn't such a bad economic time. It didn't take him long to find jobs and he worked here for a couple of years on and off, this was only a seasonal thing. Then he went to New York because he thought he might find a job. They liked it. They lived in Coney Island where some of his cousins lived. And he knew me already.

INT: Oh, he knew you already. Was he coming to Philadelphia to date you?

MARGIT: He used to come to Philadelphia sometimes to date me.

INT: Were you his first girlfriend in the States?

MARGIT: In the States, yes. He had a girlfriend in Germany, a young Gentile woman.

INT: A German woman?

MARGIT: Well, she was a Czechoslovakian. No, I don't know where she was from. Maybe she was a German.

INT: Did she live through the war too?

MARGIT: No, she was only, she was not. She was a very young girl, much younger than he was.

INT: So he had other romantic interests?

MARGIT: Oh yes, sure. And because in Germany you were a bachelor and you had some money. I don't know if he had any money. You know they had these certain things. They came out of the camps with nothing, probably a striped uniform. But then somehow they got money from the committee who was the HIAS.

INT: The HIAS at the time.

MARGIT: I guess so. They got money to live on. They were given money to get a room, get a furnished room somewhere and with a German family naturally and he also started to work. I have, I have a little book that gives him permission, shows that he can

work there. I'll show it to you, too. And he made money. He worked with his family, with his cousins, they had an apartment. He went even to Leipzig, that was a textile town to buy machine, you know. And they had a business.

INT: In his room.

MARGIT: In his cousin's apartment, it was larger.

INT: So he was in the textile business.

MARGIT: They made textiles there. And he had money and if you had money you could get a German girl for nothing, because they did not care as long as they had something, if they got something, you know they, it is just the opposite, Hitler didn't want them to mix with anybody who wasn't Aryan and after the war, I know a few people who came home with German wives.

INT: People who were in camps?

MARGIT: Came home with German wives. As a matter of fact his cousin did, she was really a very nice young woman. She died very young. She was a very, extremely nice young woman. She was also a refugee. She came, a refugee. They lived in Sudeten, part of Czechoslovakia which was always very German and they left Germany. But they were refugees from Czechoslovakia, only they wanted to be refugees. They wanted to go to Germany and thought they would make a good living. And her father, I think, was a barber, a hairdresser or something. Her brother still lives in Germany. She was very nice and she wanted to prove that she was not anti-Semitic and she wanted to prove she has an uncle who was Jewish, she kept on saying, and she wants to get his birth certificate and all kinds of things to prove it. Then I used to say, "Don't try to prove so much. You're a nice woman. You are being accepted by everybody else."

INT: Let me be sure I understand, this was a, the wife of one of...

MARGIT: A cousin, of his cousin.

INT: So he married a non-Jewish woman.

MARGIT: A Gentile.

INT: How did that sit with the rest of the family other than you? You were accepting.

MARGIT: Well, they didn't like it, but when I came into the family she was already established. But he was maybe twenty-five years older than she was even. We are very friendly with her children and with the husband.

INT: She raised the children as Jews?

MARGIT: As Jews, yes, she raised the children as Jews.

INT: Did she convert or anything?

MARGIT: No, she didn't. I don't think so, but she was the one who learned to read Yiddish so that she could read *The Forward*, you know.

INT: That's amazing.

MARGIT: She was an intelligent young woman.

INT: She wanted to be accepted.

MARGIT: She wanted to be accepted, yes. And she was accepted by most of the outsiders, not so much by her brother-in-law but his brother also married a Gentile. (laughs)

INT: So how old was Henry when you got married? You were 38 and he was?

MARGIT: He was three years older, 41.

INT: What kind of a wedding did you have?

MARGIT: I did not want a big wedding because we didn't have many relatives and I got married in the study of the rabbi at 58th and Walnut Street. There was a Rabbi Lang. I just looked at my marriage certificate the other day and we just had a few people, a few of his friends, and my family, and my sister, and brother-in-law, and my sisters, and brother-in-laws, and his sister and brother-in-law. So we went to UHR Restaurant somewhere in South Phila. That's what it was at that time, I don't know if you ever knew about this.

INT: I haven't lived in Philadelphia that long.

MARGIT: Oh, okay. That was, yeah, there were several Jewish restaurants and we had to go to a kosher one because my youngest sister's brother-in-law was very religious when it came to food, so we had to go to this place. And we went from there to Atlantic City on our honeymoon. The President Hotel which is now, how do they call it when they put all this dynamite in it, you know what they...

INT: It was blown up.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah.

INT: To make room for a casino.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah.

INT: That was at one time for many years a very fine hotel.

MARGIT: Yes, well we stayed there for a few days and came back and I went back to work and he found himself a job at that time. And he had found himself a job, he went to work. But it really didn't last too long because it wasn't working. I went to work in the morning and he slept, you know because it was a night job.

INT: Was it a factory?

MARGIT: It was in a factory. There were many textile factories and they are all out of business now, but at that time Philadelphia was a textile town.

INT: So it didn't work because you didn't have a life together?

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah. So we decided he would be with me in the store and I had this woman, she worked only part-time and they didn't get along. No. They didn't get along. Anyway I became pregnant soon after. Now I always say I was thirty-eight years old, had no problem getting pregnant without even trying, I always said.

INT: So shortly after you were married you got pregnant.

MARGIT: Yeah, I got married.

INT: That's good if you were thirty-eight.

MARGIT: I had no problem at all. When people say, oh, I'm too old for that, I say I wasn't. (laughs) I was thirty-eight and got pregnant.

INT: Without problems.

MARGIT: Without problems. And I stayed in the store 'til the last day.

INT: Did you?

MARGIT: I was as strong as a horse, I always say. Nothing ailed me while I was pregnant. I didn't even have a cold. And when I went to give birth I stayed home for six weeks and then I gave my child up to a young woman who came to the house. And you know what? I was very glad. I'm not used to children and I was not used to being at home in a small apartment with a child. I always thought she wasn't breathing. I went every few minutes to see if she was breathing. When I found this young woman, because it hadn't turned out with my husband to work with this other woman. There were clashes all the time. I knew I had to go back to work. Gladly went back to work. I am just not the motherly type, I guess. I loved my child. I was very good to her and I was a good mother, I'm sure. But only part-time. When I told this to a number of young women that I knew who wanted to go back to work so badly and didn't want to show it, you know. I said that I went, and look at Ruthie. She's a very good child, never gave me any

problems. Because she was always with other people, too, you know, I convinced several young women to go back to work.

INT: So you're an inspiration to the modern working mother, huh?

MARGIT: I was always somehow a feminist.

INT: You're very frank about your feelings.

MARGIT: I'm frank about my feelings because I couldn't, I probably would have abused it and would have been bored to death, you know.

INT: And not been a good mother because you didn't like being confined.

MARGIT: No, no, I knew I came home in the evening, I was the best mother that I could be and over the weekend she didn't stay on Saturdays. On Sundays I would give all my time to that child and she would have me whenever she wanted.

INT: Was your husband happy working with you in the store? Was that satisfying for him?

MARGIT: Yes, it was all right, yes.

INT: How did you divide up the work in the store?

MARGIT: Well, he somehow caught up, did very well. We used to make our own stuff, do jewelry. At that time everybody wore pearls, and he was very good with this and the women liked him very much.

INT: So he was good with the customers too.

MARGIT: He was good with the customers too. Sometimes he had clashes but who wouldn't? I kept my mouth shut, but he didn't. And he had clashes with some people.

INT: You mean clashes because they would start arguments?

MARGIT: Yeah, because you know some people were -- not every customer, not every woman comes to the store is very nice.

INT: But did you feel that what he did was unusual, I mean did you care?

MARGIT: No, no. Well, I would have cared, but some people approached me and they said, "You know, your husband wasn't very nice to me," or something. Well...

INT: Wasn't very nice?

MARGIT: On the other hand I have people still now, they say, "Your husband was so nice." Now and this is sixteen years later, I meet people in the bus, I met once a woman and said, "Why did you close?" Not lately, most of the people, I guess they died or moved away somewhere else. We were very well liked on that corner there for thirty years, as I said it was like a mom and pop shop. And all these young women used to come, now elderly women. It was something we liked it. But then it became so that we didn't like it anymore and then we closed.

INT: Did the fact that you were both survivors of the Holocaust have anything to do with your decision to have children or wanting to perpetuate yourselves after the war?

MARGIT: We wanted to have children; I only wanted to have one child, really, because I knew I couldn't handle another one. You know you can turn one child over to somebody but no, that would have been too much. I remember I went to the doctor and he said, "Do you want any other children?" And I said, "No, I don't think so." So we did something about it. But you know you couldn't handle it, this household, the child, the business. I didn't want to be bothered maybe. My sister only had one child too.

INT: Oh really, your younger sister?

MARGIT: Yes, younger sister, she was thirty when her son was born.

INT: You said your older sister never had children.

MARGIT: My older sister did not want children.

INT: She didn't want them.

MARGIT: She did not want children. She did not want to bring up a child in this world.

INT: Because of her experiences during the war?

MARGIT: Because, yes. And she wasn't the only one of her group. There were several women who did not want to become mothers because they didn't want to bring children into this, into this world.

INT: Because of their experiences they had such negative feelings about the world.

MARGIT: They had such negative feelings, yeah. And most of them I know only had one child.

INT: And your sister only had one child for what reason?

MARGIT: I guess, I never found out but she really didn't want to. Her husband was eleven or twelve years older than she was, he had a family before.

INT: I see, and he lost all of his family?

MARGIT: He lost his wife and two children. And they had one son.

INT: So she also married a Holocaust survivor. Where was he from?

MARGIT: He was also from Poland.

INT: Poland.

MARGIT: And there was, I know very few, well I have one friend who had five children but she's the only one who had five children. But she didn't really go through all these things. She went from Vienna right to here but I have family over there and everyone somehow settled with the same old thing. That they lost their families, that they would never see them again or most of their families. Most people that I know had two, one or two children and nothing more and that was enough.

INT: Margit, you said that when you met your husband you wanted to take care of somebody 'cause he really needed you. How did you feel that during your marriage you did that?

MARGIT: He relied on me a lot. I usually made the decisions. My daughter once said, "Mom, you really were the boss." And I am not a bossy person but...

INT: You took charge.

MARGIT: I would say, "Why don't we do it this?" And he would say, "Okay," glad that somebody told him. He could not really decide on things. I remember a friend of his wanted to go to Israel and needed somebody to go with him. You know he didn't want to go by himself, he asked Henry and hemmed and hawed. I said, "You will go." And he went. He was not going if I would not have told him to and he had a wonderful time with his friends there.

INT: Was that the first trip for him?

MARGIT: That was the first trip for him. Then the second trip we took together.

INT: So he was submissive.

MARGIT: Very submissive, yes. You had to suggest things to him. Not in business. In business he was very good, and he made decisions and we did not make the money that we accumulated from the business, because this was a small business. But we had some money laid away and he was asked to buy some real estate with somebody and he did. And that is the money that I'm living on, let's say.

INT: So he was able to make good decisions about investments and real estate?

MARGIT: Yes. But personal decisions, no. He had to be pushed into things. I would suggest let's go there for a weekend visit. Okay, we went. He never would have said, "Let's go." I mean there were things but in business decisions he made. Sometimes I would say no, I don't want to. I don't want to do this. I don't want to be a landlady I said, or something, you know. I became a landlady.

INT: So how did he talk you into it?

MARGIT: Well, he would say, "Well, this is a very good thing to do," and then after a while, well, maybe everybody else did it for these people. They showed that it was lucrative.

INT: So you trusted him with business decisions.

MARGIT: Oh yes, I trusted him, oh yes, I did. I trusted him.

INT: You saw he had good solid judgment.

MARGIT: Yeah, he had good judgment, much better judgment. I was always, oh, this won't sell or this won't sell or so I was not such a terrific business person because I always went by my own taste and that's the worst thing you can do.

INT: Well, you were in business on a different level.

MARGIT: Yeah, I paid all the bills, I knew about the taxes and I used to go to our accountant. The whole family had the same accountant and he would say Margit does all the talking. (laughs)

INT: Why did he say that?

MARGIT: Because I knew about these money things.

INT: So he liked that. He was happy you did all the talking so he didn't have to.

MARGIT: Yes, he didn't want to be connected with all this stuff. He never knew how much money we had in the bank in the account, but he trusted me. I was doing all right with the money. He knew, you know, I was not throwing it out the window, maybe too little.

INT: How would you describe your marriage with him? Was it difficult?

MARGIT: It was difficult, yes, because he was very moody. He was very moody.

INT: In what way?

MARGIT: When he was mad at me for something, which I never found out what for, he could not talk about it. It was a difficult marriage.

INT: So when he was upset he would--

MARGIT: He would shut up.

INT: If you knew he was upset about something you could never find out what it was, because he wouldn't talk.

MARGIT: He wouldn't talk to me.

INT: He wouldn't say what's wrong? He would say nothing?

MARGIT: He wouldn't talk to me for days.

INT: Really, and you never knew why.

MARGIT: I never knew why. I couldn't even guess. What did I do? You know, what did I do? But I got so used to it.

INT: Did you ever think that maybe it wasn't something that you had done but that he was depressed?

MARGIT: He was depressed, there was a reason to be depressed. It was a difficult marriage, I must say. And, but I, I knew he was hard to live with but somehow I didn't give up.

INT: Did he ever have temper tantrums or outbursts?

MARGIT: I wish he would have had. He didn't.

INT: The trouble was that he didn't express any of his feelings?

MARGIT: Yeah, he didn't express it. I would say, "Scream, scream at me, but talk about it." You know, he would just walk out of the room.

INT: When you say it was a difficult marriage, was that the reason why you felt it was difficult because there was no communication?

MARGIT: It was difficult because of the communication definitely, but not from my side, because I can usually express myself. Also, in many respects I do not express myself to everybody or to, to if something bothers me really I work it out myself, and up 'til this day it was always like this.

INT: Well, like if you have a problem with somebody you wouldn't go to them and say (?)

MARGIT: No, it wouldn't.

INT: So then you hold it inside and just resolve it yourself.

MARGIT: Yes, and swallow it.

INT: Is that what you mean by not being aggressive or assertive, that if you're upset with someone then you don't deal with it, you just swallow it?

MARGIT: No, I don't deal with. I deal with myself but not with the person, no. I can't do it. I was always like this. My mother even wrote in one of these letters why am I so, (pause) never talk about myself.

INT: Did she talk about herself?

MARGIT: My mother? Well, she talked, she didn't talk about her life with my father because we lived with it.

INT: In her letters.

MARGIT: Well, in her letters she could not really write much about it. It was read by many censors and she couldn't do it.

INT: Would you feel comfortable reading part of her letters to me?

MARGIT: They are in German.

INT: Is it too hard to translate them?

MARGIT: Yes, it's too hard to translate.

INT: Well, it sounds like it was a really important part of your connection with her with these letters, and very emotional for you.

MARGIT: Also, she only wrote about everyday things, but somehow you could imagine how, how hard it was in this place.

INT: You've kept these letters all these years.

MARGIT: My sister, my older sister kept these letters and when she died they came to me.

INT: Oh, so you inherited those letters.

MARGIT: Somehow, yes.

INT: What role do these letters play for you now? You said that you read them if you want a good cry.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: What role do you see these letters playing in your life now?

MARGIT: Because I see how she must have suffered, how she never said anything, that she did suffer, you know, that only worried about us.

INT: So is it a continuation of the mourning process for you?

MARGIT: Yeah, every time I talk about it I get--

INT: I can see you get very emotional.

MARGIT: Yeah, very emotional.

INT: Well, in a way it's important to have a way to mourn because they just disappeared for you. That's a healthy transition.

MARGIT: That's what I say, it was made so easy for us. All at once they were gone, yes. And you didn't see them suffer. Distance suffering. Something I never will forget. And my daughter who had never had any grandparents, she always felt that way. She felt like the other kids had loving grandparents, she didn't have one.

INT: I guess that's the story for most children of survivors.

[Tape 4 - End Side 2] [Tape 5 - Side 1]

MARGIT: Yeah, well, all these children in one way or another, they must have suffered some more, some less. Some children are more caring than others.

INT: When Ruth would say, "I don't have grandparents," how did you respond?

MARGIT: Well, we always talked about these things. We did not hide the fact their grandparents died and that all the other aunts and uncles and cousins of my family, lots of them died. But they took it for granted. All the other children didn't have grandparents, the ones she knew from the family nobody had grandparents.

INT: This is when she was younger?

MARGIT: When she was young. And later on she said she would have liked to have a brother or sister. I said, "Well, it's too late. Forget about it." But she's accused me,

“Why didn't you have any other children?” I'm an only child. I said, "Well, not sometimes, think about how many problems you saved yourself by being an only child." Then she says something about her children, siblings fight, "See, you didn't have to fight," I tease her.

INT: Did you ever tell her the truth about why you only had one child?

MARGIT: Yeah, I told her I thought I was too old for that and she was embarrassed to know how old I was because the other mothers were so young. But I always looked younger than I was and nobody ever thought that I was too old to have a child, you know.

INT: I'm sure you had a lot of energy, you still have a lot of energy.

MARGIT: Than the others had, yes. And my nephew said I'm chipper. (laughs)

INT: That's true. (laughs)

MARGIT: My sister the other day said, "I have a compliment from Gary for you. All the people in the office said, "You are chipper." I said, "Thanks a lot. I am chipper." But I was always chipper.

INT: Did Ruth feel because you were older that you were not as active a parent?

MARGIT: No, no, because the other friends were in their twenties and I was already forty or so. So she said, "My G-d, why were you so old?" So I said, "I was an old maid." "How could you have been an old maid?" She outgrew these things, and she's very proud of me and now she tells everybody how old I am. And I said, "Thanks a lot," you know. (laughs)

INT: I do that with my mother too and she gets upset. (laughs)

MARGIT: I do not really care but she said, "My mother is 81 years old, you know." "All at once I did such a bad thing. You always thought I was too old, yeah?"

INT: Now she's proud of what you can do.

MARGIT: I always say, "Age is only relative, the older you get, the better it gets.”

INT: That's what they say. I'm hoping that they're right.

MARGIT: No, it does not bother me to be old. And this is one thing about being old, you're not afraid of telling how old you are. Somehow, you accomplished something. You got to that age. (laughs)

INT: And you're living a vital life still.

MARGIT: Yeah. Up 'til now I did. Let's hope sometime longer, but we crave to die in our sleep. It doesn't always happen.

INT: You're right.

MARGIT: It doesn't always happen.

INT: Let me just go back to Henry. How was he involved in the raising of Ruth? Did his moods get in the way of his parenting?

MARGIT: No, no, he was a good father. He didn't know what to do with a girl.

INT: He didn't.

MARGIT: No. He would have loved to have a boy, I'm sure. Because I know when he came to families who had mostly boys, he was in his element. What could he do, play soccer with a little girl or something, you know?

INT: He was a little awkward with a girl?

MARGIT: Yes, he was, he was a little awkward but he used to take her I remember, when she was a small child, he used to take her every weekend, every Saturday he took her to some kind of manufacturer or something. And used to take her there. She knew all the men in this place there and all the men in that place knew Ruthie. He used to take her out to eat on Wednesday nights. It was the night we were open late and he used to take her out. So, he was pretty good with her. He would not have changed a diaper, that's for sure, but he bugged her a lot about her not eating.

INT: Just like your mother used to bug you!

MARGIT: Yeah, sure. Mother didn't, my father bugged me.

INT: But you didn't bug her about eating.

MARGIT: I didn't bug her, no.

INT: Because you remembered?

MARGIT: I remembered this. He never called her by her name. He always called her "shrimpie."

INT: "Shrimpie."

MARGIT: Yes, because she was also little, "shrimpie." And she, not all the other girls whose fathers who called them princess. My father calls me "shrimpie." I said for him it means princess. Okay. And she was married; until he died he called her "shrimpie." She

said, "Do you think he knows my name?" (laughs) But my father also didn't call me Margit either.

INT: What did he call you?

MARGIT: This is hard -- I was so skinny. I was skinny like a pencil.

INT: So he had a name for you.

MARGIT: He had a name for me that meant pencil. But you know people, I went to Israel and there was a cousin who is the son of my father's twin brother. We were very close. We grew up somehow a little bit together. He also called me "shtiftel" is the word for it. It is the diminutive of a pencil, which means "blishtift," which means lead pencil, you know. That's the translation and "shtiftel" was the diminutive of it, that's what he called me. He didn't call me Margit either. (laughs)

INT: Are you the only one of the three daughters who had a nickname?

MARGIT: No, he had a nickname for everybody. No, he had a nickname for everybody. But even people who were not in the immediate family knew I was "shtiftel". Everybody knew I was "shrimpie."

INT: How about disciplining Ruth?

MARGIT: Never, never.

INT: Was she such a good child you didn't have to?

MARGIT: No, you had to sometimes. There is no such child that you don't have to discipline. (laughs) If she needed it I did it.

INT: Did you spank her?

MARGIT: I did it.

INT: You did the disciplining, he wouldn't.

MARGIT: Never, never, he would not touch her. Maybe he was afraid he would hurt her.

INT: How did Ruth deal with his moodiness?

MARGIT: Well, somehow she was used to it, I guess.

INT: Did it have any effect on her?

MARGIT: No, I don't think so. Now she says it did. How does she call it? I don't know. She said something to me the other day about how we did have a, how do they call these families? Are not sometimes they--

INT: Dysfunctional?

MARGIT: Dysfunctional. We had a dysfunctional family. I said, "Show me one who was any better."

INT: Did she ever tell you why she felt it was dysfunctional?

MARGIT: Oh, well because of his moods, I guess. Now, now she realizes it. She must have realized it as a child without being able to realize it, you know. But she says so. So I said, "So you shout a lot? You scream a lot?" I said to her.

INT: At the children?

MARGIT: To the children. I said, "I never raised my voice because this is not my style," I said. You know, I did not. So she said, "How did you make it?" I said, "I don't know. Somehow you were a good kid but you had to be disciplined, too, but I never shouted, and you do and it annoys me," I said. She said, "But they all do."

INT: All the mothers do?

MARGIT: I talked once to a young woman, she had four children and I said, "Mary," or whatever, I said, "Mary, how do you do it?" She said, "I scream a lot." (laughs)

INT: It's hard to manage kids and work full-time.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah, well, she also screamed before, when she was home a few years ago, because her husband did not want her to work and she was home until the youngest child went to first grade, I think. But she screamed before that. I am not a screamer. I am not a screamer, neither was my mother. She did not scream. And I, I found it terrible when she screams at the kids. She said they don't listen otherwise. But I notice that other young women who do this too, it's the times. They are all trying to do too much.

INT: And it stresses everyone out.

MARGIT: Yeah, it stresses you out. And that doesn't say I wasn't stressed out. (laughs) I was stressed out plenty. I am not, I am a very tense person.

INT: How do you express that stress and tension?

MARGIT: I cannot sit still. I cannot sit still. I come home and I do something all the time. Things that don't need to be done, because I cannot sit still. I bite my fingers. I

used to bite my nails. I still bite my fingers. I sit like this and bite my fingers. I can't, I'm really a stressed out person. (laughs)

INT: Have you always been?

MARGIT: I always was and we all in our ways, my sister is neat to the absurd and she doesn't sit still either. She cannot sit still, we all were like this, I guess, the family trait. My older sister, whenever you looked at her she was doing something. My mother told us, "Do something with your hands," you know how do they say idle hands are something.

INT: Yes.

MARGIT: "Do something with your hands." So we always did, we always did something with our hands.

INT: So she encouraged you to keep yourselves busy all the time and that's like in your head.

MARGIT: That's like in your head, yes. But anyway, I found out when you are busy you are not bored and I try not to be bored. I have a lot of free time now and I try not to be bored and do the things that the ladies do that they go for lunch and things like that. I don't do this.

INT: From what you've told me off tape I assume you want to do meaningful things.

MARGIT: I like to do something, you know some. But you know that thank G-d we were told not to read during the day, that was a luxury.

INT: To read because you had to busy yourself with your hands.

MARGIT: Yeah, with something. But since we were six years old we did something with our hands. It was good for us because we, we were able to do things, you know, when your brains weren't required your hands did something.

INT: You talked about not being materialistic at all.

MARGIT: No, I was not.

INT: Was your husband? How did he feel about that?

MARGIT: Well, he wanted to have money, yes he did. He did not talk about it, he had so little. He came to this country with a pair of shoes on the back of his suitcase. What did he have in this, nothing. So everything he had he got himself, you know. He wanted to make money. I would have been satisfied if, I don't know what, just enough to, as long as I had enough to eat, and pay my rent and pay my bills. I always said I was always

lucky enough, I explained it once to my daughter, to have enough money to pay for everything I needed and I didn't need much, I said. I was lucky enough to pay for this. I didn't have to worry where was the next day's money come from. And this satisfies me up 'til now. I don't want to have, look at my apartment. There is not much furniture here. I have a friend who came in who said, "You could have become a nun." I said, "You're right. I could have become a nun." I would have been happy in a room, and whatever a nun does can satisfy me. I'm not religious but I'm a non-religious nun, yes? I don't need anything. I don't need possessions. When I buy something, clothes and so on, and I go and have fun and go to New York and I live a very nice comfortable life, but I don't need possessions, you know. There's only something, "What's Ruthie going to do with it," I said. You will take it and throw it all in a bag. Why should I buy these things? They don't make me happy, you know. I am not happy buying things.

INT: Is Ruthie like you?

MARGIT: She's a little bit more materialistic. She likes things. It's perfectly all right with me. I am very happy that she is not.

INT: You don't think she'd like some of the things that you have here, you don't think she'd keep some of these things?

MARGIT: She says she would, but she only wants to be nice to me. (laughs) No, I have a friend who has the same size apartment and she has the one next to it. You cannot get into her living room because she has so many possessions. And she always says, "How come your apartment looks so much bigger?" I said, "Because I have no furniture in it."

INT: It's easier to keep clean too when you don't have a lot of things, and airy.

MARGIT: I like airy.

INT: Well, you have a lot of plants. Look at your plants.

MARGIT: Yeah, I like plants, some of them are from hunger, but I'm not throwing them out yet.

INT: Yeah, they look terrific, your violets are beautiful.

MARGIT: But you should see my sister's. She likes possessions. She doesn't have just one of each. She has at least three of each, (laughs) I always say.

INT: Oh, of possessions generally.

MARGIT: Yeah, she likes it. She is entirely different from my older sister and I. She didn't like possessions either. She was only six years younger than I, but she's from a different generation.

INT: And your, how did your mother feel about possessions?

MARGIT: It wasn't so important to her either at that time, you know. And she was also a working woman, and but as long as the times were also bad, you know, you didn't spend money on things that you didn't need.

INT: Just the basics that you need.

MARGIT: Don't bring me any "tchotchkies," I would say. I don't like them. You have to dust them, but I have also one rule with my daughter, no birthday or mother's day presents. I don't need these things. I know you love me just the same. Then she sends me a card. I say, "Well, that was very nice." They could have done it over the phone too but okay.

INT: A card you'll accept, right?

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: You don't like.

MARGIT: Things don't make me happy.

INT: What makes you happy?

MARGIT: When I know that I am healthy, that I don't have to worry about anything, that my daughter and her family are healthy, that my sister is healthy, that makes me happy. And I saw a good show and went on a nice vacation or something, that makes me happy. I don't, I need very little to make me happy, content let's say.

INT: How was Ruth's education handled?

MARGIT: She was a candy striper when she was fifteen or so and loved it. She worked at Wills Eye Hospital and read to people who couldn't at that time read because they had cataracts. It's a long time ago so she loved the atmosphere of a hospital. That medical thing. She wanted to become a medical technician and did not want to go to college. At that time it was not necessary to go. She went to Girl's High and I talked to the guidance counselor. She said she doesn't need to go. It doesn't even help. But as it turned out it really was not a helpful thing. When you became a technologist it was much harder to find a job than when you were a technician. In our family one of the girls went to college and became a technologist. You have a bachelor's degree in science. She could not find a job.

INT: Ruth?

MARGIT: Ruth had a job before, she went to high school and from there Dobbins, you know Dobbins. Had one of these courses. It was two years course. You went to school

for ten months or something, yes. In fourteen months you went as an intern into a hospital lab. She worked at Veterans Hospital.

INT: As a lab technician?

MARGIT: As a lab technician. And then you had some kind of a maybe I don't know. Did she have some kind of exam afterwards? She had a job before she was finished with school at Medical College of Pennsylvania as a histology technician.

INT: Oh, really. That's great.

MARGIT: Very nicely paid, I remember.

INT: And did she stay in that job until she got married?

MARGIT: And she stayed in that job, stayed in Medical College for a year and a half, got married, yes, and her car was stolen there. She was so mad that her car was stolen that she got a job at Fox Chase.

INT: I see.

MARGIT: And worked at Fox Chase for five years.

INT: But she never went ahead and got any more degrees?

MARGIT: No, she didn't. No.

INT: Were you disappointed that she didn't?

MARGIT: No, no, I did not. I was not disappointed. It was her decision. She liked her job and that was it. She worked for seven years before and then she had a child.

INT: I don't think I got the date. What date was Ruth born?

MARGIT: She was born July 1st, 1953. She was born a caesarian so it was decided it was July first.

INT: Oh. So you let Ruth make her own decisions.

MARGIT: Yes, it was her life. She wanted to do it, if she did not go to college it did not bother me either. She said afterwards, "How come you didn't push me?" I said, "I don't like to be pushed either and it was your decision. You liked the job." She was very well liked by her boss at Fox Chase. Years later I used to meet him at the Academy of Music on Friday afternoon. Maybe five years ago he stopped me and said, "Where does Ruthie live now?" He said, "I tried to get in touch with her. I want her to do a job for me." I said, "Dr. Custer, I don't think she would have done it." (laughs)

INT: She's happy now with what she's doing.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah. Now she really liked her job and she was good at it. I don't know, I don't know what it means to be histology.

INT: Yeah, tissues.

MARGIT: Tissues. You have to put it in on slides.

INT: Having gone through the kinds of experiences that you and your husband went through, did you have any fears? I mean she grew up in the city? Did you worry about her?

MARGIT: No, no.

INT: Were you overprotective?

MARGIT: No, I was not.

INT: Was Henry overly protective of her?

MARGIT: More than I was, yes, but I was not protective at all. I remember we were busy at Christmas time and she used to go to Woolworths. Well we lived, the store was at 17th and Chestnut, or Walnut, and we lived at 16th in the same neighborhood. She used to go to Woolworths and play around with the toys all by herself.

INT: Really?

MARGIT: She was nine, ten years old, but at that time you didn't have to be afraid.

INT: But some parents were overly protective, even in those days.

MARGIT: You see, I lived in the city and I grew up in the city myself.

INT: But your husband didn't.

MARGIT: Well, he lived later on in the city.

INT: So you both felt comfortable with letting her go.

MARGIT: I was very comfortable.

INT: So she must have grown up to be pretty independent.

MARGIT: She was independent. She had a lot of girlfriends and she spent time with them. But she was very independent and I let her be, because I knew I could trust the child, she knew what she was doing.

INT: Did you ever have time to have fun as a family?

MARGIT: Oh, sometimes we went visiting, yeah, sometimes we had fun.

INT: You worked hard.

MARGIT: I worked hard, yes.

INT: Six days a week in the store.

MARGIT: Six days a week at the store but I enjoyed it, you know?

INT: Was that your fun?

MARGIT: This was, yeah, I was a workhorse, that's it. But I didn't work hard physically. No.

INT: Did you ever take vacations together?

MARGIT: I did later, twelve years after, we were married twelve years, right before that we used to go to these people on the farm and I stayed there for a week or so.

INT: I'm sorry.

MARGIT: He had cousins, Henry had cousins on a farm near Lakewood, New Jersey.

INT: Oh, a farm.

MARGIT: Yeah, and we went there practically every Sunday, because we were very close. In the summer we sometimes went for a few days and left Ruth there. But when she was eleven years old, I was married twelve years, we went to Israel for four weeks, Ruth and I.

INT: Just Ruth and you?

MARGIT: Yeah, you couldn't just close the store. So Ruth and I went to Israel. That was my first trip abroad since -- it was in 1964, it was my first abroad, my first trip, not abroad.

INT: Had your husband been there previously with his friends?

MARGIT: No, now he was there afterwards.

INT: Oh, afterwards. So you took the first trip to Israel in the 1960's that was early on. Not a lot of people were traveling to Israel at that time.

MARGIT: No, but I had all these relatives there. It's a good thing I went at that time because some of them died afterwards, soon afterwards. So she met his cousins and she knew that she had a family.

INT: Oh, that was wonderful.

MARGIT: Yeah, that was really the reason I went, that I wanted to meet all these. There were lots of cousins, you know, boy cousins and she always had boy cousins. So she was a little bit of a tomboy herself, you know. She didn't mind being rough and being thrown in the pool or something, she didn't mind those things.

INT: Ruth? You're talking about Ruth?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: She liked that.

MARGIT: That she liked, yes.

INT: So she fit right in.

MARGIT: She fit right in, yes. And also she couldn't speak Hebrew. Most of them didn't speak English, some of them did. Kids make themselves understood between each other and then three years later we went to Europe. I took her to Europe and I still say you didn't deserve it, that I took her.

INT: Why did you say this?

MARGIT: Because she was a stinky teenager. (laughs) Nothing impressed her, you know, nothing. We went for a week in England.

INT: She was, let's see, she was what? Fourteen?

MARGIT: Yeah. A bad age to take a kid. They don't deserve it, no. One week we stayed in England, one week we stayed in Austria and one week we stayed in Switzerland. Wouldn't you like a trip like this? (laughs)

INT: When I was fourteen, I don't know.

MARGIT: Well, just when you were fourteen that's it. I had to promise her not to go to any museums. (laughs) And I didn't. I didn't take her. I said, "Well, so what, I wouldn't make her." Don't have to go to any museums. On the trip to Israel we stayed also a couple of days in Paris. And the Louvre was closed, I couldn't go.

INT: So she was saved.

MARGIT: But she still remembers little things.

INT: So was that your last trip together?

MARGIT: That was my last, I said, "That's it. I'm not going to go with you anymore." And she went later when she finished high school, she went to Israel to work on a kibbutz.

INT: Oh, did she really?

MARGIT: I did not send her to my relatives who offered. My sister sent her son to relatives, and he stayed there and he was bored the whole summer. She went with a group.

INT: Habonim?

MARGIT: No, I forgot the, I don't know, it's a socialists' group.

INT: Hashomer Hatzair?

MARGIT: Yeah. And she went and worked on a farm picking pears and all kinds of other fruit near Haifa, which was good because we had relatives in Haifa. And she could go back and forth with the cousins, the wife of my cousin went there to see sometimes how she was doing.

INT: She was there for the summer.

MARGIT: Yeah, she went for the whole summer, yeah, the whole summer she went.

INT: That was a good experience for her?

MARGIT: She loved it. And then they also had a couple of weeks by themselves.

INT: Did she want to make aliyah after that experience?

MARGIT: She didn't want to make aliyah, but she wanted to go back, never went back yet. But now they are planning next year to make the bar mitzvah for her son.

INT: How wonderful!

MARGIT: I loved the idea. I never tried to talk her into it because I knew her husband didn't want to go, she somehow talked him into it.

INT: Her husband doesn't want to go to Israel?

MARGIT: He's not interested in traveling.

INT: I see.

MARGIT: No. I just talked to her cousin who comes here and I said, "Don't you know that Robbie doesn't like to travel, only likes to fish?" She said, "He can go fishing in Israel." She lives in Israel. I said, "You take him."

INT: Didn't you and your husband go to Israel together?

MARGIT: Oh yes, we went.

INT: After you retired or before?

MARGIT: No, before we retired. We said, "Okay." We closed for two weeks and we went, we didn't care anymore at that time. I think it was the year Nixon abdicated. What was it, '74 or '75?

INT: I think it was '74.

MARGIT: Because we got there and everybody was upset about it. Nixon was a friend of Israel.

INT: Supposed to be a friend of Israel?

MARGIT: They looked at me and said, "Don't you care?" I said, "No, I'm glad." That's how I remembered it, you know.

INT: Was that the only trip that you took together?

MARGIT: Yes, we went to England for a wedding.

INT: Before Israel or after?

MARGIT: Before Israel. Then we stayed in Israel a little bit more than a week or so and then from there we went to Spain. I had wanted to go to Greece but they had a revolution at that time so we had to go to Spain. And we were sorry we didn't stay the time we spent in Spain, in Israel.

INT: Oh, really.

MARGIT: It was extremely hot. So came back a day earlier than we thought we would and then I never liked. I couldn't. I was brought up in the idea these fascists were no better. Franco was still there and they had these monuments to the glorious revolutions wherever you looked.

[Tape 5 - End Side 1] [Tape 5 - Side 2]

INT: And what did you think of Israel?

MARGIT: I loved it there, absolutely loved it. I saw this kibbutz where I knew there was nothing when they started it. These cousins when got there, this one kibbutz, it was a couple of years old. But they had to work, you know they had to coax the plants out of the ground. There was nothing. They lived on this kibbutz near Afula. It's in an arid area. I don't know how many meters below sea level -- extremely hot in summer, dry heat. I can take the heat there very well. (laughs)

INT: Florida you can't take, but Israel you can take it. (laughs)

MARGIT: It's dry. It was dry there. This area was very dry, but they made a booming place out of it. Every time I go there they have a different kind of industry, you know? And the people seem to be happy. There are three generations sometimes living there already. Not all of them stay, but lots of them stay.

INT: How many times have you been to Israel now?

MARGIT: Five times.

INT: And the other three times had you been with organized groups or did you go by yourself?

MARGIT: Never with organized groups, I go always by myself.

INT: And you stay with family?

MARGIT: I stay with family or I take a room in a hotel in Jerusalem. My family does not live there.

INT: As a survivor of the Holocaust, how do you feel about Israel?

MARGIT: Wonderful. It's such a country that was nothing and all at once it's, it's getting too Americanized that I don't like.

INT: Do you feel more secure as a Jew knowing that Israel is there?

MARGIT: Yes, I do, I really do. And see all these people, the people that I deal with are very happy there. As a matter of fact one of the young women met an American and married and the whole family was very unhappy that she moved to America. And they promised they'd come back, but they know now that she will never come back. She will come back to visit, bring her child, her children but not. She will live here because her husband was born here and his family's here. But the whole family was very upset. And I said well, forget about it. She will not come back because she was in the army and she

will know that her children will not have to go into the army like her father did until he was fifty. Last year he went back and he was fifty. And that was the last year, didn't have to go anymore. And there is this thing over their head but they are so used to it. And the people say I can't go there, something is always happening. I said you know I've been going to Israel for years and I never had that feeling that anything was going to happen; if you heard something they mourned, but next day--

INT: Life goes on.

MARGIT: Life goes on. And they say, one of my cousins said, a very sensitive person. She said, "You know, if one of our children gets killed it's like our child, like he was our child and we mourn." But that's how life in Israel is, and we read all these things are happening, and I talk to, my cousin writes to me and she never mentions anything happens. You turn the radio on or the television--

INT: Like they read about us getting mugged and car jackings (?)

MARGIT: Yeah, it's so terrible and your friends in the suburbs say, "How can you live here?"

INT: Of course. (laughs)

MARGIT: Oh, I don't want to come into town, you know like, we had some kind of a little episode. We went to a Chinese restaurant on the weekend with my son-in-law and we parked his car in front of the Trocadero on Arch Street and I really didn't like, I didn't say anything, I don't mix in. When we came back there was a suspicious-looking guy there and the alarm didn't go on. What happened to the alarm? He must have tried to open the door, you know, and the next day I talked to my son-in-law and he said, "You know, he did something to the car, tried to take something off the car and was fiddling around." I said, "Well, next time you're not parking in a place like this."

INT: Well, we're used to it.

MARGIT: But we're used to it, you know.

INT: We accept it as part of life living in the city.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah, part of living in the city, but other people don't know this. But in Israel also, the only thing I remember my cousin told me the first time I was there, "Never go into a car with somebody, you know like hitchhikers. Never do that."

INT: Never pick up hitchhikers.

MARGIT: Never go because the Arabs look just like us. He said, "Believe me they have no conscience."

INT: So really need to be very sure about what you are doing.

MARGIT: Yes, he said never do that. But that was about the only warning I got. I also lost my passport and I'm not sure if it was not stolen in Israel. Luckily, I had a copy of this.

INT: Oh, did you? Oh, you are very smart. They tell you to Xerox.

MARGIT: Yeah, I was told. I always Xerox my plane ticket wherever I go.

INT: Oh, that's smart. You're a good traveler.

MARGIT: Yeah, but I was told this by our guide once. He took our passports and did that Xeroxing for us too at that time; since that time I always do it.

INT: When was your last trip to Israel?

MARGIT: '93.

INT: Do you think you'll go back again?

MARGIT: Well, maybe next year. I'm going to the bar mitzvah, but I would go like this anytime. I only don't want to bother my relatives too much. But I would go anytime. It's always nice, last time it was only two weeks. It's really not long enough.

INT: There is always something to see there. There's always new things going on.

MARGIT: Oh, always something new.

INT: Next year's a big year too. They're having the 3,000 anniversary of the founding of Jerusalem.

MARGIT: Oh yeah?

INT: And then after that is going to be something else, so they are doing a lot of celebrating.

MARGIT: There is always something.

INT: All right, let me get back. I wanted to just pick up some ends here. Was there anything about the Holocaust that you and your husband didn't want your children to know about when you talk about it?

MARGIT: No, no.

INT: I get the impression you feel pretty open.

MARGIT: Yes, pretty open, yes, sometimes my daughter says, "You didn't tell me this." I said, "Well, maybe you just didn't listen."

INT: And that's probably true.

MARGIT: Yeah, sure.

INT: You hear the story so much.

MARGIT: No, we talked about everything.

INT: And does Ruth now appreciate the fact that she knows the stories?

MARGIT: Yeah, she said, "Look, the difference between me and Robbie is that I had you as parents and not his parents, I know and he doesn't."

INT: She did not mind hearing?

MARGIT: Well, she didn't have any choice. (laughs)

INT: But she listened. Now that she's an adult does she still ask questions?

MARGIT: Well, she didn't sit around and hear. But she knew she was, she had a life. We talked about these things. Well, I would say I didn't have it as good as you when we went through a war or something comes, the bombs and those kinds of things.

INT: Did that bother her when you would say things like that?

MARGIT: I don't think, well because I was still around, yeah, (laughs) I don't know. I wouldn't know, you could bother her. She wouldn't talk about it either. She's also not a very outgoing person.

INT: She keeps her feelings inside?

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: Did you ever have issues with food? I know you said your husband said Ruth didn't eat. Was there a problem, that he had lived with starvation and you also didn't have a lot to eat?

MARGIT: Have you ever seen a Jewish family that doesn't tell his children to eat? It's like the Italians. Yeah. Well, you know to this day I will not take more on my plate than I know I can eat. I can't stand it that people leave food. I cannot, it really bothers me if somebody leaves food.

INT: Many survivors feel that way. It's a big issue with people who leave food.

MARGIT: Yeah, well people who went through the Depression, too, in this country.

INT: Leaving food is thought to be a terrible waste.

MARGIT: Yeah, it was a terrible thing. Well, Italians say, "mange" and Jewish people say, "eat." (laughs)

INT: How would you, how would you want your children and grandchildren to view you when they have memories of you? What do you want them to remember?

MARGIT: That I was not a "kvetch." You know what that means?

INT: Yes, I know what that means.

MARGIT: This is in one short word that I was not a complainer, that this little thing or this little thing. The overall thing was okay. There are plenty of little things that bother anybody that bother me, I'm sure, but I'm not talking about them.

INT: How, can you interpret that a little more, that you accept what life has dealt you?

MARGIT: I accept, first of all most things that bother people are not that important. They are the little people, the annoying little things. They go away most of the time.

INT: I think you said before that little things are not what's important, it's the big things like health and--

MARGIT: Yeah, if I am annoyed at something, like I tell my daughter, "Don't you yell too much." It annoys me. I tell her, she doesn't really stop yelling but I got it out of my system and she knows I don't like. She says, "Go out of the room if you don't like it." (laughs)

INT: Well, it's good that you clear the air with each other.

MARGIT: We have a good understanding, not cloyingly sweet. She will tell me and I tell her.

INT: I just want to pick up on something earlier about your husband.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: You talked about, now your husband coming from a religious family.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: I'm going to ask a bit about his religious past.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: Was he observant when he was in Poland?

MARGIT: I don't think you could help yourself. You had to be.

INT: Did he go to cheder?

MARGIT: I don't really think so. You know, the people who went to cheder didn't speak Polish, they talked Yiddish all the time.

INT: Did he speak Yiddish?

MARGIT: He spoke Yiddish, yes, Yiddish was spoken at home but he spoke Polish very well and I think he must have gone, maybe he went to cheder too, I don't know. We didn't talk about it.

INT: And when he came here you said he didn't fit into any kind of religious synagogue situation?

MARGIT: No, he didn't, he didn't feel like.

INT: What did that mean?

MARGIT: Well, here the synagogue is a social place. You meet here, not just to pray, to meet, make contacts, to meet the people of your religion, yes? In Europe this wasn't so. In Europe you did not, that wasn't a social place.

INT: But in your neighborhood not far from you there were many Orthodox synagogues, and you could just go in, and you could pray, and do your thing and not have to be involved.

MARGIT: You mean in Vienna, yeah.

INT: No, no, here.

MARGIT: Well, he did not want to go. He was probably, he said his father never made a living because he never had time to work.

INT: Why was that?

MARGIT: He was always studying.

INT: Do you think there was some negative feeling about his father?

MARGIT: He loved his father very much, talked more about the father than the mother, but there was a negative feeling about it, that he had to depend on his children. And it really didn't bother him that he didn't make a living because the study was much more important.

INT: Did his mother work?

MARGIT: She had so many children I'm sure she did not work.

INT: So whatever he could scrape together. So they were very poor is what you're saying.

MARGIT: They were poor, yes. That he didn't want to talk about.

INT: Did the two of you ever talk about, or you might want to talk just from his aspect or maybe your own, about his relationship to the Holocaust and G-d?

MARGIT: No, he did not talk, no. First of all, I am not, how should I say, I'm not that deep about G-d. I don't want to think too much about it because I really don't believe in something that high. Only in a very, on the surface thing, I say there must be something, but I really don't believe in this and I will always say this, "It doesn't do anything to me," that expresses my feelings. That simple sentence, "expresses my feelings." I have no, I don't get any higher thinking out of it, I don't think, because if I'm going to pray here, and listen, I read the Talmud, and it's very interesting, I like sometimes about the wording and it interests me, but it doesn't mean a thing to me. And I feel sorry for myself because some people get a lot out of religion and I don't get a thing out of religion.

INT: And how did your husband feel about it?

MARGIT: He didn't, no.

INT: So you two were really compatible about religion.

MARGIT: There was no conflict. We didn't talk about it. He didn't want to go, I went to Yizkor services only for my father. You know tomorrow morning I'm going to yahrzeit services for my sister, only because my father would want me to do out of how do you say, filial respect. It doesn't mean a thing to me. I do it. And it's silly. I asked my daughter yesterday, her mother-in-law died several months ago. I said, "Did Robbie go to, to say Kaddish?" And she said, "No, he didn't." I said, "You know what, he said Kaddish for his sister." She said, "Yes, he did, but he didn't say Kaddish for his father or mother, only they sat shiva," which I did not sit shiva after my husband.

INT: Really?

MARGIT: I did not.

INT: Why didn't you?

MARGIT: He would not have wanted me to do it either. I did not think I'm doing anything special by sitting there and making social talk, which annoys me all the time, you know that social talk. And it's a party. My brother-in-law was more religious, much more religious; he was the president of the synagogue here and was always doing something.

INT: Which brother-in-law?

MARGIT: My younger sister. He died ten years ago. He said, "Don't make me a party." And she didn't.

INT: Don't sit shiva.

MARGIT: Don't sit shiva either. And it didn't bother me. I didn't know what people said, you know people always talk, but they know I'm different. (laughs). I don't care what people think of me in this respect.

INT: So you do what you feel is good for you?

MARGIT: What I feel good about. It's me who has to decide these things, nobody else. And I did not sit shiva.

INT: Did Ruth go to Hebrew school or Sunday school?

MARGIT: Oh, yes, she went to Hebrew school. She went here in Beth Zion. She went to Hebrew school.

INT: Did you belong to Beth Zion?

MARGIT: I did not.

INT: You just sent her to school.

MARGIT: Yes, I sent her there to school, she went there for five years and she did not have a bat mitzvah because at that time girls didn't have anything. But she was very good and she was always a good student and especially in Hebrew school. She goes to synagogue.

INT: She belongs to a synagogue?

MARGIT: She belongs to synagogue because the children have to go to Hebrew school.

INT: Are they in a Conservative synagogue?

MARGIT: It's a Conservative synagogue. She did not want to go into a Reform synagogue.

INT: Does she go every Shabbat?

MARGIT: No. No.

INT: Is her business open on Saturday?

MARGIT: Oh sure.

MARGIT: She wanted to go to synagogue. I said, "Why don't you go back to what you did before?" She said, "Mom, this is part of my business too. Why shouldn't go here?" And she likes now. She does not keep kosher. She eats all kinds of things that I wouldn't eat, but she is a member of a synagogue. I don't know if she would be a member of the synagogue after the children are out of it but maybe they will. And they live more of a, well, I wouldn't say a Jewish life. Now they have a lot of Orthodox customers. And my son-in-law learns all kinds of things. He used to think if somebody wore a beard, he was a rabbi. I said this man is not a rabbi, he has a beard. He looks like one. That's how much he knew, you know. And now he tells me all the things about the Jewish holidays and he knows all the things about them. And I said, "You even learned to say this." My G-d, if it doesn't come out like an anti-Semite.

INT: So you get along with him?

MARGIT: I get along with him very well, yes. Very well, but it bothered me in the beginning that he was, he also had a bar mitzvah and he didn't know a thing about it. But his parents had all those holidays. They had a Seder, which is a travesty.

INT: Have you been to their Seder?

MARGIT: Oh yes, I went to all the Seders. Always came home and said, "That was the Seder?" We didn't even get to, to the dipping of the fingers, of the wine, yes. And that thing was all over because I was used to saying it from the beginning to the end, that we ended up under the dining room table asleep was a different story. But my father did not go to bed until he had finished the whole Haggadah, yes? And there now I go to the Seders and come back, that was a dinner, yes. But it keeps the family together, that was the idea of his parents who were very family-oriented and very nice people, but they didn't grow up knowing things.

INT: What other holidays do you celebrate with your "machatunim"?

MARGIT: Well, we celebrate all the holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and I go always to them.

INT: For meals?

MARGIT: Yeah, for meals, and I go for Yizkor to their synagogue because anybody can go in, but I do not, just don't want to belong to a synagogue, never did. I just don't, that's it.

INT: Do you see any difference in the way you raised Ruth versus the way you were raised? Any values that were different or were they the same?

MARGIT: No, no, no, they were definitely the same way, values.

INT: And what were those?

MARGIT: That you had to do your work, that it was important to be honest, that it was important to do what you like to do, to tell what you like to do, not to be, having to do things that you didn't want to do. And I think she raises her children like this, too, not that they do any work. (laughs) They don't do work, no. They don't even pick up after themselves, but (laughs) that's how kids are these days. That also annoys me and it annoys her.

INT: That they don't look after themselves?

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: She doesn't make them?

MARGIT: The children are old enough to pick up after. They don't throw their clothes on the floor.

INT: And you've told Ruth how you feel?

MARGIT: Oh yes, and I've told her children.

INT: And what did she say?

MARGIT: And she said, "I know. I tell them a million times." So I told my granddaughter, "You want me to live in, to sleep with you in this room? You can't even get into it." "Oh, Mom-Mom," she says, "Oh Mom-Mom, you're always saying this." I said, "Pick up."

INT: And does she?

MARGIT: Yes, she throws it in a drawer. (laughs)

INT: At least she picked it up off the floor.

MARGIT: Under duress.

INT: Under duress (laughs).

MARGIT: But I love them.

INT: It sounds like you do.

MARGIT: Yeah, I do.

INT: It sounds like you're very close to them.

MARGIT: Oh yes, I feel close to her but not to the boy. The boy is at an age that nobody gets near him. He's eleven and a half. He lives in his own world.

INT: Do you have any feelings of regret what your life might have been had the Holocaust not occurred and you wouldn't have had to leave Europe?

MARGIT: No, no, I don't. I really don't because I'm very happy here. I know that financially it would have been much harder to make a living in Europe, not in Austria, Austria has gained a lot from the war because the United States helped Austria to recover too well, too well. They have it too good now. But no, I am not, that I do not regret from the point of view that now I have it much better here than I would ever have made it there. There was nothing to look forward to in Europe. Without the Nazis too. I mean, even if the Nazis wouldn't have come, there was nothing to look forward to for young people.

INT: Well, it was hard to know what it would have been like had there not been a war.

MARGIT: Yeah, sure, you cannot think of this, I know. But there was really nothing there. There was a very bad future for young people.

INT: What about friends? When you came to America, where did your friends come from? Was it mostly family you were close with or did you have other people?

MARGIT: With family and several survivors. Very few American Jews and we met with, stayed in like a little ghettos. We did not live in the same area, but it was a ghetto atmosphere too. There were always the same people, you saw always the same people with the same experiences, with the same feelings probably. I have not too many friends. No, I do not have.

INT: Now you mean?

MARGIT: Well, now I have a little circle, but we don't have too many friends.

INT: When you were in business did you have time to do any socializing?

MARGIT: Well, only on the weekends, let's say, Saturday night. But also we all had children. We took our children to somebody's house, you know.

INT: Well, how did you meet survivors then? Was there a survivors' organization back in those days?

MARGIT: It is, I think, forty-five years old, this survivors' organization.

INT: So that they had the group even then?

MARGIT: The same organization is forty-five years old. I think they are going to celebrate it next year or something. So we were not too close with those people, with most of them, but I knew a lot of these people.

INT: Your husband was from Poland and you were from Austria. Did you mix with people from all different countries, or were they segregated.

MARGIT: They were probably all from Poland and I was really the only one who was not.

INT: And was that a choice or it was made for you?

MARGIT: Yeah, it was made for me. My husband, they all, they came together. They had the same experiences, they came together. The ones from Vienna didn't have all these experiences. Some of them came from Vienna to here so that was pretty, it wasn't easy but it was easier than it was for all these channels, yes. And they were mostly older than we were.

INT: The people from Vienna were older?

MARGIT: Were older than we were. I didn't know anybody young really who was from Vienna. We knew a few but not many.

INT: The Polish survivors were more your age?

MARGIT: They were more our age, yes. And somehow they were our friends, my husband's compatriots. He was comfortable with them.

INT: And that was important to you.

MARGIT: Yeah, I was not uncomfortable with them. I think they always looked at me like a "Yakke". I'm still the "Yakke." I'm used to it. But they thought I was a little bit different, you know. They used to try to talk English with me when they talked Yiddish to each other. And I said, "Why don't you talk Yiddish to me? I understand Yiddish. I don't want to answer you back in Yiddish because you wouldn't understand what I'm saying," I said. But I could talk German to them and so they would understand me. So in

the end they wouldn't talk English to me because for them it was a hard, they had a hard time to talk English and they were much more comfortable in the Yiddish, even now. But most of them speak English quite well, but they still when they are together talk Yiddish.

INT: And when you had problems of your own, I know you said you resolved them yourself.

MARGIT: Yeah, I resolved them.

INT: Is there anybody you ever shared with?

MARGIT: Yeah, I used to talk to my older sister sometimes but--

INT: What about your younger sister? Do you have a good relationship with her?

MARGIT: No, I wouldn't talk to her about it, about problems. I don't know. We were never that close. Now we are pretty close, but I was always very close to my older sister, but I really wouldn't tell her everything that bothered me because it's my problem not anybody else's, that's it. I talked once to, to a counselor from the marriage council, the marriage something.

INT: That was going to be one of my questions, yeah, about your marriage.

MARGIT: Yeah. And it had, well, I talked about this moodiness and they asked the same questions you do, yeah. This was the place, at 42nd and Chestnut there was a place, marriage...

INT: Marriage Council?

MARGIT: Yeah. And I went there.

[Tape 5 - End Side 2] [Tape 6 - Side 1]

INT: This is August 17th, 1995. Margit, at the end of our last session you had mentioned that the marriage was very difficult and you went to get some counseling. Would you talk about that, please?

MARGIT: Well, the first year my husband started to work with me in the store and it was difficult. He was out of his place somehow, had to learn everything, had to learn to live with somebody. He hadn't been living with somebody for a long time, was not used to have another person in the same room with him somehow. Did not trust anybody and anything and did not think that he could be happy, ever happy. I had that feeling, didn't talk about it. But he thought life was always going to be miserable for him, and it was hard, but I didn't want to give up and somebody suggested to go to counseling. Well, we went to two different counselors. He went to one and I went to another one. I went

longer than he did because he was not the type of person could talk himself out, you know. I remember talking to the counselor and I had said that my mother had a hard time with my father being sick and this and this. And she said, "Do you think you have to live the same way as your mother?" And I said, "No, I don't but I'm not going to give up on this marriage in the first year." And I didn't and I tried to, and I kept it up. First of all he got better and he got more used...and we had this child and there was another person between us, you know. We did not fight. He did not tell me why he was angry at me. He did not tell me why he was angry at anybody else. He was angry. But somehow he simmered down. He was working in the business and he was better, but during all these thirty-five years of our marriage he had these episodes of not speaking.

INT: How long did they last?

MARGIT: Sometimes two or three weeks, but you know you get used to everything. I thought I could get used to anything. Anything in your life and it wasn't crisis always, but the way he stopped talking, the way he started talking, you know, all at once, that's it. And who knows what was going on in his head, he never talked about it.

INT: Was he ever placed on medication in those days?

MARGIT: Never, no, no.

INT: Was it ever suggested?

MARGIT: No. I'm sure he did not. Well, I did not always go with him to the doctor, that's for sure. He did not doctor around too much. Well, he had rheumatism in his knee and he was a little bit of a hypochondriac in many respects. But he had serious problems too, that knee for instance was swollen; it was an old thing from the concentration camps. He was not a happy person; only happy when he was with his cousins, that was his, his background.

INT: When he was with his cousins what made him happy?

MARGIT: Yeah, that they had the same background.

INT: They talked about it.

MARGIT: Yeah, they talked about the family, they talked also about concentration camp but he was happy then, you know you really heard him laugh. My daughter still says, "Daddy never laughed, only when he was with Uncle Moshe." I was from a different background.

INT: Did the counseling help you at all?

MARGIT: Yeah, it did because talking always helps me. I talk. But he did not talk. He was never a big talker. But he needed me. He definitely needed me, he needed me more than I needed him, that's for sure. But he was not a happy person.

INT: And you went back to counseling?

MARGIT: No, I did not go back anymore. You misunderstood this, no. No, I did only go there in that first year and somehow it helped me. Well it made me decide what to do.

INT: To stick it out?

MARGIT: To stick it out. Also the counselor somehow suggested things about thinking I shouldn't, but I said no, I'm not giving up. I'm not giving up on anything that fast. And I was not going to give up on that and I was glad I didn't because I didn't have a miserable life. I wouldn't say I had a miserable life, no. No.

INT: I don't remember if I asked you this, but how did Ruth deal with those periods of silence where he didn't talk to her either, I assume?

MARGIT: Oh yeah, no, he talked to her, he talked to her.

INT: It was just you he didn't talk to.

MARGIT: He didn't talk to me. No, he was angry at me but I never knew why and I read little things...put it off or something. You know, when you spend twenty-four hours a day with a person, it's not very good. I remember my mother once said, "Never go into business with your husband." All of us went into business with our husbands and even my daughter did. And many times I told her don't go into business with your husband and there you are.

INT: It's funny, isn't it, the four generations, yes, and your grandmother too.

MARGIT: Yes, yes, everybody did and all my sisters worked with their husbands. I said, "There is no element of surprise in the evening. You come home, what do you tell each other? You heard it all, yes." That's very, that's very hard on a marriage.

INT: I've heard that, yeah.

MARGIT: Especially if one person is a difficult person and maybe I'm not so easy either because I have opinions.

INT: So you feel that you're opinionated.

MARGIT: I'm opinionated in many respects (laughs) and not easily to change them if I believe in something. And my sister that I always bicker.

INT: Did you bicker with Henry?

MARGIT: He wouldn't.

INT: What about you and Ruth? Did you also bicker?

MARGIT: Not too much, no. Well, when she was younger, she married when she was twenty-one so that's it. She went to work, I went to work. Came in the evening, she went in the bedroom, listened to her music, I always let her listen. I stopped listening to music in 1945 and never heard any of those Beatles, nothing, she was on a different floor. (laughs) I was lucky.

INT: She wasn't into Mozart and Bach, huh?

MARGIT: (laughs) Never. So this is, no, we got along all right and she was a good girl. She was a good child. She didn't give us any problems to deal with.

INT: Why do you think she was so wonderful?

MARGIT: I don't think she was wonderful but she was not into drugs. She was not into this, all this dirty stuff, the clothing. She was dressed very, she is very conservative herself.

INT: Is she really?

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: So she's not materialistic?

MARGIT: Well, she likes money, and a nice house and these things, yeah.

INT: But when she was younger did she want things? Have you ever had any conflicts over wanting this and that?

MARGIT: No, no, she was working after school in an insurance office and made so much money, I don't know how much. Then she said from now on she was going to buy her own clothes and that was that.

INT: With her own money.

MARGIT: Good. And I let her make mistakes and so on, so I had no problems about this.

INT: Did she have friends?

MARGIT: She had friends.

INT: She was a normal adolescent?

MARGIT: A normal adolescent with all the nasty things, "You don't know anything." "I hate you," or something once in a blue moon and, "You don't let me do things." I let her do things, I said, "Who are you going with?" Is all I wanted to know, and she had meetings in our house, and so from her BBG Group or something and I said, "You'd better behave, otherwise you won't." There were rules which she obeyed.

INT: How did you transfer values or goals to her?

MARGIT: Well, we would say, "We do this at home and you have to do this and you don't squander money, you work hard for it," and things like that.

INT: So working hard?

MARGIT: She saw us, she saw us.

INT: So working hard was an important value.

MARGIT: Working hard was important. You do something, you do it right. This is in your blood, when you are brought like you are normal family. There was never an abundance of money and money wasn't really stressed. It wasn't important. It was important that when you buy something you pay for it. You take care of it, you don't throw it away, things like this.

INT: So you're careful with your money.

MARGIT: Yeah, sure.

INT: Did Henry agree with your parenting of Ruth?

MARGIT: Oh yeah, he never complained.

INT: He never got too involved?

MARGIT: When I was not here sometimes I went away by myself, when I came back Ruth always had something new, "When did you get that?" "Oh, Daddy bought it for me." He tried to buy her love. He didn't know any other way.

INT: He couldn't show it emotionally?

MARGIT: No. He was not a cuddler, or a kisser, or something, and she is not either but I am not either. I am not really demonstrative.

INT: Did she know that you loved her?

MARGIT: Yeah, she knew, yeah, she knew. She knew. She is not demonstrative with her children too.

INT: She's not?

MARGIT: Not, no, not.

INT: Kissy, huggy?

MARGIT: No, not. No, not really. Neither is her husband but the children know they are loved, they are very secure, I think. So she was secure. She had my undivided love and her father's undivided love, as I told you, never called her Ruth, he called her "shrimpie," but that was his way.

INT: Now you said off tape that Ruth was more religious than you are. How did you transfer Jewish identity to her?

MARGIT: First of all, there was this idea you know that children went with non-Jewish kids. She had lots of non-Jewish friends, later on some of them married. And she said, once she said to me, "How come you were never worried that I would marry somebody Jewish?" First of all, I said, "If you would have really loved that person, that person would have been very nice. How could I have said you shouldn't?" So I gave her a choice. Then I said, "And you know your father went through all this, and you should marry somebody from a religious group that did not like Jews?" And she said, "You know Mom, I went out with one boy once, that was a long time ago, and he was not Jewish and I never told you because I really felt badly about it." Somehow this you don't have to talk too much. Somehow in everyday life you know it's so, I mean and I am not so gung ho about that you have to marry somebody in your own faith if it's not the right person, because I think this in our family work out very badly.

INT: If somebody is not Jewish.

MARGIT: Well, that they married somebody Jewish did not turn out at all, it was terrible, and then they married somebody who was not Jewish and has a wonderful marriage. So you can only go by the person.

INT: But did you feel that Ruth wanted to marry somebody Jewish because of how you brought her up?

MARGIT: Oh yes, I'm sure she did. She did. First of all, later on she had only Jewish girlfriends. She went to BBG and there were these boys from AZA, whatever it's called, some of them were not so nice. And, but she didn't have too many boyfriends. She went to Israel when she was eighteen, and came back and had two boyfriends in Israel. And she was up to that year, eighteen she was very small, and the boys did not look at her, and she was not very popular with boys, and then she came back with two of them. They were in Israel.

INT: Did she write to them?

MARGIT: They called, they called, she wrote. But then she met her now husband, the same fall she met him. Israel was gone, the boyfriends were gone and she was hooked.

INT: She was hooked.

MARGIT: He was a nice boy from a Jewish family who didn't know anything about Jewishness but in name he was Jewish.

INT: Has she passed on Jewish identity to her children?

MARGIT: Oh yes, they went. They know, they all know these things about--

INT: They attend their synagogue?

MARGIT: They went to synagogue, they went to Hebrew school, not that they liked it, but they went and the girl was bat mitzvah and that was the last day she was in synagogue I think. For holidays they go. They know they are Jewish, but they have mostly Gentile friends. There are very few Jewish people living in that development and she has mostly Gentile girlfriends, boyfriends she hasn't gotten yet. But she knows. Her grandfather had a number.

INT: She knows. She knows the story.

MARGIT: She knows the story and so does he, the boy. They know, somehow they know.

INT: Who told them?

MARGIT: Their mother, their grandmother, their grandfather was there too. They knew their grandfather and talked about it in Hebrew school because this is being now, they bring this out in Hebrew school, no? Every year. So they know. They know they are Jewish. Probably don't always like it, but it is not easy to be Jewish.

INT: No, it's not.

MARGIT: It is very hard to be a Jew, as they say. They make a joke about it's hard to be a Jew. They say it was like a joke but it's not a joke.

INT: It's not.

MARGIT: It's never been that easy.

INT: Okay, so you were married for thirty-five years. Was life rather routine until Henry got sick?

MARGIT: Routine, yes. He got sick and had a colostomy.

INT: He had to have a colostomy?

MARGIT: Yeah, with a bag. But I didn't let the doctor tell him he had cancer because I knew he'd fall apart and he didn't. And this was good for two and a half years, the colostomy bag he only had three months.

INT: Did they reconnect the colon?

MARGIT: Yeah, they put it back together.

INT: So it wasn't permanent.

MARGIT: Yeah, it wasn't permanent. No. He was all right for two and a half years. That year my sister died and two months later my brother-in-law, the husband of my older sister died, that same month my husband found out, the doctor found out he had a tumor on the liver. This is usually secondary. This was the year 1985 and the doctor told him he had cancer. I couldn't deny this, I couldn't deny it to him anymore, you know. But he had two and a half good years.

INT: Did they give him chemotherapy or any other treatment?

MARGIT: No, the first time they did not. They did not.

INT: The second time?

MARGIT: Then he had practically continuous treatment. He had, how do they call this? Continuous intravenous with a computer. Infused support. That is a metal computer he wore that regulated the treatment.

INT: So could he live a normal life with this equipment? Was he still able to work?

MARGIT: No, we did not work then anymore. We were already retired. Yes.

INT: Already retired.

MARGIT: He had retired, yes. But, it wasn't normal because there was always, 2:00 in the morning there was this beep, beep, beep, there was something wrong with the computer. But we went to Florida with it. We went to the doctor there. We went for three winters. The last winter he was sick.

INT: What year did you close the store?

MARGIT: 1978.

INT: You closed the store and retired. And how old were you when you retired?

MARGIT: How old was I in 1938?

INT: 1978.

MARGIT: 64 I was, almost 65.

INT: And then what did you all do with yourselves?

MARGIT: Well, we closed up and went to Florida for six weeks. I did not want to go to Florida, but he wanted to. And I got used to it. I remember got there and said, "I'll hate it here," because I saw all the old people, but I got used to it and he liked to go. It was good for him, he liked to swim and it was warm and it was, at that time he did not have the infuse support. In 1978, no, he didn't have cancer. In 1982 he had the cancer. But he was okay, yes.

INT: So you enjoyed life for a while.

MARGIT: And I came back and volunteered at the hospital and I had a house, a husband and the hospital. I was, I was doing things.

INT: You were content.

MARGIT: Yeah, I was content, yeah. Now as long as I can do something I am content. If I am not doing something then I am discontented. (laughs)

INT: And then Henry became ill the first time and then you kept up your life after he recuperated.

MARGIT: We kept up our lives, yes. I tried to live as normal a life as possible because I did not want him to think that he was sick, and he wasn't sick.

INT: So you had to be strong is what you're saying; you held it in.

MARGIT: Yeah, hold it in. I didn't talk about it and he thought he was cured.

INT: One always hopes that we're cured after that, you know. And when he got sick again did you know that it was going to be terminal?

MARGIT: Yeah, I knew. The liver at that time, they didn't have liver transplants in 1985. There was this doctor in Abington, we changed afterwards, because he said go to Washington to the National Institute of Health, this and that and I talked to another doctor who said no, this is not feasible. And he changed hospital, went to Graduate and had a very nice oncologist and there wasn't much that you could do but chemotherapy, you know. But this didn't affect him really, that the chemotherapy did not affect him.

INT: He didn't get sick from it.

MARGIT: He didn't get sick with it, no.

INT: Thank goodness.

MARGIT: No, and he went very often later on, even when he had infuse support it did not affect him, he wasn't sick, but he got weaker and weaker and every time he went on the scale there were a few pounds less on the scale. So it was hard I must say, on both of us. He was not a bad patient.

INT: Did you get any help?

MARGIT: No, I didn't need to. He was not bedridden.

INT: So this went on for two years.

MARGIT: It went on from 1985 to the beginning of '88. He died in April of '88. So he came home from, from Florida in March and three weeks later he was dead.

INT: So it was really quick in some ways.

MARGIT: Holding onto, he was somehow holding onto it. You know every night instead of sleeping, I pack in a hurry, not really, you know in my mind. How am I going to do it? Because he didn't want to go home somehow, not before the date that we had set.

INT: You mean when you were in Florida.

MARGIT: Yes. And she said, "Oh, Mom, you will do it." I did it and he made it home. I still don't understand how he did it, because three days later he was in the hospital and three weeks later he died.

INT: What gave you the strength to go through all of this? What do you think?

MARGIT: I don't know. I came just from good stock, that's what it is, female stock.

INT: Strong stock?

MARGIT: Yes, that's it. My mother was the same way. I did not fall apart, not before, not after. I didn't cry. I didn't cry at the funeral.

INT: You didn't cry?

MARGIT: I don't cry at funerals, not that funeral, they don't mean to me. My sister is the same way.

INT: Did you have a chance to cry at all alone? When you were alone?

MARGIT: I cried. I cried by myself.

INT: So you don't show emotion publicly.

MARGIT: No, I don't and I don't want to. But I arranged everything. I mean arranged. He died on Saturday morning. I arranged the funeral for Sunday, because this way I thought that some people might come that couldn't come any other time. I called even his cousins in Massachusetts and asked them not to come because they are also not so young, and it's a long trip and they were going to drive. They were mad at me for months, but I thought I was nice to them. And I did this, all on the day between Saturday morning 4:00 and Sunday 10:00, when there was the funeral, because I don't like to drag out things if you don't have to. And my daughter was thinking the same way, it was good.

INT: So you got support from her?

MARGIT: Oh, very good support, yes. But she did not say, we didn't hug, we didn't kiss, we knew this thing had to be done, and it was over, and it was good for him and it was good for us because it was sad to look at that man.

INT: Did you sit shiva?

MARGIT: No. No, I did not sit shiva and I am sure people said something. But I don't care what people say because I was not going to sit shiva and listen to somebody telling me funny stories. I think I went the next day to the hospital because there I sit and work and don't talk. I work.

INT: Is that how you deal with grieving is to keep yourself busy?

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: I'm sure you think about it.

MARGIT: I think that you can think about it while you work, but I do not want to sit there and tear my hair. It's not productive.

INT: Okay, if we can make a transition now to more philosophical things. You know, I have a feeling for what happened. One of the things I want to pick up on also will be what kinds of things you're involved with in your leisure time, in your volunteer work. Let's talk about that now. After Henry died you kept up with working in the hospital?

MARGIT: Right, found myself another job in the thrift shop.

INT: The ORT thrift shop.

MARGIT: The ORT thrift shop, got involved in ORT a little bit and also started to work for my son-in-law because it gave me another day of doing something useful.

INT: And what was that?

MARGIT: I go there and help in the store. I make fruit salad.

INT: Do you still do that?

MARGIT: I still do.

INT: Do you? How often?

MARGIT: I do it on Tuesdays. I go early in the morning.

INT: They sell prepared fruit salads?

MARGIT: Yeah, I'm the fruit salad lady.

INT: So you do that on Tuesdays.

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: And you work in the hospital?

MARGIT: On Mondays and Wednesdays and on Thursdays I work in the thrift shop. So I have four days. Friday is mine.

INT: Day off.

MARGIT: I have to do some errands. (laughs) I don't work all day long, but when I come home at 2:00 from the hospital, for instance, there is only a few hours in the afternoon to prepare something to eat or go shopping, food shopping. I always do something. And I also knit for Magee Hospital.

INT: You knit? What do you make?

MARGIT: I make lap robes for people who sit in their chairs.

INT: How nice. It keeps your hands busy when you have some free time.

MARGIT: Yeah, when I watch TV.

INT: How long do you spend at the store?

MARGIT: I usually leave at 2:00. I come in at 8:00 and leave at 2:00.

INT: Do you take a bus back and forth?

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: You really do keep yourself busy. You're amazing. You're amazing.

MARGIT: I don't like to be picked up, only on certain times, but sometimes I'll say to my daughter, "Can you take me to the bus station at 69th Street," or once in a blue moon it's hot or cold or something and she'll drive me home. But otherwise I go by bus.

INT: You are very independent.

MARGIT: I'm independent.

INT: Well, what do you do on your weekends? My goodness, you have two full days.

MARGIT: I go to the movies or I go to New York sometimes.

INT: The theater.

MARGIT: The theater, yes.

INT: Do you go with your sister?

MARGIT: I go with my sister.

[Tape 6 - End Side 1] [Tape 6 - Side 2]

INT: So weekends you take trips.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: We talked off tape about how you travel.

MARGIT: Yeah, once a year we travel for two weeks, usually at the end of June.

INT: We, meaning?

MARGIT: My sister and I and two more friends. And we always go, lately we have gone with a tour group and enjoyed this very much. We have been in Europe, we have been in Great Britain, which was really a joy because I found out about things I never knew, I didn't know much about in England when I was living there. We went to Ireland, we, one year we went to Holland, and Belgium, and Luxembourg, and Germany and Switzerland. And this was one of these, if it's Tuesday, you must be in Belgium.

INT: Just the four of you went, not with a group?

MARGIT: No, we always went with a group because this is more comfortable for women our age. We don't have to think about hotel, anything. And there was always a very good tour guide and food they put in front of you. You don't have to think much. Then one year we went to Alaska where we went by ourselves.

INT: So you're really seeing the world now, aren't you?

MARGIT: Yes, I never had the chance to. One year I even was in Alaska and in Israel in the same year.

INT: But you said one of your favorite places to be is Israel and you'd go anytime.

MARGIT: Yeah, I'd go anytime to Israel.

INT: Are your other two friends also survivors?

MARGIT: No, they are Americans do not understand what you're talking about. One of them doesn't want to understand what we're talking about and she asks very naïve questions sometimes.

INT: Does that bother you?

MARGIT: Yes. But my sister always says don't talk about it. I said why? She should know. She's a grown woman. She's almost my age. She should know that there are other worlds than the American senior. She's an intelligent woman but she does not want to hear about this.

INT: She doesn't want to know about it, the bad things that happen to Jews?

MARGIT: Yeah, she doesn't want to hear about it and we talk about it. We talk about England and is funny and tragic comedy things, yet it wasn't really funny. It was tragic comedy, what we went through. People do not always understand, but like they say, "We also had rationing." (laughs) Yes, that's the answer. Rationing was the least.

INT: Do you feel more comfortable talking about these things than your sister? Does your sister feel comfortable talking?

MARGIT: Oh no, we talk about it all the time, yeah.

INT: The two of you.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: You're very open about what you say; you said you talk even though people don't want to hear. Is she like that also?

MARGIT: But she does also talk, yeah, because sometimes she will say why do we talk? She doesn't understand. I'll say, "Well, one day she might, she might." (laughs) She might look at things from a different standpoint than we do, you know this I'm an American first and then a Jew. We went through this and when the Germans said we are German first and then we are Jews, yeah? It didn't help them. And some people do not want to believe that it could happen again and it could.

INT: You feel that it could?

MARGIT: I think it could.

INT: How do you feel? Do you feel that you are Jewish first and foremost before you're anything else?

MARGIT: I do not make such a big point of it being something first. You can be both of it, fifty/fifty, let's say, yeah? But to say I'm an American first and then a Jew, it's not healthy.

INT: Why do you think it's not healthy?

MARGIT: Because it could happen to you that the American first does not help you.

INT: You do feel it could happen again.

MARGIT: I think it could happen.

INT: You don't feel safe anywhere.

MARGIT: You hear all these things the militia, all these things. I never thought that I would start to believe in it stronger than I ever did. And you heard about it.

INT: Anti-Semitism in the United States you're referring to.

MARGIT: Yeah. I don't talk about the skinheads, they're young, but the militia, these people, they are not young, middle aged and what you heard and when you saw the discussions on television, my G-d. It can happen anytime, anywhere.

INT: It's still something to be wary of, you're saying, you have to be on guard.

MARGIT: In my opinion, yeah, if I want to be honest. Yes, I don't always want to think about it, ahh, it's somewhere in the hinterland but, that's how it started over there too.

INT: Okay, now let's move onto some more philosophical stuff. Okay.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: I'm going to talk about successes and failures in your life. What do you see as your successes in life?

MARGIT: My daughter.

INT: Okay.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: What else?

MARGIT: I have a pretty comfortable life now and I don't think I would have achieved this anywhere else, but this is America. But nobody did it for me, I did it myself. Okay, I did it with my husband, but we did it together. Nobody gave us anything for nothing.

INT: And your daughter is very special?

MARGIT: My daughter is very special, yes.

INT: You produced her?

MARGIT: Yes, yes. I gave her her life and her values and I think that's an achievement. I mean, I really did good with her and she knows. (laughs)

INT: What about any mistakes that you made in your life?

MARGIT: Well, mistakes I made. I made a lot of mistakes but. Mistakes anybody makes that you do, I couldn't pinpoint one. That I made a mistake, one of my big failures is that I am not ambitious, that I am letting things ride sometimes. I am not too good with friends. I have very few friends. I am not seeking friends and this I would say, this is my big fault.

INT: How did that happen?

MARGIT: Well, I'm always very self-sustaining.

INT: And making friends with other people?

MARGIT: Was not important for me.

INT: It's not important to you.

MARGIT: It wasn't. Now it's more important than it was. But it wasn't really. I was always friendly but not a friend.

INT: Why is it more important to you now?

MARGIT: Well, because I'm alone. I'm not one of those widows who says, "Yeah, this, that, this is so terrible," because I keep myself occupied. But one is enough.

INT: Now this is about the Holocaust itself and what you do in confronting it. Do you read Holocaust literature or see Holocaust films?

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: You do both.

MARGIT: Yes. Out of a feeling of guilt, as I said.

INT: A feeling of guilt?

MARGIT: Yeah, because I wasn't really too much in it. I always have that feeling that I will never lose it.

INT: That you, that you--

MARGIT: Had it much better than anybody else that I know. I was affected, but not in such a horrible way.

INT: Does Ruth know that you feel this way?

MARGIT: Oh, she knows, yes, she knows.

INT: And she knows that you feel guilty.

MARGIT: I always said, "But I'm not really a Holocaust survivor. Don't say that because look at me. I didn't have it so bad." She said, "Yes, but Mom, you did." She knows.

INT: So no matter what anybody says to you, you still have those feelings.

MARGIT: Uh-huh.

INT: Does Ruth, I know you said your son-in-law doesn't, but does Ruth read literature or go to films? If there is a Holocaust film does she go out of her way to see it?

MARGIT: She didn't even see "Schindler's List."

INT: Why didn't she see it?

MARGIT: She said she couldn't go.

INT: Why?

MARGIT: She walked out when I saw this movie of Gerda Weissmann; you know she taped it for me. She walked out of the room. She said, "I can't see it."

INT: Is it because it's too painful for her?

MARGIT: Yes, I think so. She walked out. First of all, she cried and she didn't want me to see her crying. I sat there and cried myself.

INT: Why wouldn't she want you to see her cry?

MARGIT: I don't know. I guess the same way I don't want to be seen crying to her too. She is not a crier either. Also, she cried at her mother-in-law's funeral. She didn't cry at her father's funeral.

INT: Isn't that interesting? Do you have any ideas about why?

MARGIT: Well, because she's my daughter.

INT: She cried at somebody else's but she wouldn't cry because she controlled herself for you?

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah. But she cried at her mother-in-law's funeral.

INT: Is she afraid to show emotion at all in front of you, do you think?

MARGIT: I think so.

INT: But even in private if she had seen "Schindler's List" on video now, but she did not because she found it too painful.

MARGIT: Yeah, I don't think she got it, and I said, "It won't hurt you." "I don't have to, Mom, I know all this story." She's afraid.

INT: She's afraid?

MARGIT: And her husband would not watch it.

INT: Is she afraid that she's going to have some emotion?

MARGIT: I don't know. She doesn't want to see it, I guess. Also there are all these films, "Shoah," all these things; I'm sure she saw some of it.

INT: But you don't know that she follows it, like you would go to see all the new Holocaust films coming out.

MARGIT: Yeah, I sat through "Shoah" for six hours, I think. (laughs)

INT: A wonderful film, wasn't it?

MARGIT: Yes, it was. She did not and I said, "Why don't you?" And she said, "I'll go. I'll go." But she did not. And to me, well, I saw "Schindler's List," but somehow it was nothing compared to what the others went through, you know.

INT: I don't think it can ever really be.

MARGIT: No, not even, I read all these stories, you know it was like I'm used to seeing a situation or so on, and some people made documentaries, non-fiction things out of it, you know.

INT: It's sort of interesting how all of a sudden the Holocaust has come into the awareness of society.

MARGIT: Because the Holocaust survivors start talking more.

INT: You think that's what it was.

MARGIT: I think so. They talk because they are afraid nobody will believe it, everybody will forget. They even write books, some not so good, some better. And the Holocaust Museum, there's an awareness fifty years since the war, that helped too.

INT: Do you think that when Holocaust survivors came to America they tried to talk, but nobody listened, nobody wanted to hear? You don't think they tried?

MARGIT: No, there was a guilt feeling in America about this, I think. People felt guilty that they didn't help more.

INT: You mean at the time or later?

MARGIT: At the time, at the time, I think. When we came, well we came early in 1946, most of them came in 1949, the ones from the camps usually came from 1949. They didn't really want to talk about it either. Then they were too busy to make a life, their life. Some of them didn't even talk to their own children about it or later on they did because they didn't want their children to hear such horrible stories, or their past was not impressive enough for the children, who knows? Some of them didn't. Some talked incessantly, they were the ones who were better off, I guess because they talked about it. It wasn't American and they wanted to Americanized so much. You know I'm still, I'm living in America since 1946; I'm still a European, that's it. You think a different way. Everything was more complicated there so you think whatever comes here is easy, you know for us. (laughs) European. I still think like a European. My daughter keeps on saying, "Been here so long but you still think like a European." I said, "Can't help it. That's the way it is." And these people came here with nothing. Some had already children. They had to find work, they didn't speak the language. It's very hard to be a refugee. I feel for every refugee of any ethnic group. It is hard to get used to a different

life. And we were already, I mean I came, I spoke English. I was already used to another country than the country of my birth. But still it was an entirely different way of thinking. Everything was different. There was once a woman who told some kind of funny story, how long is a refugee a refugee? Forever. I said there is this feeling.

INT: Mentality.

MARGIT: That mentality. And it's in all of these people. And most of them didn't have any families and they stuck together with all the other refugees, which is not really that good because they were living in an imagined ghetto. They made friends with Americans, but not really. They always said we have these refugee friends, you know. Some, on the other hand, said they do not want to mix with refugees and that wasn't good either, you know. Because his (Robbie's) mother was blessed with two refugee mother-in-laws. (laughs)

INT: Really?

MARGIT: I was one. One of the daughters married a young man whose parents were from Vienna too, a coincidence.

INT: Really, are you friendly with them at all?

MARGIT: No, because this was the couple who didn't want to have anything to do with other refugees.

INT: When did they leave Europe?

MARGIT: The same time as me. No, but they came from Vienna.

INT: Straight to the United States.

MARGIT: Yeah, but they were refugees, yes.

INT: Oh, oh.

MARGIT: But they did not want to have anything to do with them. That's what they say. And because they come from the same country they don't have to be sympathetic to each other, yeah? And I knew them and we were friendly, but never close. We only met through the other in-laws, but, and I always said to this in-laws, "Aren't you lucky." (laughs) He had two of them.

INT: Did she ever have both couples for Passover?

MARGIT: No, but we went out to eat or something. We weren't hostile to each other, but not friendly. And it was funny, yeah? This woman said she did not want to be friendly with other refugees and I thought this was ridiculous. But it's her life.

INT: Well, lucky her that she made friends with other people who were not, right?

MARGIT: Yeah, I don't know. I guess she did. But that's how it is. There are either those who only had friends that were refugees or others that didn't want to have. I know of other people that did not like to mix. They wanted to Americanize and this is impossible. You Americanized to a certain degree, but you adjusted like an American moved to Austria. They will never be an Austrian, they will be American, yes?

INT: That's a very good point. How has your experience with the Holocaust affected your political views?

MARGIT: Well, I was always a liberal, I am still a liberal. There is nothing will keep me from that. I could not go more to the right, no, that I could not do.

INT: And you always vote?

MARGIT: A little bit to the left. Not too much, just in the middle, yeah?

INT: Well, a little more to the left you were saying.

MARGIT: Yes, but you cannot be in the middle somehow. You have to be on the right or left. Just a little bit to the left.

INT: And I think you told me you always vote and how important that is.

MARGIT: Yeah, it is very important. I still think so.

INT: And I think off tape we talked about what's going on now in Bosnia and how you felt about that.

MARGIT: Yeah, that is absolutely unbelievable what they do there.

INT: It brings back memories, doesn't it?

MARGIT: That's like the war between the states, isn't it? Same idea.

INT: With the refugees and the ethnic cleansing and that kind of stuff going on.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah.

INT: And the world sitting by and watching what goes on.

MARGIT: They are in there in the middle somehow, yeah. It's absolutely awful.

INT: It's not the first time it's happened. Since 1945 there's been genocide going on in other places too, I find it very upsetting.

MARGIT: Well, and especially there. It must have gone on since the First World War when they were cut. This is all part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire -- most of it, not all of it. Herzegovina, Bosnia -- Herzegovina was part of the Austrian Empire. I never heard about Muslims. I never knew there were Muslims living in Bosnia. But I knew a woman, the agent who sold me this apartment, she had a strange sounding name and I said, "Betty, where did you get that name?" And she said, "I'm a Serb." And that was six, seven years ago. And she was a Serb. She grew up here, was born here, but she was a Serb.

INT: I didn't realize there were so many Serbians in the city.

MARGIT: I knew they had like a Greek Orthodox Church or something.

INT: Oh yeah. You know I personally hadn't thought about this ethnic group at all.

MARGIT: No, I never knew it was so divided.

INT: I knew the Croats were very bad during the war. They were not good to the Jews.

MARGIT: Well, they had Tito there and Tito didn't do anything to the Jews. He was a dictator, but Tito was a good dictator because before that they didn't have anything at all. They never had much leadership. What did they have, a king in Bulgaria not Bulgaria, Yugoslavia didn't have a king, I think Michael or somebody. I don't know. I don't remember these things anymore. But, it was a beautiful country where one went to in the summer.

INT: You went?

MARGIT: No, I've never been to Yugoslavia but it was very near from Vienna. It was a cheap vacation, we used to say. It wasn't hard to go to Yugoslavia, places like Split and Sarajevo and Dubrovnik, all these places were known to me, but I never went there. I never thought about it that there were Serbs and Croats and other people and that they hated each other. No one knew about that. They were all peasants. Well, that's how we thought. You look at them, look at these people, most of them look like they are old peasants. They are in the mountains and so on. So we didn't have anything to do with it. I never thought of it that they would hate, hate themselves because one group is Muslim and the others are Christians. Those are Christians? My G-d! It's a terrible situation!

INT: People hating one another, it's starting all over again.

MARGIT: We have a friend, who has a former boyfriend who is a Serb, I think. He lives in the United States and I said, "What does Mika say about this?" And she says, "Well, he's devastated or something." And she said, "It's so strange, they all have the same color face, of that skin," she said to me. She said, "Yes, it's hard to understand who is your enemy."

INT: Because everybody looks alike.

MARGIT: It's really racial.

INT: She's really racial?

MARGIT: No, this is really a racial thought, yeah. (laughs) I didn't think about it.

INT: I think it was during our first interview you mentioned an incident where somebody had come over to you and asked you to sign a petition about something and you didn't sign. You felt it was a cowardly act at the time.

MARGIT: Yeah, a socialist.

INT: Why did you feel you were being a coward?

MARGIT: Well, I really believe in the socialist party but there's no chance for to have one here. It is ridiculous because now when they run for something nobody votes for it because people here hear it, they only hear social -- only social security is good. (laughs) The other social things, not good. It might be too, it might still be thought communistically, still think of McCarthy, I think. (laughs)

INT: So why did you feel you were a coward by not signing the petition?

MARGIT: Because I thought why should I put, I shouldn't put my name on it. I would get literature and all kinds of things.

INT: That's not being a coward. Do you think that was a proper word?

MARGIT: Yeah. In my opinion it is. Let's call it by the right name in my mind.

INT: You just didn't want to be associated with that term at this point because of possible repercussions because you were thinking of McCarthy and how it would come back to haunt you?

MARGIT: Well, I don't really think about McCarthy coming back, I hope. This is one terrible period in American life and I don't think that will ever come back. But it bothered me very much that Cohen was involved with it. I saw this, what was it?

INT: "Angels in America"? (a play)

MARGIT: "Angels in America," sure. And the other one, what was it?

INT: "Perestroika"

MARGIT: Yeah, "Perestroika," I saw it too, yeah.

INT: That was a different part of Cohen's life. (laughs)

MARGIT: (laughs) What I didn't know. But did you see it?

INT: Yes, in New York. It's coming here, actually.

MARGIT: I saw it, with what was his name? Who did I say it was?

INT: Murray Abraham?

MARGIT: No, it was the first one.

INT: Ron--

MARGIT: It's Lieber.

INT: Liebman, something like that, yeah.

MARGIT: I remember I was sitting in the first row, terrific seat but he was such a, he spit on me.

INT: Yes, I know. I could, I was sitting close. I saw it too.

MARGIT: Yes, and I thought my G-d, he spit on me. (laughs) It was a very effective thing. But this was really the second part.

INT: Yeah.

MARGIT: They had a biography on one of the cable stations about McCarthy, but I said, I'm not going to watch this because I remember how terrible these times were you always think, this came in America in a country like this and the whole country was afraid of this one man who was an evil person. Maybe he was mad. Who knows?

INT: And then we condemn the Germans for following Hitler.

MARGIT: Yes. And they pick on innocent people, really innocent people.

INT: Intellectuals to a certain extent. It was a bad scene for Americans to look back on. We've done some really unpleasant things in this country too.

MARGIT: Well, it happens.

INT: Okay, let's move onto a retrospective looking back on your life. What have been your happiest moments since the war?

MARGIT: Well, that I became a mother, that my child turned out all right, that I have been a grandmother twice and I am not a gushy grandmother. (laughs) But things don't have to be so, I am not such an outgoing person. There are things that make me happy, they are smaller things.

INT: And what about your most difficult moments since the war?

MARGIT: Since the war. When my sister died, my husband died. When all this, all these people in Europe that I knew...

[Tape 6 - End Side 2] [Tape 7 - Side 1]

INT: We were talking about the loss of your loved ones as your most difficult times.

MARGIT: Yes, yes.

INT: Looking back, how would you describe with adjectives if you can, the strengths to cope with all that you've been through to rebuild your life? Can you give it names? You say strength. What does that actually mean?

MARGIT: I didn't do it consciously. I never said this, today I have to do this. Somehow this is my life, this is the way I live and I do it. I plod along. I am not a real person who knows I'm going to do this. You know, I plod along. I am not really, I don't want to bring up that I am such a wonderful person. I am just a plodder and I do what has to be done, not very consciously.

INT: Would you say that you live one day at a time? Would that be the way to describe your philosophy?

MARGIT: Very much, very much one day at a time.

INT: And you can do that without being anxious about what's going to be?

MARGIT: No, I'm not going to think what's going to be in another year or so. If I'm still here, okay, I deal with it. That's I would say, I will call it that way. I deal with it when it comes along but I'm not looking, I'm not planning. I'm never planning. That's another one of my bad habits. I never plan.

INT: What do you mean you never plan?

MARGIT: I never plan.

INT: Why don't you?

MARGIT: This is my goal.

INT: You don't do that.

MARGIT: No.

INT: Why do you feel that you don't plan ahead or have goals?

MARGIT: Well, because this is a more intelligent way trying to think, I think when you plan something. I'll do it when it comes along.

INT: I don't think intelligence is the answer because you're very intelligent. Is there another reason can you think about? I mean, I don't know what it is.

MARGIT: Lazy.

INT: I can't accept that.

MARGIT: I'm lazy.

INT: Are you afraid to make--

MARGIT: Plans?

INT: Plans because you don't know?

MARGIT: No, I'll say well, I'll say okay next year I'll go down there, this is the only thing I plan, yeah, G-d willing I say.

INT: You planned your vacations. (laughs)

MARGIT: Yeah, I planned my vacations. I said G-d willing because this is a word to say. But if I'm still around. I don't want to say, "If I'm still around."

INT: So you do make plans. I mean you make plans, you buy tickets for the theater.

MARGIT: No, I'm not going to live haphazardly. You have to have some plans but not long range plans, I never did.

INT: For your life.

MARGIT: Yeah. I never said when I'm forty I'm going to do this. And I will have to have arrived this and this goal, never. Never. I'm sorry to say, I'm not very organized. My life is not, I did not organize my life to that end.

INT: You never have.

MARGIT: Never.

INT: But that's now since you've been here. Before you had to make plans like when you were in England or...

MARGIT: Well, you couldn't make too many plans.

INT: You knew you were going to go to America.

MARGIT: That was a plan.

INT: That was a big one.

MARGIT: That was the plan, yes. That was the plan.

INT: You appear even now to have an awful lot of energy.

MARGIT: Yeah, I do.

INT: Has your health been good?

MARGIT: My health has been excellent, touch wood. (knocks) But, I have a lot of energy. Sometimes too much for my strength.

INT: Where do you think you get the energy? I mean, energy is psychological to a certain extent. Where do you think you get this energy that keeps you so busy?

MARGIT: I come from good stock, that's it.

INT: It was something that was passed onto you from your parents?

MARGIT: It was the idea you do, you don't sit around.

INT: The values.

MARGIT: You just don't sit around, you do something.

INT: What memories are strongest for you in your life, I mean your whole life?

MARGIT: Well, the older you get, the more you think of your youth, of things, you forget what you did yesterday but you remember all these things that you did in your youth. I had a pretty good youth. I mean, compared to other people I had a pretty good youth; and I think about it a lot and we talk, my sister and I talk about it sometimes and I talk to my daughter. Sometimes she'll say, "But you never told me that." "There is too much to tell. I cannot tell you everything." I have a long life really, a long life.

INT: When you say you never told me that, is that from before the war stories?

MARGIT: Uh-huh.

INT: Mostly your fondest memories were from before the war in Vienna.

MARGIT: Yeah, I was carefree, didn't know what the future held for me, luckily. I wouldn't have been so carefree. I didn't have a bad life, I must say, compared to others. Everything is relative, especially your life. Compare it to anybody. Oh, some people make it sound worse than it is, but I was always pretty satisfied with what I had. That's my philosophy: be happy with what you've got. Don't always want what somebody else has. The grass is not always greener for me on the other side. Mostly it's green enough on my side.

INT: Would you say you are a person who has fears much, do you ever have any fears about anything? This or that is going to happen?

MARGIT: No.

INT: Because if you take one day at a time so (?)

MARGIT: But the only thing is that I really have this fear that all this might happen again, yes. But I am not thinking about it. You ask me, I'll think about it. It's not in my mind that I think about it, this is going to happen, no.

INT: You mean another Holocaust, anti-Semitism.

MARGIT: Yeah, yeah, but I don't like the word, anti-Semitism, that I don't like. But no, I'm not thinking all the time about it. You talk about it, it comes and you talk, you think, you say well, I think it might happen but I'm not really consciously thinking about it. I feel, well, this is going to happen, what's going to happen to my children and I cannot do anything about it, you know. And people say oh my children, what's going to? You cannot do anything about it. It's not good. It will make you mad.

INT: Do you think that what's coming out about the Holocaust with the literature, films and the museum are going to have any kind of impact on future generations?

MARGIT: I don't think so. Not too much. This world doesn't consist of Jews only. Jews are only a small percentage. You talk to many Gentiles, you would never even think the word "Holocaust" or what it meant. This is something so strange to them. I don't think it will have any impact.

INT: What about the Jewish future generations? (?)

MARGIT: Not so much either. First of all they're so mixed now.

INT: Inter-marriage you mean.

MARGIT: Yes, and doesn't help, that doesn't help either, no? But, well, I mean they tried to instill that in the children. I hope they still remember that they are Jews but, Israel helped a little bit in this; the idea there is something like a homeland.

INT: It's like an anchor for us, that's what you were saying. Has this experience made any sense out of your life? Is anything predictable anymore? I think you were saying that it was hard to really predict.

MARGIT: It is. I would say it's hard. You cannot predict what happens tomorrow. Not even the weather you can predict.

INT: Okay, now we're going to move on to some emotional areas, your beliefs and attitudes. Would you describe yourself as hopeful or pessimistic?

MARGIT: In between. I'm not pessimistic, but I'm also not very optimistic. I am somewhere In between. Wishy-washy.

INT: Does it depend on what it is?

MARGIT: Yeah, sure. No, but I wouldn't say I'm a pessimist, no, no. A pessimist is a sad life. No, I always say, well, tomorrow is another day.

INT: You're like Scarlett O'Hara. (laughs)

MARGIT: (laughs) That's right.

INT: Have you experienced any flashbacks or nightmares?

MARGIT: Not now. Not lately.

INT: You had?

MARGIT: Years before I used to, stupid things that I didn't have a passport or something when the passport was so important, you know.

INT: To get out, to escape.

MARGIT: Yeah, to have a passport you have something to show that you are a person. I came to this country without a passport.

INT: So that's your recurring nightmare.

MARGIT: That used to be and not lately about it. I have dreams, but if I have nightmares, they have nothing to do with this. Sometimes you have a horrible dream but-

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INT: Not about the war.

MARGIT: No, no, not about that.

INT: Would you consider yourself a trusting or a suspicious person?

MARGIT: Not suspicious but not one hundred percent trusting.

INT: Not too trusting.

MARGIT: I'm wary. (laughs)

INT: You're wary.

MARGIT: Yes.

INT: Do you ever feel frightened for your children or grandchildren?

MARGIT: No, because I cannot help this. I cannot live their life and I don't know what the future brings. They will have to look after themselves. I didn't have much help either. You know, this is a stupid saying, "I'm spending my children's inheritance." I can't stand this expression. And I always say, "We didn't have an inheritance. Why do you have to save for your children's inheritance? We came, we did not have none of us, this group of people, yes, that I come from, we didn't have any inheritance. We made it ourselves. Why do you say this?" I always say. "My children, why do you have to leave something to your children?" I don't mean to squander it.

INT: Are you saying that you have a right to live your life and use it?

MARGIT: Not even saying it, you know, this way. We didn't have any inheritance. We made it. Let them make it themselves.

INT: You feel there's no rationale behind that kind of philosophy.

MARGIT: No. It annoys me.

INT: What have you thought when things have gone wrong in your life? What goes through your head?

MARGIT: No, I wouldn't really say that things have gone very, very wrong.

INT: Do you blame it on anything or take it personally that it's your fault?

MARGIT: No, not really. No, I was really lucky. I don't think I've done anything terrible. I haven't done anything wonderful, but always in the middle. I am a boring person. (laughs)

INT: I wouldn't say that. (laughs)

MARGIT: There's no big ups and downs.

INT: No big ups and downs.

MARGIT: No.

INT: That's what you mean about being boring, that you have no ups and downs in the way you've lived your life.

MARGIT: No, no.

INT: Do you enjoy happiness? Are you able to feel joy--

MARGIT: Oh yeah, well, it doesn't take much to make me be happy. My husband said, "You laugh at anything." I said, "Yes, I'm lucky, I always find something to laugh about." And he couldn't see that. "What's so funny," he used to say when I laughed. He used to watch television and that's so stupid. And I would laugh. So why should I cry? I'd rather laugh. I laugh. (laughs)

INT: So you're not a worrier either.

MARGIT: Well, I worry about stupid things.

INT: Like what?

MARGIT: Am I going to be able to pay this bill on time, and maybe I'll forget about it and I make lists so I shouldn't forget -- these are my worries.

INT: You worry about not remembering.

MARGIT: Yeah.

INT: But big things, I mean like are you worried about people getting sick or yourself getting sick?

MARGIT: Well, I don't want to think of the idea that I'm going to be a burden to my daughter. I'm just signing a long term insurance that takes me a long time to get done, because I don't want to be a burden to my daughter, and this I arranged, you know, because I really don't want to be a burden to her. So I, I worried about this but now I have this insurance, I don't. But you cannot worry about getting sick because you never know. Who are you going to blame for it? Nobody, and it's no use to, to worry ahead. I tell this to my sister who worries three weeks before she goes on the trip. "What are we going to take on the trip?" I say, "Ask me the day before."

INT: That's when you start preparing, packing.

MARGIT: Yes, yes. So she worries three weeks before. So I said that's the difference between you and me. But she's always the well-dressed person. She's very well dressed.

INT: And?

MARGIT: And I'm very casual.

INT: Casual.

MARGIT: Yes. But she worries about this, it really worries her and she'll ask me three weeks ahead. So I said, "Ask me, ask me when it's nearer to the date."

INT: It seems like that's not really important to you.

MARGIT: No, no, it's not important.

INT: What's important is you just get some clothes to wear so you can go on this great trip.

MARGIT: Yeah. That they are not creased, not dirty and they are not-- (laughs)

INT: Do you ever feel depressed?

MARGIT: No, very seldom. Sure, the weather might be gray, and it's raining or something and I have to sit in and not go anywhere, maybe I'm feeling a little. But I'll find something to do and then I'm not depressed anymore. I'm not a depressed person, that's it. That's one thing I can say about myself.

INT: Was there anything that happened in your experiences during the war or after that have been difficult for you to share, for you to share with your family?

MARGIT: No, not really.

INT: Okay.

MARGIT: However sad, I always talked about things.

INT: Do you have any questions that you want to ask me or do you want to add anything to this tape before I turn it off?

MARGIT: I think I said enough.

INT: Okay, I just wanted to say that this has been a great pleasure for me to spend these hours with you. I've learned a lot from you. I really appreciate your time.

MARGIT: Well, maybe you'll look now at people who went through this from a different point of view, that they are not all such terrible victims, that they were able to make a life.

INT: Well, that's what we're hoping to show in this project, that there's lots of strength and people have really rebuilt their lives. So I thank you.

MARGIT: You are very welcome.

[Tape 7 - End Side 1]

(END OF INTERVIEW)