

INTERVIEW WITH FRIEDA TABAK

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**Transcending Trauma Project
Council for Relationships
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INTERVIEW WITH FRIEDA TABAK

INTERVIEWER: This is tape 1 of an interview with Frieda Tabak on November 27, 1995. Will you begin by giving me your name?

FRIEDA: My name is Frieda Wishner Tabak.

INT: And your age?

FRIEDA: I am 63.

INT: Where were you born?

FRIEDA: I was born in Czernowitz, Romania. Do you need the date?

INT: Go ahead.

FRIEDA: December the 31st, 1931. I mean December the 20th, I'm sorry. (Laughter)

INT: What is your present marital status?

FRIEDA: I am married.

INT: What level of education did you achieve?

FRIEDA: I have a bachelor's of art. Four-year college.

INT: And education of your husband?

FRIEDA: He has a two-year college.

INT: And were you ever employed? Are you now or were you ever employed?

FRIEDA: No.

INT: What about the employment status of your husband?

FRIEDA: My husband is presently retired. He was the president of a business which had been started by his father.

INT: You want to tell me what kind of business?

FRIEDA: It was a hardware business, mainly industrial hardware. They did business with industries, mostly in Marcus Hook, such as Sun Oil Company, American Viscose Company, etc.

INT: How would you define your economic status?

FRIEDA: How would I define my economic status? Satisfactory? I'm quite happy with it.
(Laughter)

INT: Could you be a little more specific than that?

FRIEDA: Like, you know, how much money do we have?

INT: Where would you put yourself in...

FRIEDA: I would put myself in a middle class. Is that what you're looking for?

INT: Okay. What are the ages and marital status of your children?

FRIEDA: I have three children. They're all married. Rhea, my daughter, the oldest, is 41. COSTM is 38, and David is 30.

INT: Do you have any grandchildren?

FRIEDA: Yes, I have one grandchild, COSTM's daughter, Julie. She is five and a half.

INT: What is the educational level achieved by your children?

FRIEDA: My daughter has a master's in marketing. My son has a master's...my son COSTM has a master's in finance. And David has a master's in Russian literature, 19th century Russian literature, with a half of Ph.D. (Laughter)

INT: Okay. Where do your children live?

FRIEDA: My daughter Rhea lives in Chestnut Hill. COSTM lives in Lafayette Hill, and David is in Chicago.

INT: What is your religious affiliation?

FRIEDA: I am Jewish. Affiliated with Ohev Shalom, Conservative synagogue.

INT: What other organizations are you associated with?

FRIEDA: Hadassah, United Jewish Appeal, Federation, I guess. What else? Um. World Affairs Council. I guess that's about it as of today. I can't think of anybody else. I may think of some as we go along, probably. (Laughter)

INT: Drop it in, whenever.

FRIEDA: And whatever they are, they most likely will be Jewish.

INT: Are you active in any Holocaust related activity?

FRIEDA: No, not now.

INT: Were you ever?

FRIEDA: Not really, no.

INT: All right. Now I'm going to ask you some questions about your original family. Not your present family, but your family of origin. Can you tell me about your place of birth?

FRIEDA: Czernowitz was a very cosmopolitan city. My parents and family were, I would say, middle class up to upper middle class Jewish people. My father was a businessman. My uncle was a physician. I had another uncle who was an engineer. We had a very comfortable life until 1940.

INT: All right. Prior to the war, you didn't move, then.

FRIEDA: No.

INT: You stayed there.

FRIEDA: We stayed, yes.

INT: Tell me about the members of that family.

FRIEDA: My mother and my father. I have a brother who's seven years my junior. Do you want...

INT: Was there anyone else living with you? Did you have grandparents that lived with you or anybody?

FRIEDA: We lived next door to grandparents, but not in the same house.

INT: Maternal or paternal?

FRIEDA: Paternal.

INT: Paternal grandparents next door. What kind of religious affiliation did your parents have?

FRIEDA: I really don't remember them having, quote, a religious affiliation per se, as belonging to a synagogue. There was a Jewish kehilla, a Jewish community, to whom you paid taxes, which ran a Jewish school, and I attended for the first two years of my elementary school I attended a Tarbut. A Hebrew...Zionist...It was basically Zionist sponsored. But for services we went to, not necessarily every week but certainly High Holidays we went to services. My father at times would go on Shabbat. Not every Shabbat. My father was very much a Zionist.

INT: Was he a member? Was he in an organized faction?

FRIEDA: Yes. In an organized fashion. I remember going to meetings and rallies, and I remember filling the blue box. Very much. My father especially was very much active.

INT: What kind of education did your parents have?

FRIEDA: My father probably was totally self-educated, even though he was very learned in the Talmud and the Torah, and also some secular education. He had not gone to school, he was self-educated, but very hungry for learning, and therefore constantly teaching himself and learning and reading. My mother was born in a small town in Galicia, which was Poland. It was actually Austria before the First World War. Poland after the First World War. And her father, she was one of six, her father sent her, both her sisters, her, her sisters and her brothers, she had two brothers, to study in Vienna. And she, I guess, went past high school there. Also very interested in education. Education was foremost in my parents' mind for themselves as well as their children.

INT: And were there siblings in an equal economic level?

FRIEDA: My mother's siblings, yes. My father's siblings, almost all of them had emigrated, all but one, all but two actually, my father included. My father and a sister of his did not immigrate to the United States. The rest of them all immigrated to the United States.

INT: And were they...did they achieve a comparable educational and economic standard in the United States?

FRIEDA: Probably...an economic, middle class economic standard, I would say. Business people, became involved in business, and yes, I would say they were fairly well off.

INT: All right. Now I'm going to ask you some questions about your grandparents.

FRIEDA: (laughter)

INT: What kind of relationship, first of all, did you have with your grandparents?

FRIEDA: I was very, very young when...Well, I was eight years old when the war started and that's when we split, and I never saw them again, the grandparents who lived next door to us, and I, from what I can remember, it was quite cordial, and I really don't remember all that much about them.

INT: The grandparents that lived next door to you, did they have a significant effect on your life?

FRIEDA: I don't think so. I really don't think so. Perhaps because I was so young when I left them. I don't really remember them having any influence on me. I think my parents probably had much more of an influence.

INT: Do you remember anything about the relationship between your parents and your grandparents?

FRIEDA: I think it was probably cordial. I don't remember anything that wasn't right, so...

INT: You say you don't have any significant...

FRIEDA: No, nothing really.

INT: ...memories.

FRIEDA: No, not very significant. No.

INT: Now can you tell me something about your parents' relationship with each other?

FRIEDA: They had a fairly decent relationship. Man-wife relationship. They had their fights, as well as their disagreements. Where they both agreed was when it came to the education of their children. And their own. Every Shabbas they would sit together and study. And I think that cemented their relationship more than anything else. I suppose they weren't that unusual. I mean, they had their fights, and they had their good times.

INT: How about your parents' relationship with your brother, as compared to their relationship with you. Was there a difference? How would you describe the relationship?

FRIEDA: Well, my brother was the baby boy who's going to be a doctor. And, at least my husband thought, that they favored him a little bit. I'm not so sure.

INT: As a child, how did you feel about that? Not as an adult, when you look back on it, but as a child, did you feel that they...

FRIEDA: As a child...there's seven years difference, and yeah, I guess so. There's always a certain amount of sibling jealousy. You know, he's the baby and you're older and you should know better. (Laughter)

INT: How did you and your brother get along?

FRIEDA: Quite well. You know, we had our little fights here and there, but quite well. And I was very fond of him, as a matter of fact, still am. And he was my baby brother, and he was almost like a toy. Very well.

INT: Can you remember any special friends that you had?

FRIEDA: Uh-huh.

INT: Oh, tell me about that.

FRIEDA: I had a special girl friend. And again, only till I was eight years old.

INT: Yes. We're talking about up to the age of eight.

FRIEDA: Actually, there were I guess two girl friends that I had and that we always used to get together to play. One took piano lessons, so the other had to take piano lessons. Just like any...

INT: And you took piano lessons?

FRIEDA: Yes, yes. We would get together and play house and play dolls, and then as the war started we lost track.

INT: Was there anything different about you, and we're talking about up to the age of eight, from the other kids, other kids that you played with? Was there anything special about you?

FRIEDA: I don't think so, no. I think I was a child like any other child.

INT: Was there anything that was especially important to you? Did you like one thing specially? How did you feel about playing the piano?

FRIEDA: Everybody took piano lessons, so I had to also.

INT: It was not a great love.

FRIEDA: Not at all. (Laughter)

INT: Did you have any other kind of training?

FRIEDA: No. You mean extra-curricular?

INT: Yes, outside...

FRIEDA: No.

INT: Can you tell me a little bit more about your education up until the war?

FRIEDA: There's not much to tell. I went up to second grade. I went to kindergarten, and then I went to this Hebrew...I guess it's like a Hebrew day school, for two years, up till the time we were invaded by the Russians.

INT: Right. What did you study at that?

FRIEDA: I guess reading, writing, and arithmetic.

INT: In what languages?

FRIEDA: In both Rumanian and Hebrew and Yiddish. It was really a multi-lingual school.

INT: So then you were taught to read and write in Hebrew...

FRIEDA: Hebrew and Rumanian, yes.

INT: All right. What kind of strategies for managing conflict did your parents use, when there was a conflict between you and your brother, or between you and your parents. How were arguments settled?

FRIEDA: How were arguments settled? If there was a conflict between me and my parents, my father hit us. My father used the strap. Especially if I wouldn't eat.

INT: Didn't you like to eat?

FRIEDA: No, I didn't like to eat, would you believe it? (Laughter) Or so I was told.

INT: We all change. (More laughter)

FRIEDA: And...arguments between me and my brother were basically settled by saying, "You're older, you should know better. He's only a baby."

INT: Did you have conflict with your parents?

FRIEDA: I suppose as much as anybody. And that's again up to eight years old, are you talking?

INT: Primarily, yes.

FRIEDA: Probably I didn't want to eat, maybe I didn't want to go to sleep, or whatever. Whatever five-, six-, seven-year-old conflict that arises. I don't remember anything spectacular or unusual that no other kid would have.

INT: Can you tell me what your earliest childhood memory is? Of an event or something. Either very good or very bad.

FRIEDA: I know we used to live next door to a Hasidic rebbe. Rather my aunt lived next door to a Hasidic rebbe, who had eight children with whom I played, and had some wonderful times there with his kids.

INT: So that was a very positive...

FRIEDA: Absolutely, very positive.

INT: Do you have any or did you have any recurrent dreams about that time? Did you ever dream about that time of your life?

FRIEDA: No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

INT: Did you have to deal with any loss before the war? Did anybody die? Was there a financial problem? Was there anything tragic in your life before the war?

FRIEDA: No, not before the war.

INT: How did your family show affection for each other?

FRIEDA: I guess they kissed, they hugged. I imagine.

INT: What do you mean you guess? Do you remember hugging and kissing your parents or not?

FRIEDA: Yeah, to a point. Not a tremendous amount, but every once in a while you hugged and kissed and...They weren't, my parents were not overly demonstrative, and I don't think I am either. So when there was hugging time, then there was hugging time, but I don't think it was excessive.

INT: Other than the fact that your father hit you when there was something really wrong...

FRIEDA: When I didn't do whatever he thought I should be doing.

INT: Right. Was there any other method of discipline that either of your parents used?

FRIEDA: I don't remember. I don't think so.

INT: All right. What was the role or influence of your Jewish identity as a child?

FRIEDA: The role of my Jewish identity.

INT: Other than the fact that you went to a Jewish day school.

FRIEDA: I went to a Jewish day school. We celebrated Jewish holidays. I knew I was Jewish and never questioned it, and probably never even thought that...the other people were the peasants. I didn't know anyone who wasn't Jewish, who wasn't in the same socio-economic level that we were. In other words, the non-Jews that I knew were the servants, the people who came from the farm and sold produce, the peasants. They were the non-Jews. I heard about stirrings of anti-Semitism, of Nazism, but in a six-, seven-year-old's mind, I didn't quite understand it.

INT: If I ask you about your family's philosophy of life, you've already indicated that education was of prime importance.

FRIEDA: Prime, uppermost.

INT: Was there any other view of the world, or philosophy, that you would say...

FRIEDA: You mean political?

INT: ...permeated your family?

FRIEDA: Yes, the survival of the Jewish people. Does that...? Zionist.

INT: The survival of the Jewish people through Zionism.

FRIEDA: Through Zionism, exactly.

INT: Not everybody felt that way about Zionism.

FRIEDA: I thought everybody did because my parents did. (Laughter)

INT: And all of their friends, did they? Everybody they associated with.

FRIEDA: That I remember. As a matter of fact, when I came to the United States and found out that there were some Jewish people who weren't Zionists, I couldn't understand it. Absolutely couldn't understand it.

INT: Give me a general description of your family. Use an adjective or a couple of adjectives that would describe your family.

FRIEDA: That's tough. They were loving, even though not in a demonstrative way. Caring. Concerned about my welfare. One of the things that bothered me later in life is that I thought they were overprotective. I wasn't allowed to get on a bicycle because I'll fall, and I was not allowed to get near water because I'll drown, and it had instilled fears in me that have lasted my entire life, and I had to fight them, basically, to overcome. It's about all I can think of.

INT: Were they, would you describe them as religious?

FRIEDA: Religious? You mean by religious, observant?

INT: Observant.

FRIEDA: To a point, yes. They kept a kosher home. Lit candles on Friday night. Yes, I would say so. Not fanatic, but religious. And everybody did that in our circle of friends, basically. Now I had an aunt who had a kitchen with three kinds of dishes. She had milchig, fleishig, and treif. (Laughter) So that's the kind of...But my parents were a little bit more observant than that. They had a kosher kitchen and didn't mix milk with meat. Even though they didn't go to synagogue all the time, occasional services, definitely at High Holidays. Seders, Chanukah, and not because it was in competition with Christmas. That's about it.

INT: Did you have much of a relationship with your extended family, aunts and uncles?

FRIEDA: Actually, I didn't have all that many aunts and uncles there. My mother's siblings lived in Yugoslavia, so I hardly ever see them at all, with the exception of the one uncle with whom we lived during the war, and my father's siblings were all in the United States, so I really did not have a large extended family. My father had one sister there who was very kind to me and really...who had two boys my age. One was I think two years older, and I played a lot with them, but otherwise I really didn't have all that much family.

INT: What was a typical day like for you? Can you give me a kind of chronology of what the day was like?

FRIEDA: If I remember, you got up in the morning, you went to school.

INT: What did you eat for breakfast?

FRIEDA: I don't remember. (Laughter)

INT: Probably not much if you didn't like to eat. Okay.

FRIEDA: Probably bread and butter and maybe a glass of milk. I really don't remember.

INT: Okay. It's all right.

FRIEDA: Evidently it wasn't that important.

INT: Obviously it wasn't that important.

FRIEDA: I don't remember that.

INT: You went to school?

FRIEDA: Yes.

INT: How long a day at school? Did you come home at lunchtime?

FRIEDA: I don't think so. You know, I really remember very little about that particular time span. I think school was probably over around one o'clock or so and you had your main meal. You came home for, quote, dinner. Yeah, it probably was over around one o'clock. (?) you ate or so until one. And then came home, had dinner, and the rest of the afternoon.

INT: And then what did you do the rest of the day?

FRIEDA: The rest of the day? Kids come over to play. My father, again, had some time, had more time than some other people, and would sit down and teach us. I remember when I was five years old he would sit down and write down columns of numbers, large columns, and I had to add them up and subtract. He taught me to read the Yiddish paper. We used to sit down and read the newspaper together. Basically. And play with kids. I don't think it was any different, much different than anybody else's childhood, up to the age of eight.

INT: What were your...the expectations if there had been no war? What were the expectations for you? What would you...

FRIEDA: Of my parents' expectations of me?

INT: Yes.

FRIEDA: I don't know before the war what my father expected of me. Certainly to be educated. I know after the war he was heartbroken that I didn't go to medical school.

INT: Then he must have expected that you would go to medical school.

FRIEDA: Exactly. Their son went to medical school.

INT: If there had been no war.

FRIEDA: I would imagine. I don't remember them saying anything at that time. But I know after the war when we came to the United States, he was devastated that I didn't go on. I got married and didn't go on.

INT: So he probably expected you to go to medical school if there had been no war.

FRIEDA: Well, I don't know if he expected, but he certainly hoped.

INT: Did you ever, as a child, think about the future at all? When you were a little girl playing with your dolls, did you always assume you would grow up and get married and have a family?

FRIEDA: Probably be a mommy.

INT: To be a mommy was your expectation.

FRIEDA: I think so. Probably, at that age. Yeah, I guess so. As I became a teenager, things changed.

INT: Yes, yes. I understand that.

FRIEDA: But probably...every little girl became a mommy. We used to play dolls and we used to make clothes for the dolls. I don't remember expecting to become a doctor.

INT: Did you, personally, ever hear of any experiences with anti-Semitism?

FRIEDA: Yes, but didn't understand it. Couldn't quite understand. There was a, the Iron Guard in Romania at the time, under Kuza. And there were talks of pogroms. But, you know, I'm analyzing it now with today's mind. At the time I probably did not understand it.

INT: But you personally had no experience because you had no experience with non-Jews.

FRIEDA: Exactly. Exactly. I didn't have that much contact with non-Jews. I know my father would tell me, and that's another fear I now have, you know, of dogs, don't go near a dog, because the peasants used to sic the dogs on him. You know, on the Jewish kids. But I was also told, "You may not go into a church," and I thought, you know, if you go into a- (end of tape 1, side 1)

INT: You were talking about being afraid of going into a church. What do you think would happen if you went into a church?

FRIEDA: Something bad. I wasn't told what it was going to be, but it was going to be something bad, and Jewish children just don't go into churches. Jewish children cross the street when a nun comes in the opposite direction. I remember the first time I had gone into a church after the Russians had occupied us, and they used a church as a school. It was probably a Catholic church, I mean a Catholic school, before the war, and they used it as an elementary school. Besides, the Russians had no religion. But I had to go into this church, and I remember the fear that something terrible was going to...I'm sinning...and something terrible was going to happen. And also somebody just reminded me, and I don't remember who it was, I can't remember. Just recently. That when...oh, it was probably one of the courses I was taking, that when you pass by a church you spit three times, and that avoided the evil spirit.

INT: Oh, kept this evil spirits away.

FRIEDA: Kept the evil spirits away. Obviously, that probably was, you know, a result of anti-Semitism, that they knew the church has started it, and therefore the church got that kind of reputation.

INT: You said that the town you lived in was a fairly good sized place. It wasn't all Jewish, however?

FRIEDA: Oh, no. I don't think so. As far as I knew they were all Jewish. I didn't know anybody else.

INT: You only knew the Jews. But of course, there were certainly others.

FRIEDA: Socially, except the servants, as I said. The produce hucksters.

INT: Do you remember having any personal faith? Did you believe in G-d? You don't remember having any particular...

FRIEDA: Yes, I guess we spoke of G-d. There is a G-d. I don't think I philosophized at age five, six, seven.

INT: Well, I know. But sometimes you remember having certain feelings which maybe changed.

FRIEDA: You know, I suppose you said, "with G-d's help," and what that really meant I'm sure I didn't know.

INT: Okay. Now let's begin talking about the beginning of the war. What was your family response to what was going on in Europe?

FRIEDA: Well, where we lived in 1940, we were occupied by the Soviets first. There was the pact between Stalin and Hitler to carve up part of Romania, part of Poland. And we came under the Russian occupation. My father's business was immediately taken away from him, and we

went to live with my uncle. My uncle was a physician, and because he was a physician, he was treated just a little...I guess they needed him, and he was treated just a little bit better. And so we lived with him almost through the entire part of the war.

INT: Let's go back a little bit. Before 1940, Europe was in big trouble.

FRIEDA: Yes, yes. And I re-

INT: Did your parents respond in any way? Do you know if they did anything?

FRIEDA: I remember them being interested. I remember Hitler's ranting and raving on the radio. I remember my father listening in to that. I, again I think, their response was actually twofold. And it seems to contradict itself, because my father was very Zionist, and yet when he heard that the Soviets were coming, he said, he felt that everybody will be the same under communism. There will be no anti-Semitism, and he kept sitting in front of the radio when the talk was, I remember him as a child saying, "Come, come."

INT: To the Soviets.

FRIEDA: To the Soviets. And the minute they came, everything was disappropriated, and we realized who they were. Took our house away, took everything away. And we went to live with my uncle, and I think my father ended up working in a factory.

INT: Now this was your mother's brother.

FRIEDA: Yes, yes.

INT: The rest of the family was in Yugoslavia? The rest of your mother's family?

FRIEDA: The rest of my mother's family, yes.

INT: Her brother was the only one who was not.

FRIEDA: There was one...the youngest brother was left in Poland. And all of the others were in Yugoslavia.

INT: Wait. You didn't go to Yugoslavia?

FRIEDA: No.

INT: This brother that you went to live with-

FRIEDA: Lived right in Czernowitz.

INT: What kind of a family did he have?

FRIEDA: He just had...he was childless.

INT: He was married.

FRIEDA: He was married. His wife could have no children, and he himself really loved children. Both he and his wife loved children, and they treated my brother and me as almost like grandparents would treat their grandchildren. They would play with us. They would...I remember when I had a birthday my aunt would get up at six o'clock in the morning, make me my favorite birthday cake. They really were very, very good to...not only to us children, but to my parents, who by that time, were economically devastated.

INT: You...your parents didn't make any preparations. In other words, they thought, when the Russians came...

FRIEDA: When the Russians came, everybody would be the same. Everything would be fine. Everybody would be the same, there won't be any anti-Semitism. And it obviously wasn't.

INT: Was your father a communist?

FRIEDA: I don't know that he was a communist. He was looking for equality. And I think that's probably what made him think that the communist government would offer. And I guess perhaps in that respect, he didn't belong to a communist party, or anything of that sort, but maybe in that respect you could call him a communist, but he was cured very fast. It didn't take long at all. (Laughter)

INT: Do you want to tell me what happened while you were living with your...

FRIEDA: After, yes.

INT: No, not after. During the war. What was your life like?

FRIEDA: During the war, okay. My life during the war. From 1940 to '41, we were under Russian occupation. I went to a Russian school, repeating second grade because in Russia, their children start later. So according to my age, I was supposed to go to second grade. My father worked in a factory, and we lived with my uncle. In 1941, the war between Russia and Germany broke out. June 22, I think, 1941, if I'm not mistaken. And within two weeks, we were occupied by the Nazis. Actually, we were not occupied by German forces, but by the Axis. The Romanian forces, who were allied with the Germans. And I remember, you know, that there was a war going on, and there was bombing, and we were in bomb shelters, and you couldn't go out. And then the Nazis kept advancing, and slowly they started to...to...I guess, take care of the Jews. They put us in ghetto. There was a Jewish sector in that town.

INT: Now did your uncle have to move?

FRIEDA: Yes.

INT: So you and your parents and your uncle and aunt all moved together.

FRIEDA: We all moved together. We lived in a room. There was a Jewish section. It was an old Jewish section in that town, where the houses were sort of dilapidated. I guess at one time it was a Jewish section and the Jews had moved out and maybe some old, old people remained there. Maybe some poor people. I don't remember exactly, but I know that was the ghetto area. It was walled in with guards, Romanian guards who would not let you out, and we lived there for probably several months.

INT: How did you feel about that?

FRIEDA: How did I...That, well, first of all, even while the...when the Russians were retreating and we knew the Nazis were coming, I truly felt, as a ten-year-old, that it was the end of my life. Sort of resigned that we will be killed. My uncle had needles of morphine, high doses of morphine, at the ready, in case we should get...if they should come in, or whatever, that we would all commit suicide. And I remember when they first came in, they rounded up...we lived in a house, that was before we were sent to the ghetto, it was an apartment house with a large courtyard in the center, and the Romanian troops came in and it was all...the inhabitants of that particular apartment house were all Jews. They rounded everybody up in the courtyard and then they took all the men away and they were gone for around four, five hours, perhaps longer. And probably by miracle they came back. It was my uncle and my father. And they both said that what had happened was they were herded into the courtyard of the city hall. The authorities bought machine guns to face them, and they stood there, and evidently some order came down from who knows where, and they let them go. And I think the rest of my life through the war, really, was just one miracle after another. Things like that happened.

After they put us in the ghetto, they...an order came down from...and I really didn't know until I visited the Holocaust Museum as to who issued that order...but the mayor of Czernowitz issued an order that he needed some, he needed some Jews, certain occupations, to run his city, and it was simply a means of rescuing Jews. And his picture hangs in the Holocaust Museum among the people of...the righteous. And I had no idea until I went down to the Holocaust Museum that that's how it happened. But anyway, after we were in the ghetto for several months, this order came down that this mayor, or whoever it was, needed some Jews who had certain occupations. My uncle was immediately let go, and he somehow had my mother, my brother and me put on his permit, so that we were let out of the ghetto. My father did not get a certificate.

INT: And his wife did not get a certificate?

FRIEDA: Oh, his wife too. Yes. My uncle and his wife, and somehow my mother, my father and...

INT: Mother, you and your brother.

FRIEDA: Yes. My father did not get one, and somehow until, I don't know how many days afterwards, we would line up to listen...they called out names as to who would get a permit, and people would line up in front of that window and they would just call out names. Well, anyhow, several weeks later, my father's name was called as an agriculture expert, 'cause his business was in agriculture.

INT: What kind of business was he in?

FRIEDA: He was an export...he would grow grains, and export them.

INT: He actually grew the grain?

FRIEDA: He grew the grain.

INT: A Jewish farmer?

FRIEDA: A Jewish farmer. But he himself didn't do the farming.

INT: Oh, he had the land and he planned it...

FRIEDA: He had the land and he hired the peasants to work it, and he exported. So he was freed too. And we went back to the old apartment.

INT: Now, you had said earlier that you felt that your life was over, that you were going to die.

FRIEDA: Yes.

INT: After this happened, first the men were taken away and brought back, and then when you got permits to leave the ghetto, how did you feel then? Did your attitudes change? Did your...

FRIEDA: Probably still felt insecure. I'm not sure that I felt that tomorrow would be my last day. But there certainly was no security. I did not go to school. Jewish children were not allowed to go to school. We had to wear the yellow star, and we lived together in my uncle's apartment, and things were very spartan. But after we heard of what other people went through, ours was a, quote, good life. My father...

INT: Did you...looking back now you can say it was a good life, but at the time...

FRIEDA: No, I knew that, you know, if you have a childhood when you're not allowed to go to school, you're only allowed to go with your yellow star certain streets, you know that you're different and that you're being persecuted. And of course, I was getting older, and beginning to understand a little more, so that I knew that things were not as they used to be. I mean and not as they should be. My father was subsequently taken away to a Romanian labor camp, and I think he was there for two or three years.

INT: And how did you feel when your father was taken away?

FRIEDA: Certainly not very happy. (Some sort of interruption here on the tape) How did I feel? How did I feel when all these changes transpired? I felt uncomfortable, scared. Certainly not happy.

INT: Any different feeling when you father was taken to the Romanian labor camp?

FRIEDA: Scared that I would never see him again, probably. Didn't know what was going to happen.

INT: Did that change any of the relationships with any of the other members of your family?

FRIEDA: No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

INT: Okay. Go ahead, what happened next?

FRIEDA: What happened next? We lived under those circumstances. Again, I did not go to school, but my mother would try to get a teacher to teach us, wherever possible. There were lots of Jewish teachers who were also unemployed because they couldn't teach. So they, for a piece of bread, for a piece of firewood, the barter system, they would give lessons. And that's how I...

INT: Did you have the extra bread or the extra firewood that you could...

FRIEDA: My uncle, being a physician, had it a little better, and if we didn't have the extra bread, we cut a piece of bread in half for a teacher. And that's how we lived.

INT: Were you aware that such great sacrifices were being made for education's sake?

FRIEDA: Probably yes. Well, let's put it this way, I don't know that I was aware that it was a sacrifice. It seemed as though it was something that is the thing to do, and that doing otherwise wouldn't be right. It's just, this is what you do, you must...you can't go to school, you must learn, and really, my education was picked up very piecemeal. A little bit here, a little bit...The expertise of one teacher for six months, the expertise of another teacher for another few months. Here and there and sort of pieced together. It's like a quilt education.

INT: Did your mother teach you at all? Did she do any of your education?

FRIEDA: No, I don't remember her teaching us. I remember my father when he was home. As a small child, because that's when he was home teaching us, but I don't remember my mother exactly sitting. She would read to us, but that's all I remember of her, but we did...I remember them hiring teachers.

INT: Did you...were you ever afraid that your uncle would be taken away, or that your mother would be taken away? Was that your fear?

FRIEDA: Probably. Probably the fear was that we would all be taken away, and all be killed or incarcerated en masse.

INT: Were you afraid to be on the street?

FRIEDA: Yes. If you saw a soldier you crossed the street. And there was a curfew. You couldn't be out on the street all that much, especially for Jews. So there wasn't that much street

walking. You were basically in the apartment as much as you could. And that...this was the type of life that we had until 1944.

INT: During all that time then, you really didn't have much association with any other children or adults, or did you?

FRIEDA: Well, some. Not as much...not on a normal basis, but occasionally, other kids...they would get three, four children together and hire a teacher, so then...but all this was in such a state of flux. I mean, there was no continuity. Sometimes yes, sometimes no, sometimes a teacher was available, sometimes the teacher was sent away, and you got another teacher. It was really catch as catch can, and that's how it was until 1944, when the Soviets started to come back. And just before the Soviets came back, again my father was released from labor camp and sent home. Don't know how...

INT: You don't know why?

FRIEDA: Don't know why. He came home. But it was perhaps just a few weeks before the Soviets came back.

INT: What kind of condition was he in when he came home?

FRIEDA: My main memory was that when he left, his hair was black. When he came back it was white. And as a child, that is the most vivid memory that remained with me. And he had told stories of being beaten, and hard manual labor on the road gang and so on. But he came back, and I consider that another...

INT: And how did you feel when he came back? Were you more secure then or you...

FRIEDA: I don't think I was...there was never any security, because the world, the entire world was in a state of flux. Even when we knew the Soviets were coming back, we didn't know what the Nazis were going to do as they retreated. And so it was just a constant fear and insecurity. I don't think we had...I think we were insecure from 1940, well probably until we reached the United States, and even then we were insecure because then you had to start making a living, and starting a new life.

INT: How did you feel about yourself?

FRIEDA: How did I feel about myself? You know, I really don't know. I don't think I ever really stopped to think how do I feel about myself. I don't remember thinking about myself.

INT: So what happened then in '44 when the Germans started to retreat and the Soviets...

FRIEDA: There was a period to a couple of weeks where it was sort of no-man's-land. Where it was anarchy. There were some Germans left, and some Soviets came in. Really total flux. And I remember we were in the apartment, and there was a Russian army, I think it was a Ukrainian army under General Vlasov, that the entire army had gone over to the Nazis. They were Ukrainians or Russians, I'm not sure. I think they were Ukrainians. And they were in German

uniform. They broke into the apartment, and looked around. My uncle had some journals, you know, and they said this is a nest of Jews. They were obviously illiterate. My uncle had a bunch of German books. They said, how could it be Jews, these are German books. So they sort of believed him. But I had dark hair, and I guess I must have looked Jewish. They pointed at me and said, "She is a Jew." And I remember my mother chasing me out the door. I ran out. I don't remember where. I do remember running away. And I think a neighbor let me in. And I don't remember what happened after that. I remember bombing, I remember...but it's a big blur. But I do remember them pointing at me.

INT: How did you feel when they pointed at you and said, "She's a Jew"?

FRIEDA: Petrified. Petrified. Scared. And to this day, when I see a German helmet, I have...it's not fear, but an aversion. That helmet, that square helmet. I guess it's a certain amount of fear that I still have to this very day. And then the Soviets came, and again, I went to school again. I went to Russian school. I guess we were there for a year. And they took my father away. The Russian took my...the Soviets took my father away again to a labor camp. And they took him to the Ural Mountains on the border of Asia, and he worked in aluminum mines there.

INT: Now that was...

FRIEDA: 1945.

INT: That was a distance, though.

FRIEDA: Oh yes, it was quite a distance. It was straight across European Russia.

INT: Okay.

FRIEDA: And I imagine it's probably as distant, I would imagine, as from here to California, at least.

INT: Did you have any contact with him during that time?

FRIEDA: Yes, there were letters exchanged. They did allow him to write, but the letters were censored. They were always read by the authorities. And my mother and he developed a certain code system that they would correspond and make themselves understand so that, in other words, if he would mention somebody who was dead, for instance, and say, "My life is as good as his." And that's how they would correspond. And again, in nine months they let him go.

INT: And your uncle remained in...

FRIEDA: Yes.

INT: He was a physician and he remained in practice.

FRIEDA: He was a physician. He remained in practice.

INT: He was helping.

FRIEDA: I imagine his practice was limited, but I guess they needed physicians.

INT: But he treated not only Jews. He was allowed to treat...

FRIEDA: You know, I don't remember whether he treated just Jews during that period of time, or treated non-Jews as well. That I don't know.

INT: Now, when the Russians came back, were there...did you have more things? Was life a little easier?

FRIEDA: No, no, no.

INT: The other way around.

FRIEDA: The other way around, exactly. As a matter of fact, they confiscated a couple of the rooms of our apartment. It was a small apartment to begin with, and we all lived in two rooms. My uncle and aunt in one room, and my mother and my brother and I in the other. But I did get to go to school. Learned a lot of communist propaganda.

INT: Did you believe it?

FRIEDA: Yeah, I guess so. If your teacher tells you it's so, it's so. When you're...although by that time I was a little older. It was...actually the first time I probably believed it more. The three or four years prior to that. Went there for one year, and then the Pole...Poland and Russia were exchanging citizens. Russian citizens who had somehow been displaced and fled to Poland, and Polish citizens who were in Russia, they were exchanged. And somehow my mother...we knew that we had relatives in the United States. My father had a sister and they had corresponded with them during the war, but after the war they kind of lost...I mean, during the war they lost contact with them. And I don't remember how they became in contact again, but we knew we had to work our way west. So my mother somehow got- (end of tape 1, side 2)

INT: An interview with Frieda Tabak. Frieda, we're going to talk now about your attendance at the Russian school when the Russians took over for the second time.

FRIEDA: Yes. I suppose by that time I must have been, I was thirteen years old when the war was over in 19-...No, I must have been fourteen, no, not quite. I was thirteen in 1944, in December. I must have been about thirteen years old, twelve, thirteen, at the time I went to school there. And they did...I think they gave us an exam, and I was put into sixth grade, or the equivalent of that. We went to school there for a year, and then, as I told you, there was this exchange of Polish and Russian citizens, and my mother obtained, by bribing somebody, Polish papers, and we all left Romania to go to Poland, and we traveled in cattle cars, box cars, and I think we traveled for about three weeks in a box car. Many, many families together.

INT: Now, at that time your father was still in a labor camp?

FRIEDA: No, no. My father had come back just before.

INT: But the Russians took him off to the Ural Mountains.

FRIEDA: Right. But he had come back.

INT: You didn't leave until your father came back.

FRIEDA: Right.

INT: And you don't know why your father came back from the Russian labor camp, either.

FRIEDA: No, don't know. That's why I'm saying that all these must have been just a series of miracle, because many of the men who went to these labor camps, both Romanian and Russians, never came back. And he did come back, both times. And we left for Poland together as a family. The four of us. Not my aunt and uncle.

INT: Now what happened to your aunt and uncle?

FRIEDA: They stayed. My aunt had a heart condition. She also was a cripple. She had...when she was young, a ceiling fell upon her. And her mother, rather than lifting the rubble off her, pulled her out, and dislocated her hip. And that's how she met my uncle, by the way. My uncle was an intern in the hospital where she went for surgery, and that's how she met him. Anyway, she felt that they where childless, and they didn't care...they didn't need to leave for their children's future. His practice was okay.

INT: How did you feel about leaving them? You had lived with them and you were very close.

FRIEDA: That was traumatic. As a matter of fact, if you want to jump forward to 1969, my uncle came to Israel, and I picked up my three kids, and we all went to see him. It was a very close relationship, and it...as a matter of fact, as we left, because our economic, that is, my parents' economic situation, was so much less than his, was so much worse than his, he gave us a bunch of stuff to take along with. But my parents felt they had to leave for their children...because there was no future for their children under the Soviet Union. And so after three weeks' journey in a cattle car...

INT: Let me stop you a minute. Were there any parting words that you remember? Any messages, any...

FRIEDA: No, no. I don't remember messages. I remember crying, and I remember emotional parting. I don't remember messages of such.

INT: Were you feeling good about leaving? Did...your parents obviously saw this as a better future for you children.

FRIEDA: Absolutely.

INT: Did you feel that way...?

FRIEDA: Probably.

INT: ...or did you feel sad at leaving?

FRIEDA: No, I probably felt that that...I felt, you know, I think in those days when your parents told you this is what you had to do, and this is the thing to do, you did it, and I don't remember really questioning. But I really don't think I felt...I felt that this is what was going to help my future, and I'm not even that sure that I sat down and analyzed it. I knew my parents left, and I had to go with them, and that was that. And then we lived in Poland.

INT: And what was happening in Poland?

FRIEDA: Okay. That was after the war we were in Poland. We were in a suburb of Lodz. How we got there I don't know. I guess they took refugees there. And we contacted the Jewish community that was under the, I think, Joint Distribution was running the Jewish community center there. They had a soup kitchen, and they got us a room. The room was probably the size of my living room. Two families lived in it, and did everything in that room. I mean, everything. The one room. It was a three-room apartment, and there were two families in each room. So there were six families in a three-room apartment.

INT: Now was this a family that you had traveled with from Romania or was it...

FRIEDA: We have traveled with them from Romania, yes, but we met them on the way. We did not know them. They had a daughter who was a year older than I, and she was...I was tiny and short and she was big and tall. We really looked like Mutt and Jeff. But we became very friendly. And after six months in Popuniza, which is a suburb of Lodz, we moved to Lodz. And at that time, the partisans, Polish partisans, were active in persecuting Jews. That's after the war.

INT: And this is after the war.

FRIEDA: After the war. And especially what they would do, they'd go on trains and have the men take their pants off to see if they were Jewish and would kill them.

INT: And if they were?

FRIEDA: They'd kill them.

INT: Kill them. On the spot.

FRIEDA: On the spot. So, by that time we had been in touch with my aunt in Chester, and she would send us care packages. Not through Care. She would send us packages.

INT: Packages to Poland.

FRIEDA: To Poland, she would send us. Clothing, food...

INT: Before this time, you were not in contact.

FRIEDA: I don't think until Poland we were in contact with them. And we would use that to sell. We would sell the things that she would send us, and that was our sustenance.

INT: That was your income.

FRIEDA: That was our income. Whatever we sold. And like even in Lodz we had a room to ourselves...we lived in an apartment that was one, two, three, four rooms. But we had one room to ourselves, the four of us, which was luxury.

INT: So there were three other families living at...

FRIEDA: There were three other families. And our room was on the way to the kitchen. In other words, whoever had to go to the kitchen, had to pass by our room, so it was almost like, probably before the war, it was like a hall, or an anteroom, or whatever, a foyer. And that was our room. And we lived there for another six months. And because of the partisans boarding trains, my mother used to go to...she had to go to get our papers ready to go to the United States. And again, the United States was under the quota system. So, I think, as Romanian Jews, either the Romanian quota was filled, or whatever, we couldn't go. The only...

INT: But you had Polish passports.

FRIEDA: But that's done and good. The only reason we needed that passport was to get to Poland.

INT: So you're now under a Romanian passport.

FRIEDA: Now we are under no passport, but my mother had kept going to Warsaw to get papers to go to the United States, and the only way, I think, we left Poland by truck, by foot. They took those children and women on a truck, and my mother and my brother, who was little. And my father and I walked miles and miles and miles with little rucksack on our back. But at that time, for some reason, we went as Greek Jews. So we had to dispose of everything that indicated that we were not Greek, until we got to Germany.

INT: You went into Germany?

FRIEDA: We went from Poland to Czechoslovakia to Austria to Germany, and ended up in Germany in a displaced person's camp.

INT: And all of that traveling you did by foot or by truck?

FRIEDA: By foot or by truck. We got to Germany, we were in a displaced person's camp. Somehow, the people with whom we lived in Lodz, that other family, had made it to Munich before us. So my mother left and somehow got a room in Munich, because she felt that it would

be easier to get papers ready to go to the United States from a big city, rather than a displaced person's camp. So we moved to Munich. We lived in Munich for a year.

INT: Did you know that that family that you had lived with in Poland was in Munich?

FRIEDA: Yes. Somehow they...

INT: So you had been in...you had stayed in touch with them.

FRIEDA: Stayed in touch with them.

INT: As you're telling the story, I don't feel...I don't have the sense that you were in touch with other people, that you were networking. It was very much an isolated attempt.

FRIEDA: Yes, very much so.

INT: So that you didn't build any relationships during this time at all.

FRIEDA: No, none at all. That family...we built relationships with people with whom we happened to be at the certain time. There was no...

INT: But it was very temporary. It lasted only for the six months you were there.

FRIEDA: Exactly, exactly. There was no...when we did get to Munich, that was 1946, I was put in a German girls' school, high school. There were three Jewish kids in the entire school. It was I, that friend of mine...

INT: The tall girl.

FRIEDA: The tall girl, and another girl. And I don't even remember who she was. And they would have...I remember when they had religious classes. They had the Catholic and the Protestants split for the classes, but I would sit in the back of the...I didn't have to take religion classes. So I was put in the back. I just sat there and did my homework or whatever in the back of the class. The Catholic...I guess it must have been the Catholic religion class, and it really was...I don't know that I was surprised at what they were teaching about the Jews killing Christ etc. and that was after the war. And...

INT: Did you experience any anti-Semitism?

FRIEDA: In Germany?

INT: In that time that you were in Germany?

FRIEDA: I don't think so. I think, at the time, it was right after the war, the people were coming out of concentration camps, and I think at that particular time there was still a certain amount of perhaps that they either felt badly, or felt that they should be feeling badly. How genuine that feeling was I don't know.

INT: How did you feel about going into Germany? You had lived under the Nazis?

FRIEDA: I understand. But I went to Germany because it was the way to the United States. You had to work your way west. It was a way station, and that's basically, I think, how we felt. We didn't go to Germany to live. We went to Germany as a way station.

INT: And anything that you had to do to get yourself westward was acceptable.

FRIEDA: Exactly, exactly.

INT: How did you feel during all this time?

FRIEDA: I don't know. I went to school and did what I had to do, and really don't remember feeling hate for the Germans. I think it was rather indifferent. We lived, again, we lived in one room. Munich, at the time, was totally bombed out, so living quarters were almost non-existent. So if you had a room...where we lived there were German, two old ladies owned that apartment, that they rented us this little...and again we lived, our income was the packages that came. Cigarettes were legal tender, I mean, better than money. You opened a pack and you bought opera tickets for a cigarette. You took a piano lesson for a cigarette.

INT: And did you do that?

FRIEDA: Absolutely.

INT: You had piano lessons and you had a ticket to the opera.

FRIEDA: Absolutely. Paid my teacher with a cigarette. That's the way...that was the system. I think I rather accepted that that's the way to be and...then after a year of living in Germany we finally went to United States. Got our tickets in order, and sailed for the United States.

INT: But it was almost two years from the time you left...

FRIEDA: Poland?

INT: Romania.

FRIEDA: Actually, yes. We left Romania in 1945. We came to the United States August 1947. We lived a year in Poland and a year in Germany, and a little travel in between.

INT: During this time, did you know the whereabouts, or what happened to your mother's family that was in Yugoslavia?

FRIEDA: No.

INT: Your father's sister that had been in Romania?

FRIEDA: No. Had no idea...

INT: What happened to anybody.

FRIEDA: What happened to anybody, no. I don't know...

INT: And what about your grandparents?

FRIEDA: Oh, they had died before that.

INT: They died before the war?

FRIEDA: Before the war, yes. I know we found out that my father's sister, with whom I was so close, was killed with her husband and their children, now, when we found that out I can't quite remember. I know that we subsequently found out. We also found out...actually, my mother's brother who remained in Poland, we found out in the United States that he had been taken, he was in the Polish army during the war, and then was taken prisoner by the Nazis. And he was blond, blue-eyed, tall, looked very Germanic, and probably passed himself off as a German. And when the Russians came, they liberated the prisoner-of-war camp, and arrested him, because he told them that he was Jewish, and they said, "Aha, if you were Jewish and you survived, then you probably were a spy." They put him in prison, and we found that, probably maybe ten years after we were here, that he died in Russian prison. And his wife, I think, had been killed. So we really, it was a very nuclear family kind of existence. You moved where you had to, when you had to, and until we got here. And that's where I suddenly got a new family, because my aunt was here, my uncle was here, my cousins were here.

INT: Before we talk about your family here, and I know you moved here to a large extended family...

FRIEDA: Not large, but an extended family.

INT: Well, an extended family. Do you remember any of your feelings during this transition time about who you were? About the kind of person you were?

FRIEDA: You know, I just never...I don't remember thinking about it. I think this is a rather modern concept. (Laughter) I don't think we...as to who I was? I don't think so. I did what everybody else did, what my family did. If you had to go, you went.

INT: But everybody else didn't survive.

FRIEDA: Well, that's true. But...

INT: Did you ever think about the qualities? Obviously your parents had qualities that enabled them to survive. What were some of the qualities that you see that they had?

FRIEDA: That enabled them to survive? I don't know if it was quality or luck.

INT: Well, obviously some of it was...You described as a miracle that your father was in labor camp so many times and came back from it.

FRIEDA: But he never said he came back because of what I did.

INT: But certainly what they did enabled you to get to America.

FRIEDA: Oh yes, yes.

INT: So what are the qualities that you see that they had...?

FRIEDA: When it came to getting us to America, I would say that, probably my mother was more instrumental in...my mother was a pusher, and probably was more instrumental in getting us to America, and making all the arrangements, and leaving no stone unturned that we get here, yes. That I do remember. But again, trying to think back as to how I felt then, I felt that that's how it has to be. You know, this is what my mother is doing. We have to get to America. There's no future...and I don't even know that I analyzed it in these particular words. I mean, that's how it was going to be.

INT: What about your Judaism? Did it change during all of this time?

FRIEDA: Yes. During...I remember when we were in Poland. There was a Jewish community, and my mother wanted, or my parents wanted, to send me to a Jewish school, and I refused to go. I resented being Jewish. I felt had I not been Jewish, I probably would have gone to school like I saw all the other kids going to school. I would have had a normal life. That I do remember. I refused. I did not become interested again in Judaism until I got to college here. And I went to Temple and they had lots of Jewish courses, and I suddenly became very, very much interested. I don't know why, I don't know what did it. Whether it was because I saw my parents always philosophizing about things Jewish, and studying the Talmud, I don't know. But I became very interested.

INT: So all the times you were in Poland you didn't go to school.

FRIEDA: No.

INT: Did your parents' attitude about Judaism change over these years that we've discussed?

FRIEDA: Well, I know that my father said that if there is a G-d who can do such a thing then there is no G-d. My father lost his total belief in G-d. Even though he was very learned, and from a philosophical point of view, he became totally irreligious. Absolutely. He knew...he could read the Torah, he knew the Torah inside out, he knew the Talmud, he knew everything. And loved learning it, and he loved studying it, and he loved analyzing it. But his belief in G-d had left him. He just said there can't be a G-d who will allow something like this to be done.

INT: And your mother?

FRIEDA: My mother was...as educated as she was, she was rather superstitious. Very superstitious. And probably was afraid to say "I don't believe in G-d," as to, you know, what's G-d going to do to her. She probably was a little more observant than my father.

INT: Speaking of observant, did she continue to keep kosher during all of this?

FRIEDA: No. Well, it was an impossibility. Really. You know, you ate what you could eat, and what you could get your hands on, whether it be kosher or non-kosher, at that point it didn't matter.

INT: Did it matter to her? Did it matter to you?

FRIEDA: No, I don't think so after a while. After a while you just ate because you were hungry. And when we came back to the...in the United States, actually my mother did not become kosher again until something had happened to my brother and she made a deal with G-d that...

INT: Of which there was none. (Laughter)

FRIEDA: Well, as far as she was concerned she wasn't so sure. My father was sure there wasn't one. But she wasn't sure. And if there was a G-d, and he would help her out with my brother, she would keep kosher. And he did help her and she remained kosher till the day she died.

INT: What was your feeling about death with all of this going on around you?

FRIEDA: I guess I was scared to die, basically. Again, didn't philosophize. Knew if I'm going to get killed, I'm scared of being killed, and tried to avoid being killed. Very human way of looking at death. I really don't remember, as a child, being that philosophical. You know, really analyzing it in a psychological, you know, this is the way things are. Sure, if I'm going to get killed...I remember the night before the Nazis came, I remember my mother said, you know, "It's time to go to bed," and I said I didn't want to get undressed, and I guess I, I don't know, I was nine, eight, nine, ten, and I said to her, "Why do I have to get undressed, they're going to kill me whether I'm dressed or not, why bother?" So obviously, I don't know whether it was a certain amount of fear and resignation.

INT: You may have felt that resignation and you've expressed that you've felt like at any time...

FRIEDA: Yeah, I could be killed.

INT: You could be killed. From what you've said about your mother, she doesn't appear to have had that feeling because she keeps pushing you to be educated, she keeps striving to go on, so her attitudes were a little different than yours.

FRIEDA: Yes, but by the same token there were those morphine shots at the ready. That when push comes to shove, we were going to...all going to commit suicide. So, yes, she did push, and my mother was a pusher. I mean, there's no two ways about it. More so than my father. But I guess she felt that as long as we're alive, you do everything possible to stay alive, and to hope to

create something for your future. You're right. I never really analyzed it in that way, but you're right.

INT: It sounds to me, from what you say, that she never gave up.

FRIEDA: No, no. Giving up was not her thing.

INT: You said that your father lost his faith in G-d. Did he give up?

FRIEDA: Probably somewhat, I would say. More so than my mother, anyway.

INT: So she kind of was the force that kept the whole family moving on.

FRIEDA: Absolutely, absolutely.

INT: Given that she was such an important factor in your survival, have I stated it...am I expressing it fairly?

FRIEDA: Yes, I would say so, yes.

INT: Can you give me any more characteristics of your mother?

FRIEDA: Well, my mother would take no prisoners. It was as she said. She was an extremely strong woman, not afraid to say anything. Not afraid to lecture us. Not afraid to hurt our psyche. She had certain philosophies of life, and that's the way it was going to be.

INT: And...can you elaborate a little bit on those philosophies?

FRIEDA: On those philosophies? That you strive to do the best you can, to rise to the very top that you can. When...even in the United States, I went to high school and I would bring home a 95, and she would say, "Well, there is 100." She would never accept second best, and always had to be the best. To a point where at times both my brother and I resented it. She was not very free with praise. Her philosophy of raising children was to tell them how poorly they're doing, so that they'll do better, instead of positive reinforcement. She didn't know from positive reinforcement. (Laughter) She felt that, you know, if I bring her a paper with a- (end of tape 2, side 1)

INT: Frieda, we were talking about your mother and the characteristics that made her who she was. You said that she always wanted you to be the best. What was the best? How can you define what's best?

FRIEDA: What's best? Very well educated. That was uppermost. She would say to me, "If you buy a dress, don't buy too many, but buy good. Buy one dress, but buy a great dress." She was very interested in aesthetics. You know, everybody had to look just so. She always did. And was rather disappointed with me, because to me, even though I like to look nice, it's not that important, as important as it was to her. Respect for elders. To this very day, I cannot call an aunt

or uncle by their first name. Can't do it. If an older person comes in, you get up and you give them their seat. The respect and do the best you can and better.

INT: What other values did she have as far as treating your fellow man? What was her value system when it came to money, material things?

FRIEDA: She liked material things. She liked pretty things and nice things. However, since you mention fellow man, during the war, during the Romanian period, as I said, we in Romania, at least, lived. Where we lived it was about I guess an hour away from the old Polish border. And there the Nazis...that was in Galicia, the Nazis occupied that rather than...you know we were under Romanian, basically under Romanian occupation. Not occupation, they considered it theirs. And what the Nazis would do there, basically, they would line up Jews and have them dig their grave and then just shoot them and they would fall into this grave. Every once in a while, a few would escape into Romania. A few of those Polish Jews would escape into Romania. And it just so happened that it was a sister, two sisters and a brother, had escaped from the village in which my mother was born to Romania. And I don't know how they got to my mother. And my mother took them in and probably under great danger. One of the sisters had just had a baby, and in order to escape, she left the baby behind because she could not flee with the baby. The baby would make noise. Just left the baby behind. And she subsequently lost her mind and went back and got shot. Just walked back. The other two, there were two younger sisters, a younger sister and a brother, who stayed with my mother, with us, in that one apartment where everybody lived, for a while. And I think my mother got them a place to stay afterwards. But then the Romanian government started to cooperate with the German government and sent these people back. So my mother provided poison for these two people. Not enough to kill them, but enough to make them unconscious. They were taken to the hospital, and were rescued that way. In the hospital. They couldn't be sent back. And my mother would cook pots of soup...

INT: How were they rescued by being in the hospital?

FRIEDA: Because in the hospital...I guess they were sick, so you don't send back sick people to be shot. You know, you want to shoot a healthy person.

INT: And then when they got well they escaped?

FRIEDA: They either escaped...I don't remember just exactly what happened afterwards, because they did survive, and they...as a matter of fact, they moved to Vineland. They came to the United States, and about twenty years my mother...twenty years ago my mother had attended a bar mitzvah of one of their sons in Vineland, and my mother said they gave her the place of honor. But I remember, and again I was a child, I couldn't quite understand what was going on, but I know she...I don't know what kind of poison it was, but it was enough to get them unconscious so they could be taken to the hospital. And that's how they were saved. And what happened afterwards I'm not...So that's the kind of a woman she was.

INT: So what you're saying is that helping human beings was a very high value.

FRIEDA: Absolutely.

INT: Was it one that she instilled in her children?

FRIEDA: I would imagine. I mean, it's something that certainly made a very large impression upon me. And as a matter of fact, we were living with my uncle at the time, and my uncle was rather scared, and he did not...he was very upset that she was doing this, because he was afraid that all of us...it would imperil all our lives. And he was probably right, had she been caught. We probably all would have been...but I guess she just felt that she had to do it. And she was quite a woman.

INT: As we've talked about your father, it sounds to me as if your mother was the leader of the family.

FRIEDA: Yes, yes. It's true.

INT: At least it was that way when you arrived in this country. Was it that way before the war, or was it the war that changed their relationship?

FRIEDA: I think the war probably...Yes, the war definitely changed their relationship. I don't remember it as a child, of course, but my father was the breadwinner, and he was the man of the house as far as I remember when I was a little...as much as I could remember. I think you're right. The war changed. And again, my father, having been in all those labor camps, psychologically he was totally beaten. We came to Poland, he couldn't go do anything, because he was a man.

INT: He was in danger.

FRIEDA: He was in danger. So I guess after a while you just get beaten down. And she just felt that I guess somebody had to do it, and did it.

INT: And she definitely became the matriarch of the family?

FRIEDA: Oh, definitely. No question about it.

INT: Would you say it's fair to say that your mother's strength then is one of the qualities that enabled your whole family to survive?

FRIEDA: In part, probably. I still feel that luck had a tremendous amount, it did. Because no matter how strong she was, if things hadn't worked out the right way, certainly her strength and her...all the things that she did to get us over here, certainly helped. But I don't know that, I think maybe it was a matter of being in the right place at the right time sometimes too.

INT: And your father, did he feel that that was what enabled your family to survive?

FRIEDA: He didn't say so, but I'm sure he did. I think...and the reason he didn't say so is probably, I guess it was an affront to his masculinity. He may have, I'm sure he knew how strong

she was, but probably as a man of his generation, didn't want to admit it. At least not to...I don't know, he may have admitted it to himself, but didn't want to admit it to others. And that's it.

INT: Do you remember any other incidents about the war that I haven't touched on?

FRIEDA: Well, as we're talking, I just remembered about my mother. I can't think of any right now. I may...I know it has gotten...it stayed with me for a long, long time, and Eddie, my husband, says that about ten years after we were married, for about ten years, I would wake up at night and grab him. Hold on to him, and then I'd remember having nightmares of men in Nazi uniforms chasing me, until not too long ago.

INT: But that...you never really had that experience except that one time when you ran out of the house.

FRIEDA: But I knew that this was my enemy. So that if I saw him across the street, if I was on the same street with him, I crossed the street. So he was always my...no, I never had the experience of being actually, physically harmed by them, except for that one time, but the fear was there, that any minute he could harm me. And that he was my enemy.

INT: And that has been a recurring nightmare.

FRIEDA: Absolutely. It's still...now it's very, very seldom, but Eddie says that for ten years after we were married I would wake up in a sweat. And there was one experience I had when just before my daughter got married, my daughter married someone who's not Jewish. A friend of mine gave her a shower to which her husband's family was invited. A great many non-Jews there. That particular night I had a dream again. And it wasn't so much the Nazis, but I remember somebody saying to us...I was very upset because even to this very day most of my friends are Jewish. I think all my friends are Jewish. I don't think I have any non-Jewish friends. I was very upset and in my dream I remember somebody saying to me, "You have to think of their happiness," because that's what everybody said to me, and I said, "Yes, but they're all murderers." And woke up sobbing. It's a little easier now, but that one time, this party with all these non-Jews at the party who came, it's my party, to my party, got me very upset. And certainly that's...I remember the dream vivid saying, "Yes, but they're all murderers." And I guess in my subconscious too, still to this very day, and perhaps that's the reason I do not have non-Jewish friends, I feel uncomfortable in their presence. In their social, close presence.

INTERVIEW WITH FRIEDA TABAK ON DECEMBER 11, 1995

INT: This is tape 3 of an interview with Frieda Tabak, December 11, 1995, and today we're going to be talking about... (long pause). We're going to be talking about some of the things that happened when you were liberated. We talked about some of that last time, but we're going to be talking a little more about liberation. As I remember, for you, when you were able to leave and make your trek, that really wasn't liberated.

FRIEDA: No, it wasn't.

INT: It was really the beginning. It was the beginning, but it really wasn't liberation. When did you feel liberated?

FRIEDA: When did I feel liberated? It's a good question. I really don't know. Even when I came to the United States, I didn't feel, quote, normal. The culture shock was tremendous, so that I still feel...I still felt kind of uncomfortable. I wasn't afraid if that's...It depends on your definition of liberation.

INT: How do you define liberation?

FRIEDA: How do I define liberation? Probably as I feel today. I probably feel liberated, and I don't know when that started. I don't know. Probably not even after I got married. Probably way into...it was a very slow process, and I really don't know when I felt totally comfortable with myself. Probably when I became very active, when I became very active in Hadassah. In my thirties. I was president at thirty. And as I was doing that type of work, and connecting with people I began to...and I guess it's sort of a personal liberation, a gaining of self-confidence. That's really what I call liberation. A gaining, a feeling good with myself as a person. And as a Jew.

INT: During the time that you were making your way to the United States, and when you first arrived here, did you feel any control, or did you feel that you were being, not manipulated, but, you were being directed by circumstances and people?

FRIEDA: Well, it was being directed by circumstances. Actually, it was being directed by my parents who were being directed by circumstances. My parents knew they had to make their way west, and therefore they took us along. I don't think we questioned it. My brother and I, that is. My brother was very young. I was a teenager, and I knew that's what had to be done. I didn't analyze it.

INT: All right. Let's talk a little bit about the losses that you experienced. What's the first loss that you remember of a person?

FRIEDA: Well, we left and we left my aunt and uncle that I told you that I had grown up with. They were in a little town, and never saw them again. So I imagine that was probably the first loss. And then people just started disappearing from...and we ended up as a very, I think we spoke about this last time, a very nuclear family. And I had my mother, my father and my brother around me. And probably that was, I don't know whether it was all I needed, or that was all that there was and I probably didn't think much beyond that. That's as far as I can remember. We never saw them again, and we were very close with them. I don't know how much...I knew people were being sent to Transnistria to die. But as a child, I guess there was a certain amount of self...a drive for self-preservation. As long as I was all right, it probably did not make that much of an impact on me at that particular time as a child. Later on, as I keep thinking back, things are beginning to bother me. But I think probably as an eight-year-old, a nine-year-old, a

ten-year-old, the impact wasn't all that great, because we were very much a connected family. A small family, nuclear.

INT: So you don't remember mourning any death at all during that period?

FRIEDA: No, no.

INT: Not until much later.

FRIEDA: Not until much later. It was a sort of, I don't know what's the word I want, postponed mourning.

INT: Can you pinpoint any time when you began to mourn?

FRIEDA: No, no. Things just evolved very slowly.

INT: Let me ask you a question about the decision to come to the United States. You said your father was an ardent Zionist.

FRIEDA: Yes.

INT: Was there ever any discussion about going to Israel? Or was it...

FRIEDA: Maybe before the war, and I don't remember, but at the time that the war ended, the main goal was to get to somewhere where we could make a life. At the time, Israel had not been established yet. It would have been more of a struggle. And we had family in the United States, who we thought were going to help us out, and they did. And we were tired, I suppose, of going on struggling. Had we not had family in the United States, we probably would have made our way to Israel. I'm convinced of that. But this was the easy way out.

INT: So now tell me more about your family in the United States.

FRIEDA: My family who brought us over? It was my father's sister and her family, and my father's brother and his family. My father's sister used to send us packages to Europe, after the war, which was basically our livelihood. She and her brother, my father's brother, I guess, co-signed the affidavit. They brought us to Chester.

INT: Let me interrupt you. How did they happen to be here and you happen to be there?

FRIEDA: I think I told you last time that my father, when they immigrated to the United States, my father at that time was very religious. And he heard that in the United States you work on Shabbas. And he was not going to come to the United States to have to work on Shabbas. And that was one of the reasons he stayed behind. Probably the major reason as far as I heard.

INT: And his brother and sister were not religious?

FRIEDA: I guess not to that extent. I didn't know them then. However, when we came here to the United States, my uncle worked in the garment industry in New York, and it was all Jewish. I

don't know how...I don't think he was religious. I think he sort of leaned to the left a little bit. My aunt belonged to a synagogue. Her husband was not too happy with that idea. He too leaned to the left. As a matter of fact, he and my mother had extended arguments about his political leanings. He claimed that the reason we had left Russia, the reason we had left Russia is because we didn't want to work. And anybody who wants to work in Russia was well taken care of. He wasn't there. Anyway, my aunt did belong to a synagogue. She belonged to Jewish organizations, and I think she did it a lot for recognition. She was very generous, but wanted to be recognized for it. And it was the thing to do, I guess, in the Jewish community. Socially.

INT: So neither your aunt or uncle in this country were religious.

FRIEDA: No. Observant. No.

INT: Not observant.

FRIEDA: No. You know, they probably went to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur.

INT: Well, that's not observant.

FRIEDA: But that's it. No. No.

INT: And your father stayed behind because he was observant and wanted to live a life that he could be observant.

FRIEDA: Exactly.

INT: It seems to me that when you described your parents, however, that you didn't describe them as being very religious.

FRIEDA: Well, actually, I think I told you last time also, that after the war my father said if there is a G-d who can do this, there is no G-d. My mother was observant I think more from superstitious, for superstitious reasons. Although she was very Jewishly orientated. My father was a Zionist and very...an ardent Jew without...after the war, without believing in G-d after the war. He was very learned. As a matter of fact he used to read the Torah and he found some mistakes in the Torah, which makes the Torah treif, and it had to be redone, in the synagogue here. But after the war, he kind of lost his belief. Could not believe that a G-d would do such a thing, and therefore he felt there was none.

INT: Your mother continued her belief.

FRIEDA: Yes, she continued. She kept a kosher home. Well, when we first came here, we were not kosher, simply for the reason 'cause we had not been kosher during the war. It was impossible. And we just never...there was a crises in my brother's life and my mother made a pact with G-d that if things would straighten out and he would continue medical school...at the end of his sophomore way he came home and he said he's quitting medical school. Anyway, she

made a pact with G-d that if he would continue medical school and graduate she would keep kosher forever, and she did.

INT: What made him continue medical school?

FRIEDA: My mother. She got on the train, he was at Harvard. She went to Boston. Made arrangements for him to see a psychiatrist. Spoke to all the deans and whoever was there. And he came home. You know, when he first came home he said, you know, "I'm quitting," and she said, "Like hell you are." And she got herself on the train, went to Boston. I don't know what she did, but he continued and he graduated.

INT: Why did he want to quit?

FRIEDA: He was at the top of his class at Franklin and Marshall. And when he got to Harvard, he was only one of many. He was not...

INT: At the top of his class.

FRIEDA: ...big shot. He graduated, I think, seventh or eighth, Eddie would know, from medical school. He did very well. However, at Harvard, they had a pass/fail. He really didn't know how he was doing. And he thought that he was not doing well. So at the end of two years he came home and he said, "I quit." And obviously he didn't. My mother just wouldn't have it. And he went on. And she became kosher to the day she died.

INT: This also talks to the strength of your mother. The strength of her convictions.

FRIEDA: Absolutely. You did not cross her. And she wasn't afraid to tell you, as I'm afraid to hurt my children's psyche, and have to weigh every word before I utter it.

INT: You mentioned before that education was very important.

FRIEDA: Absolutely.

INT: Why was it so important to her?

FRIEDA: To both of them.

INT: That she was willing to do...

FRIEDA: Why was it so important? I think probably to my father and mother for two different reasons. My father was self-educated. Always hungered for an education and couldn't get it. My mother was educated and felt the need for it and the need for her children...and I don't know, she always said we're the people of the book, and we have to know. And that's the way we were raised. I don't know why.

INT: Jewish education wasn't as important to her as...

FRIEDA: Both.

INT: Both were?

FRIEDA: Yes. The Jewish education was more important to her father. He would sit down with my brother and they would study Talmud. He'd get him off the baseball diamond when he was a kid. And they'd sit down and study Talmud. Which my mother certainly didn't object to, and of course my father...you know, professional education was important to him too. It was the greatest disappointment of his life that I didn't go to medical school. It was important to both. An educated person, they thought a great deal of people who were educated. It gives you stature. Probably a means to earn a living. That was important. But I think it was more than that. It was stature, prestige. In Europe, especially, if someone was a doctor, the wife of a doctor was called Frau Doctor, which you know, as we call our rebbetzin, almost, by her husband's...It was just prestigious. It was just the thing that they wanted their children to have.

INT: Did it ever occur to you to go to medical school? Did you ever think of becoming a doctor?

FRIEDA: No, no. I really...at the time never wanted to go to medical school. I was a chemistry major. I was in the premed course. I probably could have gone. Medicine at the time was kind of, I guess, the idea of cutting up cadavers and that kind of stuff sort of turned me against it. At the time. In retrospect, now, I could do it. But it's a little late.

INT: At any time during your life did you ever consider?

FRIEDA: No, no. Once I became a mother that was my life's career.

INT: Let's talk now about your coming to the new country and how you viewed, how you viewed religion. Not how your father or your mother. How did you feel about G-d and G-d's role in the world? Your religious faith as you came to this country?

FRIEDA: As I came to this country. Probably didn't even give it a thought.

INT: Well, your mother and father were responding differently to their experiences. Did you seem to follow more you mother or your father's view?

FRIEDA: I don't know. The first I remember, I was fifteen and a half when I came to the United States and was put into high school, I don't even know that I gave religion a thought. I can't remember giving it a thought. Until I came to college, and there were some Judaica courses. And I was interested. Now, I may have been...these things don't happen overnight. So there may have been some subconscious thought. But I really don't remember giving religion much thought.

INT: Well, when you went to college and took courses in Judaism...

FRIEDA: I became more and more interested, and I think, probably, after I got married, had my first baby, maybe even both of them, I don't remember, I was looking for outlets, for things to do, and that's when I became very active in the Jewish organizations. It was...it gave me something to do, intellectual stimulation, and something that, I think I told you last time, when I

came to the United States I was very surprised that there were Jews that weren't Zionists. I didn't think there were such things. It was...I was drawn to Hadassah for Zionism's sake, more so than religious. Even though I took many courses in Judaism, even in Jewish philosophy, and found them fascinating. I still did not find rituals that...the only rituals that I performed is to show my children some physical evidence of Judaism. I really didn't need them and they probably...If I lit candles, I lit them to show them that it's Shabbas and that you have to light candles. It really didn't mean anything to me.

INT: How about G-d?

FRIEDA: G-d? I didn't give G-d much of a thought to be very honest. Probably, I would consider myself almost an agnostic. Even at that time, later, now, whenever.

INT: All right. Did you ever question your ability or your desire to go on living?

FRIEDA: My ability or my desire to go on living?

INT: Were things ever that bad that you were despondent?

FRIEDA: You're going back.

INT: At any time.

FRIEDA: At any time. I don't know. Of course, we all had times when we were depressed. I don't think I've ever reached a point where I said, you know, I'd like to commit suicide. There were certainly bad times, and I think the emphasis was more on trying to remain alive, rather than to question why should I go on living. Things were bad, but not to the point where you give up. Even though, as I told you last time, my uncle did have morphine at the ready. But it was truly for a last resort.

INT: Can you describe your adjustment to this country? What it was like when you got here.

FRIEDA: Slow.

INT: Where did you live?

FRIEDA: Okay. When we came here, my aunt had an apartment ready for us on Third Street in Chester. It was...when we first came, actually, we came to New York in August.

INT: What year was that?

FRIEDA: 1947. August the third, 1947. We came to New York harbor, and we were picked up by our family. They immediately...my father's brother's family used to spend their summers in the Catskills, so they immediately took us for three weeks to the Catskills.

INT: How did you feel about that?

FRIEDA: How did I feel? You know, I remember very little about it.

INT: Was it a pleasant time?

FRIEDA: Yes, it was pleasant. My cousin...I have a cousin who's the same age as I, and she was there. And she was chasing the boys. I was fifteen and a half at that time. She was chasing the boys. And I couldn't possibly keep up with her, and I kind of retreated a little bit. But it was pleasant, and it didn't bother me that much. I was more troubled, no, troubled is the wrong...more anxious, when I came back to Chester and was enrolled in high school.

INT: Did you immediately after the three weeks in the Catskills, then you came to Chester?

FRIEDA: By that time it was September. It was time for school to start. And I suppose my mother must have taken me to school, I guess. And they said to me, "How old are you?" And I said, "Fifteen." And they said, "Well, you should be a junior in high school. Let's try it."

INT: But fifteen-year-olds aren't juniors in high school.

FRIEDA: Fifteen and a half. When I graduated I was seventeen and a half. It's about the right time. Anyway...

INT: Some are eighteen and a half when they graduate.

FRIEDA: Well, I was seventeen. (Laughter) "Let's try you," and it took me about six weeks.

INT: What language did you speak?

FRIEDA: I spoke German.

INT: Only?

FRIEDA: German. My father spoke Yiddish. I spoke Yiddish. When we were in Poland, I spoke Polish. When we were in Russia, I spoke Russian. At home we spoke German, mostly. With my father...my father mixed his German with Yiddish a lot.

INT: And what did your mother speak?

FRIEDA: My mother spoke German. I knew...well, I had had some lessons in English, but I knew very little English. And they put me...I had gone in Germany, I had gone to school for one year, so there I had taken some subjects. I was there, I think it was the equivalent of eighth grade in Germany. And when I came here they put me in an eleventh grade. Well, with the little bit of education that I had, I was well prepared for eleventh grade in Chester. (Laughter) And there was a teacher there, Dr. Jordan, who took special interest in me. I was a challenge to her. And she singled me out. She taught me English. She made me write a composition every single night. And come in and correct it the next morning. And I didn't resent it. I guess I wanted to learn so badly that I didn't resent the fact that I had to do double the amount of work of anybody else.

And she taught me English to the point where after two years I skipped Freshman English in college.

INT: So she did a good job.

FRIEDA: She did an excellent job. Within six weeks I was not socially integrated, but at least could make myself understood, and understood everybody else. Could manage my subjects in English and just went on, and I think...I graduated among the first ten of Chester High.

INT: Now tell me about your social integration.

FRIEDA: Social integration was tough. I really could not...I had a hard time. I had a...it was just culture shock. First of all, I came from a life where I had no social contacts with my peers, with kids of my age. I went to school in Germany. I was the only Jewish kid in my class. I came in the morning, did my thing, and left. Then again, we were just the family. I had no friends or...I had no opportunity for socialization. And here I come and I'm thrown in. I didn't go to dances. I didn't...I really...I didn't even want to. I was extremely shy, and basically did not socialize until probably I got to college, to any extent.

INT: Now during this time, what were your parents doing?

FRIEDA: My father...my aunt got my father a job at Sackville Mills. I think they made something out of some sort of a...Well, he tried several jobs. He tried being a Hebrew teacher and he had a hard time with the American kids, he could not handle them. They made fun of him because he knew no English. That didn't work. And then he tried...my aunt gave him some things to peddle door to door, and again, it didn't work. So finally she got him a job at Sackville Mills. It was a factory. They manufactured mattress covers or something, I'm not sure. Anyway, they used wool in their manufacturing, and wool carried anthrax. It's a rather serious infectious disease that sheep carry. And my father contracted it. And luckily, he was very fortunate...I don't know whether they had...now they cure it with antibiotics. I don't know what cured...well, of course they had- (end of tape 3, side 1)

INT: You were telling the story of your father's illness.

FRIEDA: Okay. Anyway, he was cured. Did not go back to work at the factory.

INT: How did they cure him?

FRIEDA: Medicines. Probably...I don't know whether they did have penicillin. It may have been penicillin. It was an infectious disease and at times it is fatal, and whether his case was rather mild and he responded to treatment.

INT: How did you respond to this? Your father's illness after everything you had been through.

FRIEDA: I'm sure I wasn't happy about it. You know, I really don't remember, but I'm sure it was upsetting. I can't imagine it being any other way. And...

INT: Do you remember if your mother was terribly concerned over this?

FRIEDA: Yes, yes. Anyway, he was cured, and it was only...it lasted maybe two weeks or so. It's a short...I guess it's one of those kind of diseases you either get cured or you die. It's one way or the other. Anyway, and our aunt helped us buy a little candy store, which my mother and father...and they also moved their apartment near the candy store, and they kept that candy store until they moved to California, where my brother had established a practice. And my mother, being very arthritic, felt that the climate here was very bad, and my father had a heart problem, and my brother, being a cardiologist, he wanted to be near him, and they moved to California. And they stayed in the candy store until then.

INT: So about how many years were they in the candy store?

FRIEDA: Let's see, they moved to California approximately 1974.

INT: About twenty-five years, twenty years?

FRIEDA: Maybe. I'm not sure. We probably got the candy store, I was about eighteen, and they moved '74. Let's see. I was 43 in '74. Between twenty and twenty-five years.

INT: Do you think that they wanted to be with your brother? Was that a factor too?

FRIEDA: Oh, absolutely. No question about it. But I think the fact...yes, they wanted to...my mother was very torn between leaving us here, me and my children, and going to live...and my brother wasn't married yet at the time. But I think the climate, and I think my father more than anything wanted to be near a cardiologist and ironically, he died away from his cardiologist of a heart attack. His cardiologist couldn't help him.

INT: Now do you want to tell me how you chose your spouse?

FRIEDA: How did I choose my spouse? Actually, my spouse chose me. I guess it must have been...we were in...Rosh Hashanah in synagogue. My mother, my...it was after I graduated high school, because Ed had...the secretary in his place of business who had gone to high school with me, and she brought the Annual in. He saw my picture in there and he remembered that was the girl he had seen in synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, and got my name from the Annual and called me. It was a blind date. And...

INT: Was this was when you were a freshman in college?

FRIEDA: Yes. Yes, of course, because I had graduated high school. He still says he got me out of a catalog. And we began dating. And I had dated other kids from college.

INT: You didn't have much of a social life until you went to college?

FRIEDA: Until we got to college, yes. And then...

INT: And then you started to make friends.

FRIEDA: Exactly. And we dated for about a year before he asked me to marry him, and I guess that was at the end of my freshman year, or the middle of my sophomore, no, middle of my sophomore year. And I said I have to finish school. I mean, that was sine qua non, just had to.

INT: Was that your feeling or your mother's feelings that you had to finish college?

FRIEDA: Oh, mine.

INT: That was yours.

FRIEDA: I'm sure hers too, any my father's too. And if it were up to my father, I'd have gone on, and up to my mother I'd have gone on. But it was definitely my feeling. There was no question in my mind that I was not going to finish. So the deal was that he would let me continue to school. And we got married at the end of my sophomore year. Between my sophomore and junior year, that summer.

INT: Did you have any doubts about getting married?

FRIEDA: Sure. Doesn't everybody? Of course. It's the same as any new thing that you embark upon. You always have doubts am I doing the right thing. Absolutely.

INT: Now would you like to describe your husband and your marriage? The marriage relationship.

FRIEDA: Yes. We've been married for forty...it'll be forty-five years in June. I had a wonderful marriage. Really. I think the only disagreements we had was about his permissiveness to the kids. I thought he was too permissive and too easy. Otherwise we've done a lot of traveling together, a lot of...gone through life together. Money has never been a problem. I'm not the biggest of spenders, and he has never said I can't have what I want. We basically follow the same philosophies. The only thing I think we don't like, that both of us don't like is football. He loves football. I hate it. And so far it hasn't made any difference in our relationship.

INT: Can you focus now a little bit on the kind of person he is? Can you describe him? As a character.

FRIEDA: As a character. He's a character, all right. (Laughter) He's a gentle, kind, good-hearted person. As I said, that probably his permissiveness is due to his kindness. Curious, artistic, very good with...loves to work with his hands. He's a good guy.

INT: You said that you have a lot in common, your philosophy is similar.

FRIEDA: Yes, very much.

INT: What are some of the things that the two of you believe together?

FRIEDA: I think that as far as the interest in Judaism that the two of us now believe together he probably got from me. He came from a family that, yes, was Jewish, his mother was kosher, she gave to charity, also so that they would know. His father didn't...I think his mother gave the charity. Sometimes so his father wouldn't know. His father was more interested in business. As a matter of fact, his father was very upset when he heard that I was going to go on to college after our marriage. He thought what for. He had thought it was a waste of money. Girls belong in the kitchen and raise children, and why spend money and time. He thought it was absolutely unnecessary.

INT: And your husband never felt that way.

FRIEDA: At least he didn't say so. (Laughter) I had a scholarship for my first two years and he paid for the other two years so...but that was the deal.

INT: How were decisions made in your marriage? When there was something to be decided?

FRIEDA: I think they were pretty...both of us pretty much discussed things. And, I don't know, perhaps I'm a little stronger than he when it comes to decision-making. But nothing...my philosophy in life, and his as well, is to stop and analyze what an argument is all about, or what a decision is all about. If that particular decision will make a big difference in our lives, then it's worth arguing about. However, it really doesn't amount to a row of beans, why bother? For instance, I always wanted a porch. He didn't think we needed one. It really didn't matter all that much. I would have liked to have had one, but, so we didn't, and we still don't have it, and now it's too late. (Laughter) And there were certain things he wanted and I thought were ridiculous, but as long as it didn't make that much of a difference. Things were pretty well ironed out.

INT: Let's talk a little bit about having children. Did your experiences in the war affect in any way your desire to have children or not have children?

FRIEDA: I don't think so. No. I know when I got married, at that time you get married to have children, and this is what you do. And it never occurred to me that I wasn't going to have children, nor...no, I got married and that's...you have children. And I don't think I analyzed it. I think the war probably came to my mind more when my children began to date. That's when I suddenly...and they inter-dated, and I said it to them, and I don't know whether I should have or shouldn't have, but I said, "You're finishing Hitler's work." That's when the war really began to mean something in reference to the kids. That they will cut that chain of tradition by intermarrying. And that bothered me more than anything else. But as far as having children, I don't think I connected my wartime experience with it.

INT: So you really didn't think about having children? You just did it because it was expected.

FRIEDA: Because it was the things to do. Exactly.

INT: You mentioned how fearful your mother was of all the things for you. That you shouldn't do this, and you shouldn't do that. Were you fearful for your children?

FRIEDA: Sure I was fearful, but I made a concerted effort not to do what my mother did. Now this fearfulness, for example...other than the war, I've spoken to other people who had parents of that generation, and it seemed to have been a cultural thing, of over-protectiveness. I tried when my kids...I really tried to make a concerted effort not to instill those fears in them, because I myself objected so much. As an adult, looking back, I objected to all those fears having been instilled in me, and had to work very hard to overcome some of them, and probably haven't overcome all of them yet.

INT: How did you deal with the war with your children? Did you talk about it?

FRIEDA: No.

INT: Did you...

FRIEDA: No, we did not talk about it until very, very recently. I just...I don't know, it may have been painful. I don't know the reason I didn't but we just...they knew where I came from, that I was a survivor, but we never discussed it.

INT: How do you think your children look at your war experience?

FRIEDA: Today?

INT: Today.

FRIEDA: Today they seem to be very interested, and as I said, I never discussed it with them until two, three years ago at a Pesach Seder. We were talking about liberation, about Bosnia, about...I forget. My brother was there, and they said, "Mom, you never told me." And I suddenly opened up, and I started talking, and I must have spoken for about forty-five minutes. And Rhea, my daughter, came over to me and she said, "Thank you for finally telling us." COSTM is very...my older son, is very interested. He reads books about other survivors. When he hears of some...he tries to make contact with survivors who have done well. There was someone who wrote a book and he got in touch with him. He is very much interested from where he came from. David, he's interested too. I don't really know how he feels about my surviving. Both he and his wife have been doing a lot of reading, Holocaust literature. And I really don't know how he relates this to me. I'm not sure.

INT: All right. Let's talk about your philosophy of child rearing. The two of you. Your attitudes towards child rearing. What is your attitude towards school for your children? Towards education?

FRIEDA: Well, I certainly felt the same as my parents. That education was very important. I always worked with my children when they came home. I checked their homework. I was involved in what they were doing. More so than my husband, simply because he was busy. He was working, he was the provider. And it was up to me to see to it that they get music lessons and dancing lessons and see to it that they do well in school, and when it came time to look for

colleges, to research colleges. I suppose same as any normal mother and father, Jewish mother and father anyway.

INT: What about your attitude towards discipline?

FRIEDA: I felt that, as I told you before, I felt that I was always considered the disciplinarian, and I think there should be limits. And I tried to tell that to my kids, and sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. I had no cooperation when it came...on the part of my husband. And it was rather difficult disciplining the kids by myself, when they knew that they could go to Poppa in the white hat.

INT: What about possessions, things?

FRIEDA: Things are very unimportant to me. I like them. I like things, pretty things. I like nice things, but by the same token, if I didn't have them it would be okay too. I like a comfortable home, but it's not the end-all and all of my existence.

INT: What about for your children?

FRIEDA: I'd like them to have nice things. Certainly would be better for them to be rich than to be poor. (Laughter) But again, I probably...Well, I guess I would like to see them have nice things. Of course. And we have bought them things that we thought they should have. Have always helped them to have, quote, things. But again, I don't think that is the most important thing in life. Even though, if I have them I'm not going to throw them away (laughter) because I do like nice things.

INT: What about your attitude toward work, as far as children are concerned?

FRIEDA: Their work?

INT: Yes.

FRIEDA: Oh, I think they should work.

INT: Why?

FRIEDA: Why? Because I think work is good for you. I think whether they work for money, or as I did, I spent a lifetime of volunteering. One has to...your mind has to be kept busy. At least I felt in my case that I have to keep my mind working constantly. Regardless of what I do, I have to be busy. And I think my kids should do that too. And I don't think that they should sit back and wait for a handout. I don't believe in that.

INT: What do you think about independence of your children?

FRIEDA: I've always...I think, probably my kids will say I'm wrong, I think I've given them a tremendous amount of independence. When they were teenagers, I did try to direct their education. You know, I did try to direct their dating. I didn't like their idea of inter-dating. But

otherwise, I tried to direct their education, but did not interfere. Did not say, "You must be a doctor, or you must be an accountant, or you must do this." I always said, you know, "You choose what you want to do, and I will support you. But you must get an education." And I think they kind of took it for granted. I don't think they even gave it another thought that they weren't going to go to college, or get post high school education. It was even thought of. Some things you just take for granted.

INT: Over the years, how have you balanced out your needs and your children's needs?

FRIEDA: How have I balanced...I don't quite understand.

INT: Does one supersede the other? Is one more important than the other? How do you balance out your needs and your children's needs?

FRIEDA: Would I submerge my needs to my kids', you're saying?

INT: Right. That's what I'm asking.

FRIEDA: My mother always said she did that, and I don't think that I would do it. I think my needs are equally important to my children's needs. And I don't know that I would say I come first, but I think it's an equal thing. I don't think that if I have something to do that's important to me, and my daughter-in-law will say, "Come babysit," I will give it up. If it's not that important certainly I will do it. But if it's something I truly need to do, and she'll say, "Come babysit," I won't do it.

INT: How about when they were younger? Did you balance their needs and your needs the same way?

FRIEDA: Well, simply, I think, probably without even realizing it, the fact that I stayed home and didn't go to work I think was for them. And not on a conscious level. I thought that that was the thing I had to do is raise kids. And even when they were in high school, I would make it my business to be home when they came home from school. Whatever I had to do was always done when they were in school. I was always home when my children came home. And I never sat down to analyze is that am I...are their needs superseding mine. It was just my obligation, I guess. That's probably what I felt it was. My obligation, and it's very possible that at times I may have resented it. You know, now it retrospect, it's possible. But I always made it my business. Mothering was my a-number one career. And I'm not sure that I'd do it again.

INT: How did you handle making decisions about your children, with your children? In other words, important decisions in your life. Did they make them with you? Did you make them for them or did they make them without you?

FRIEDA: No, no, no. Never made decisions for them. I think some of them were probably...they may have made some decisions without me. However, I think that probably, you know, except when they were tiny, you know, and I made the decision that they are not to go in the middle of the street. We're not talking about that. But I think in the long run, most decisions were probably...they will probably tell you that I made decisions for them, but I don't think so. And

even though many a time their decisions did not please me, and I probably told them that, and that's probably why they will say that I made them for them. I tried to kind of give them freedom to make their own decisions pretty much. Perhaps had they come back and said to me, "I don't want to go to college," I may have said, "Well, you must," or something to that effect. But I really...or when Rhea, she was at Penn State for a year and then she had a boyfriend in Philadelphia. She wanted to switch to Drexel and it was in the middle of the year, because she wanted to be in Philadelphia, and I said to her, "Well, you must..." Or we said, you know, both my husband and I, "You must at least finish the year." I mean those kind of decisions. But otherwise, they had pretty much free rein.

INT: How do you want your children and grandchildren to view you?

FRIEDA: Kindly, I hope. (Laughter) How do I want them to view me? I would like them to remember me as a good person who loved them, and wanted their very best...the very best for them.

INT: What is the very best?

FRIEDA: I guess that they should be happy. Whatever will make them happy and still conform to my ideals. (Laughter)

INT: Isn't there sometimes a conflict between what...

FRIEDA: Of course. (Laughter)

INT: ...between what you want for them and what would make them happy?

FRIEDA: Of course, of course. I'd like to see them happy, as long as it agrees in what I think is right. (Laughter) I think it's a human thing.

INT: How do you think you adapted to America? You talked about the cultural differences that you found. How did you adapt? What techniques, what did you do, to adapt to America?

FRIEDA: I don't know. I think it was slow, evolutionary process. Just by living. Living in this society, and getting married and having children, and interacting with other Americans. It just slowly happened, I think. I don't think it was a conscious effort on my part to become Americanized. It just happened.

INT: And it took a long time.

FRIEDA: Slowly. And I can't tell you exactly, the exact date that I became Americanized, but I consider myself an American now. But a Jew first.

INT: You had a support system when you came.

FRIEDA: Yes.

INT: How important was that and how did it affect you?

FRIEDA: You mean a support system, my immediate family or the family who brought us...

INT: The support system that you found here.

FRIEDA: That we found here. Of course it was very important just for physical needs at that time. My aunt, she was a kind woman. She was a giving person. But she also wanted a tremendous amount of recognition for it, and at times it became overbearing. (End of tape 3, side 2)

INTERVIEW WITH FRIEDA TABAK ON DECEMBER 18, 1995

INT: Tape 4 with Frieda Tabak, on Monday, December 18th. The last time we met, we were talking about the support system that you had when you first came to this country, and you were telling me about your aunt. Do you want to continue from there?

FRIEDA: I don't remember exactly what I said, but she was generous. She prepared an apartment for us. Finished...furnished, rather. And I think I told you last time that my father...she had gotten my father a job as a peddler, which didn't work out. And he tried Hebrew school teaching, couldn't handle American kids. Then went and worked at Sackville Mills where he became ill and eventually my aunt helped us buy the candy store.

INT: You said something about she wanted some kind of recognition...

FRIEDA: Yes.

INT: ...for her efforts.

FRIEDA: Yes. Always wanted recognition.

INT: Can you explain what you mean by that?

FRIEDA: I don't think it was a matter that she wanted...no, respect is the wrong word. She wanted constant thanks, in company...she would say, "Look what I did for them." In other words...and my uncle, who I think was against her bringing us over...I don't know whether he was afraid that we might depend on him financially, really put us down. Insulted us, almost. You know, called us greenhorns, what do you know. And even my aunt used to say, "In America, you do such and such."

INT: Well, that really brings up the next question I was going to ask about the ways of life, the things that you had to change about the way you did things. What were the customs that you had to get adjusted to here?

FRIEDA: The customs...First of all, we came here as refugees, so we really didn't have a social life to speak of or...it was difficult to adjust and I can't exactly put my finger on it as to what it was. I know there were discomforts. What exactly it was I don't really quite remember. I don't know. I remember discomfort. And whether I tried to wipe it clean or whatever it was...I really can't give you specifics. I can't think of any.

INT: Did your relationship with your aunt affect your...did you spend time as a family with them? Or was it...

FRIEDA: Very little. Very little.

INT: So there wasn't much socialization.

FRIEDA: There wasn't much. If there was a family affair she would invite us, but even then, there were always some things. Look at the greenhorns are coming, or look what they're doing. Or...but there really wasn't all too much socialization as a family. It was the...it was always the benefactor and the recipient kind of relationship.

INT: And you always were the recipient?

FRIEDA: Of course.

INT: You always felt on the low end of the...

FRIEDA: We were always...and we were made to feel that. Although financially, materially, they were generous. To a point, I mean. We weren't super comfortable, but we survived.

INT: You weren't hungry.

FRIEDA: We weren't hungry, exactly. And we...I had, I don't know, I think two blouses and two skirts that I interchanged. It was enough. And coming from where we came from, we didn't really need more. It was an emotional putdown more than anything else. Their daughter was getting ready to go to college and to medical school, and when I decided that I wanted to go to college, my uncle almost went berserk. I mean, why. Graduate high school, go to work, earn some money.

INT: He didn't think you were worthy?

FRIEDA: He didn't think it was necessary. He didn't...it wasn't a matter of worthiness, I think. He didn't...he thought that I should...here he is, quote, supporting us, which by that time he probably did not. I think when we first came my aunt would give up something like \$35 a week or something of the sort. But once my father started earning some money then...and my mother used to, she would have borders living with us who would supplant the income. So by that time they no longer had to, quote, give us anything. And he felt that college was a luxury for the rich, and certainly I had no business.

INT: You weren't entitled.

FRIEDA: I wasn't entitled, exactly. Not only wasn't I entitled, but what I should do is get out, get a job, earn money.

INT: Did he expect you to pay back for what they had given you?

FRIEDA: That I don't know. My mother always said that she would pay him back, and I don't think it ever happened, because they really never had enough to pay him back. It's possible that he hoped to be paid back, but didn't really expect it. But it was a very uncomfortable existence. My cousin who used to spend money on clothes. It just absolutely boggled my mind the amount of money that she spent. I knew...I used to babysit and earn fifty cents, and I saved...when I finally saved up \$20 I thought I was the richest person in the world. And she would go out and buy a dress for \$60, which at the time was a lot of money. And I just couldn't understand it.

INT: Did you wear her hand-me-downs?

FRIEDA: Yes. As a matter of fact, I did. You're reminding me. (Laughter) It's things I've forgotten a long time ago.

INT: Did you distrust the Jewish community or the American community that you were living in?

FRIEDA: No, I don't think so. I don't think it was a matter of distrust. It was just a little...it was discomfort, and it's very difficult to pinpoint it. It was a shyness, afraid of doing the wrong things, perhaps. Acting un-American.

INT: But you don't remember what any of these un-American things were?

FRIEDA: I don't remember. I really...I do remember discomfort and, you know, constantly my aunt would reinforce this: "You know, in America, you do such."

INT: Did you have any conflicts in the values that you gave your children and the values with which you were raised?

FRIEDA: Did I have any conflicts?

INT: When it came time to raise your children. Did you raise them the same way you were raised?

FRIEDA: In some respects. Depending. In some respects very much.

INT: Can you give me an example?

FRIEDA: Yes. As far as education and Jewish education is concerned, I tried to offer them as much as possible. Very involved with their education. When it came to overprotection as I was overprotected, I kind of bent over...I remembered how I disliked it, and therefore bent over

backwards not to do it. So in some respects, yes. My parents always said you shouldn't marry anyone who isn't Jewish. I was very upset when my kids did. To me, somehow, it sunk in, perhaps because of the time or whatever, and if in college a non-Jew had wanted to date me, I felt guilty because I was asked. I felt I had done something wrong to have a non-Jew ask me for a date. But when my children started dating, I just...I tried to transmit this to them and couldn't. So in that respect I was the same as my parents.

INT: How did the economic situation that you found yourself in in this country affect your life?

FRIEDA: I came here at fifteen. I really didn't...whatever I had was enough. I didn't have enormous needs, even though, as I said, I saw my cousin spend and I didn't have it. I didn't resent it. I did not...I didn't covet it. I really didn't feel as though I needed it. I was...I had enough to wear, I wasn't hungry. And I guess coming with my background, that was enough to make me comfortable. As a matter of fact, my mother probably suffered more under the economic strain than I did. Before the war she was at a fairly higher socio-economic stratum. They were always very well dressed. Servants in the house. And she still...I was a child at the time, a very young child, so it didn't make...that lifestyle didn't make that much of an impression on me, whereas on her, even though she had gone through the war, it still...she still loved good, good things, and pretty things. As poor as she was, she always kept herself looking regal. And I think probably she was...the economic situation affected her more. My main concern was to get into college and my parents certainly had no money, and I looked all over to get a scholarship, which I eventually did, and that's how I went to college. And I worked weekends, which paid for my transportation during the week. My carfare. I used to work at Spear's in Chester on the weekend and earned money for my carfare for the rest of the week.

INT: What did you do there?

FRIEDA: I was a salesgirl.

INT: What did you sell?

FRIEDA: Ladies underwear. Ladies lingerie. I worked there probably I guess three, four years. Summers and weekends. And found it quite pleasant. I earned money. I even bought myself a sewing machine. Paid, I think \$2-\$3 dollars a week for it. Paid it out. And even made clothes for my mother. Sewed clothes for myself and for my mother.

INT: How would you learn to sew?

FRIEDA: I taught myself. That's what my mother always used to ask me. "How did you learn? Who taught you?" No one did. I would buy a pattern, read instructions, and do it.

INT: Did you like it?

FRIEDA: Yeah, I enjoyed it. It was creative process. Haven't done it in a long time, and then after a while I got married, made all my slipcovers, curtains. As a matter of fact, I traded my old...that sewing machine on to a newer one, which I still have. (Laughter)

INT: Do you still experience any regrets or disappointments about yourself? What you might have done or been if it hadn't been for the war.

FRIEDA: Oh, if it hadn't been for the war? Probably not, no. Because my life really started in the United States. I don't think that the war affected my life as...no, I really don't think so.

INT: Now I'd like to talk a little bit about the supportive network that you had, or didn't have, when you came to this country. Who did you talk about...Who did you talk to about the difficulties, the decisions, everything that was happening to you once you got here?

FRIEDA: I don't think anybody. I don't think I sought support. I think...my main interest was education, and I really pursued it. With the help of my parents, certainly. They supported me in every way when it came to seeking education. They couldn't help me financially, but they certainly supported me. But I think probably the ultimate choice I made myself. They allowed me to.

INT: But you didn't talk to anybody about the problems that you were facing?

FRIEDA: No, no.

INT: You were very much within yourself then.

FRIEDA: Pretty much. Yes, I would think so.

INT: How did you take care of yourself? How did you meet your emotional needs if you didn't share...I mean, you didn't have anybody there to...you didn't have any friends?

FRIEDA: Not to speak of.

INT: You didn't share much with your parents on an emotional level.

FRIEDA: No. I didn't know I needed to share. (Laughter) I didn't know that my emotions were in trouble.

INT: Well, you knew that you weren't comfortable and you knew you were shy.

FRIEDA: I wasn't comfortable and I knew I was shy, and I thought that's the way it's supposed to be, and I really didn't delve into it. And I knew what I had to do and I did it, and that was it.

INT: Because things were difficult economically, what was the balance between work and leisure in your family? Was there any kind of fun activity?

FRIEDA: Fun activities?

INT: And how much? What was the balance?

FRIEDA: I think the leisure was reading probably. Both my mother and father were avid readers. There wasn't any...in the two years that I stayed with my parents...then when he got the

candy store he was very busy with that. It was work. Other than reading, other than...my father and mother always used to love to sit there and discuss the Talmud. They would take a page in the Talmud and study it together. Especially on Shabbas. And that was about it. I think that there was no socializing, there was no...certainly couldn't afford to go to movies, the theater. It was pre-television. I imagine most of their leisure time was spent reading, discussing.

INT: Once your father got the candy store, did he work seven days a week?

FRIEDA: Yes. Seven days a week. Many long hours. And what they would do, they would take turns. He would go up for a couple of hours to rest, and my mother would be down there. It was a very measly existence. There was hardly anything there. However, towards the end he said that the candy store doesn't need him, but he needs the candy store. He needs to be kept busy. And even there they would sit and read. It was...if there was no customer came in, they'd sit down and read. But yes, they were busy seven days a week.

INT: The life you described for your parents sounded like a fairly lonely one.

FRIEDA: Probably yes. Especially for my father. My mother...well, actually, my father started to get involved in the synagogue. You know, he used to read the Torah, he used to do the Shachrit service, and...so he was a little, a little bit...but even there he was uncomfortable. My mother started getting involved...as a matter of fact, my mother decided that she would take a course in bookkeeping, so that she could get a job. That was about two years after we came here, maybe three years. And went to, was it Sleepers College. I think...

INT: Business school.

FRIEDA: Commercial business school. And I think had a...offered a job...someone offered her a job after she got out, but my father said he needed her in the store, and just could not handle the store by himself. And she never pursued it. And then she got involved in organizations, and used to go to meetings, and that's how she...she was a very social person. She needed that. My father didn't need it as much as she did. And so she would go to meetings of organizations, and I guess that's how she would...

INT: You mentioned that your father got involved in the synagogue, but even that wasn't good, you said. Was that because he didn't believe...of his lack of belief in G-d...?

FRIEDA: He did not believe it.

INT: ...he was uncomfortable.

FRIEDA: It's not that he was uncomfortable at synagogue. He knew all that, but he was...his belief in G-d had been shattered, so that he really was there almost under false pretenses.

INT: And that bothered him?

FRIEDA: I guess so, yes. I guess so.

INT: When you came here you were shy and pretty much friendless. What has the role of friendship been in your life, as an adult let's say?

FRIEDA: As an adult, acquired friends through basically, I think, my social life didn't develop until I became active in organizations, and that's how I acquired many, many friends. Many good friends. And it's been quite important to me to...even though at times I do enjoy being alone. There are times that I really want to be left alone. I still need a certain amount of socialization. And I've acquired most of my friends through work in Jewish organizations, and I guess that's why most of my friends are Jewish, and I do feel uncomfortable in non-Jewish circles.

INT: You said that you really never thought much about your emotional needs, and you didn't talk to anyone about any difficulties that you were experiencing.

FRIEDA: No, I don't remember talking to anybody.

INT: Did you ever seek professional help?

FRIEDA: Oh, no.

INT: Why do you say oh no?

FRIEDA: Oh no, A-I didn't think I needed help; B-I didn't have the money; C-I didn't even know that such a thing existed or that it was for me. It was something totally foreign. There was...it never occurred to me. This was how many years ago? Forty years ago? Forty-five?

INT: Well, how about in the past forty years?

FRIEDA: In the past forty years? No. I never thought...I never really gave it a thought that I needed professional help. Whatever difficulty I've run into I've tried to handle myself, for whatever results I got. (Laughter)

INT: What do you see as the successes of your life?

FRIEDA: I'm a mother. I have three children who are fairly well adjusted and are doing fairly well. I have a happy marriage. I have a comfortable life, both financially and I guess...financially, certainly our finances allow us to do the things we like to do. I suppose that's a success.

INT: Oh, absolutely. How do you think you've been able to achieve that? You certainly have achieved a lot. You've come a long way.

FRIEDA: Yes, yes. I've come a long way.

INT: How have you been able...by what means?

FRIEDA: Never really sat down to analyze the means. I did it. I got married. First, you know, I knew I needed an education, and I did it. I got married and I was told I had to have children, so I had children.

INT: Who told you you had to have children?

FRIEDA: Society. It was understood. You get married, you have kids. It was 1951, '53.

INT: It was something that you didn't think about.

FRIEDA: Never even thought about it. I knew I got married, I knew I was going to have kids. I found raising children difficult. I had a difficult time with it. I don't think that I was...my motherly instincts were as developed, no, maybe that's the wrong word. I had a hard time raising kids. For myself. Not that I didn't try. But let's put it this way. I didn't quite enjoy it. I did not love it.

INT: Why do you think that was?

FRIEDA: I don't know. I don't know.

INT: Do you think it had anything to do with your own parents?

FRIEDA: I don't think so. I don't think so. I just...something, you know, I saw a neighbor who had ten kids, and loved doing what she was doing. I just did not have this motherly instinct, although, you know, I certainly tried and worked very hard to raise the kids the way I thought was best, and certainly gave them my all. But it was not with a hundred percent...let's put it this way. Some of it was a chore, an obligation, more so than a...

INT: A pleasure?

FRIEDA: A pleasure. Right. Exactly. Yes, I've had my pleasures, but I'm not sure that...it wasn't one hundred percent pleasure.

INT: Do you think the war could have had anything to do with it?

FRIEDA: I'm not sure. I really...I think that was...I never attributed it to that. I think that perhaps it's just me. It's my personality. Some people are more maternal than others, and I think...

INT: But do you think that the war could have...

FRIEDA: No, I don't think so.

INT: ...affected your personality?

FRIEDA: Perhaps. I never attributed it to that. I never thought of it in those terms. It's possible. Everything's possible. I don't think so. I think it's just my personality. I'm not a motherly type. Yes, I was upset when the kids were sick, and yes, I got up at night with them when they were

sick, but in was not a hundred percent...and I don't think that anybody has this a hundred percent pleasure of mothering. I did not have that.

INT: Well, there are difficult times with any child.

FRIEDA: Exactly.

INT: But what you're indicating is that you think that you didn't get as much pleasure out of it as you think other people have.

FRIEDA: I have said, years ago, before it was fashionable to say so, that, oh, perhaps after my kids were teenagers, that if I had to do it again, do it over again, and knowing what I knew then, I would not have had any children. And I think I probably would still say the same thing.

INT: So the pleasure hasn't outweighed the pain.

FRIEDA: No. No, it wasn't pain.

INT: All right, what was it?

FRIEDA: That's too strong.

INT: Okay.

FRIEDA: There was a certain amount of pain, but it's really too strong a word. I think what it really is...I think it's more a bother than a pain. No, pain is too strong. Even though there were instances of pain, but that's too strong. Too strong a general word.

INT: Would you say that's one of the mistakes that you made in your life?

FRIEDA: Having children? No, I wouldn't go that far.

INT: What were your mistakes in life?

FRIEDA: What were my mistakes? I don't know that...yes, there are times when I keep saying, you know, gee, I really should have been a career woman. I shouldn't have had any children, or should have put my kids in day care and should have gone out and had a job and, quote, fulfilled myself, which I probably could have done. And yet on the other hand, I think to myself I know a lot of people who are out working in the business world and are perhaps even more stressed out than I am. So I'm not sure that it was a mistake. Perhaps I should have, perhaps I shouldn't. I'm pretty ambivalent about the whole thing. Whether it would have been any better had I gotten someone to take care of my kids and gone out in the work world.

INT: Are there any other mistakes that you have made in your life? Any things that you regret?

FRIEDA: Having done? (End of tape 4, side 1)

INT: Do you blame yourself for anything that's happened, or do you have something for which you've done that you've finally forgiven yourself?

FRIEDA: No. I really...you mean, as far as my children are concerned or generally?

INT: Generally, as far as your whole life.

FRIEDA: Generally. I really...as I said, I have very few regrets as to what I have done. I don't think I've done anything very terrible, nor have I done anything so wonderful. I've lived an ordinary life. (Laughter) Comfortable. Ups and downs, as everybody else has.

INT: What role has faith and tradition played in your life and the life of your family?

FRIEDA: Faith and tradition. Again, I feel a...an obligation to tradition. To preserve tradition. However, it's not because of faith. If by faith you mean faith in religion and G-d.

INT: You feel an obligation to preserve tradition. Why?

FRIEDA: Is it because my parents have told me that I have to, and it has kind of remained with me? Again, I really didn't analyze as to why I feel. I feel it's a wonderful tradition, and even though religion is part and parcel of Judaism, and I'm not quite religious, I think the culture has a lot of merit. And also I feel it's an obligation imposed upon me by my forerunners. I'm part of a chain, which I do not want to break. I feel guilty breaking. Perhaps it's a little bit of guilt involved in me.

INT: What specifically, when you say that you have to preserve tradition, what traditions are you preserving?

FRIEDA: I guess...good question. Tradition of a love for a people, of a caring for a...feeling a brotherhood with all the Jewish people. A fact that it is my obligation, again, and I don't like that word because it has a certain negativity. It is incumbent upon me to preserve the Jewish people. Again, coming back to this chain kind of...

INT: And how do you fulfill this?

FRIEDA: Well, certainly active in all sorts of Jewish and Zionist...and by being active in Zionist organizations, I strongly feel that a Jewish land is very important for the survival of the Jewish people, and that perhaps is due to my wartime experience, because I am convinced that had there been a Jewish land for Jews to flee to, for someplace for the Jews to be accepted, six million would not have perished. And that's why, as I told you before, when I came to the United States and found out that there were Jews who were not Zionists it boggled my mind. I couldn't understand it. So that, and the idea of a peoplehood. Of a brotherhood of people. I'm more comfortable with my people. They're my people. And that's something that I could not transmit to my kids, and it may have been because they have lived in a school system where there were one or two kids in their class who were Jewish. Their friends, they have a variety of friends. They just were raised in a totally different milieu.

INT: Do you feel any regrets about that?

FRIEDA: About the kids?

INT: About...no, the area in which you raised them.

FRIEDA: Yes.

INT: Do you wish that you had moved to a neighborhood where there would have been many more Jews and...

FRIEDA: Yes, yes. That's one of the regrets that I have. However, by the same token, I know many who live in many Jewish neighborhoods, and it doesn't...so there's really no one...many times I've said to myself, well, if I'd lived in a totally Jewish neighborhood, perhaps sent my kids to a Jewish day school, maybe they would have been a little more Jewishly conscious. I don't know. I know people who have done that and it hasn't worked. As it was, I tried to get my kids active in Jewish youth groups. Sent them to Jewish camps. Sent them to Israel. But perhaps something will remain sometimes.

INT: So you haven't given up?

FRIEDA: No, no. Haven't given up.

INT: Now I'd like to talk about confronting the Holocaust, which is something that I don't think you've done until fairly recently.

FRIEDA: That's true.

INT: So let's talk about that. Do you read Holocaust literature or see Holocaust films?

FRIEDA: Yes, yes. And find them difficult.

INT: But you do it.

FRIEDA: I do it. Not...let's put it this way, not exclusively of anything else. I mean I'll pick up some Holocaust literature occasionally, will go see a Holocaust film, went to see "Shoah" and "Schindler's List" and so on, and I find it difficult and then perhaps, you know, I won't do it for a while, and then I'll pick up something again. It's not easy.

INT: How important is this for your children and your grandchildren?

FRIEDA: Is what?

INT: Holocaust literature, Holocaust films?

FRIEDA: I would say two out of my three are probably very interested in them. COSTM is a voracious reader of that kind of literature. David too, and so is Denise, who is his non-Jewish wife. I don't know about Rhea. But the other two, definitely.

INT: How do you feel about Holocaust films and literature as far as your grandchildren, your grandchild is concerned?

FRIEDA: My grandchild. My grandchild is five.

INT: Well, but she's going to grow up.

FRIEDA: She's going to. Oh, I think, definitely, that she should be taught and told and hopefully will...it certainly is something that shouldn't be forgotten. So if she's educated in the history, including the Holocaust, I certainly think she ought to read the literature as well, and see the films. Absolutely.

INT: How important do you see this, and there's certainly been a lot of...a lot more literature, a lot more focus on it lately...

FRIEDA: Lately. And I think it's probably for the same reason that I'm talking now.

INT: Which is?

FRIEDA: Which is...I guess the distance is getting longer. The time element. We are getting older and within a few years there will be no Holocaust survivors to tell the story, and I think it's very important that the story be told.

INT: It is important for the Jews that the story be told...

FRIEDA: For everybody.

INT: ...or for the Gentiles that the story be told?

FRIEDA: It's important for the world. It's important for everybody. Yes, it's important.

INT: Why?

FRIEDA: Why? Hopefully, hopefully that they will...that people will be so appalled by it that it would not happen again. However, you know, people...there were stories of kids laughing at "Schindler's List" and applauding and so on. I don't know. Maybe to those it gives them reinforcement. I don't know. But I think, on the whole, I think it's very important that the story be told and hopefully not repeated.

INT: Does the Holocaust, your personal experience, affect your present day political views?

FRIEDA: I would imagine to a certain extent, yes. Probably would push me to the left so that, in other words, I feel that people should not be discriminated against as I was, certainly in the fullest extent of the word. Probably to the left, yes. I think so.

INT: Does it affect your...

FRIEDA: Voting?

INT: Yes, does it affect your voting?

FRIEDA: I never thought of...I mean I certainly, when I do vote, I'll vote for the probably the more liberal candidates, although as I'm getting older and I find so many social...what's the word I want, I can't think of the word...yes, the abuse of so many...

INT: Of the social programs.

FRIEDA: Social programs. It almost pushes me...

INT: Back?

FRIEDA: Back towards...but I would say on the whole I tend towards the left.

INT: You said, "When I do vote." Does that mean that you don't vote?

FRIEDA: Oh, no, no. I do. No, I didn't...No, no, not at all.

INT: It sounded like...

FRIEDA: No, I do vote.

INT: You do vote.

FRIEDA: Oh, absolutely. Every time.

INT: Do you think your interest in voting is a result of your Holocaust experience?

FRIEDA: I don't know. Perhaps. I don't know. I just feel it's, again, my obligation as an American citizen, a country that has taken me in and has certainly offered me a comfortable life. That's the least I can do. It's my duty.

INT: Oh, absolutely. Every citizen's duty. How about your view towards the current situation in Bosnia? Has that been affected, do you think?

FRIEDA: Yes. Very much. Especially now, since we're sending troops there. My first reaction was, gee, I wouldn't want my kid to go there. And immediately I said to myself, suppose forty years ago they had sent troops to save the Jews. Or fifty years ago. Would I have said the same thing? And I immediately changed my mind. It's a very...and I can understand why non-Jews didn't care. Because my first reaction to the Bosnia was I don't want my kid to go there, until I

said, you know, suppose fifty years ago they had...the United States had said...and in that respect it really affected me.

INT: What do you think about the changes in Europe? You've been back to Europe.

FRIEDA: I've been back to Western Europe. I haven't been back to the East. As a matter of fact, I had no desire to go back until my brother was just here a week ago, and he said, "How about if we go back?" And he was a little, little kid. He came here he was eight years old. And we got the maps out, and we looked. He wanted to know where it was, he obviously doesn't know, hardly remembers anything. But he said, "How about the summer if we go back? And just look around and see where we've been."

INT: And? What's your response to that?

FRIEDA: I said, "Okay. I'll work on it." And he...and I think we will. We're going to...I haven't done anything about it. And you said what's my reaction about what's going on in Europe, about the breakup of the Soviet empire? Unfortunately, I don't know whether fortunately or unfortunately, I think, well, unfortunately, there will be, I think, in Eastern Europe there will be a continuous fight of people against people. The Russians...the Russian and the other...

INT: Republics.

FRIEDA: Republics, that's the word I want. And the same that's going on in Bosnia and the Serbs. They're all little enclaves and everybody wants what the other guy's got, and I don't think there's going to be peace there for a long time. I think actually what was in the Soviet Union was held together by a dictatorship. So somebody, you know...

INT: Had to force it.

FRIEDA: Exactly. It was a forceful reunion, and now that it's all, quote, free, I think there will be a tremendous amount of...and there are very few Jews left there, so I guess...I think just recently in Poland there was a...something was blamed on the Jews. What do they have? Two hundred Jews? It's almost ridiculous. But thank goodness they can't be made the scapegoats that much anymore, because they're just not there.

INT: So how do you feel about the changes that have taken place in Europe? Are they for the better or are they for the worse?

FRIEDA: I don't think they're for the worse. I don't think they're for the better. But probably for the worse, I would imagine, because there'll be constant turmoil. So probably for the worse. They weren't good before, but in Russia, for instance, there wasn't the crime there is now. There wasn't this...so I don't know which is better. Whether the communist government that's a dictatorship that really pushes you down that you can't breathe or when you have freedom, so to speak, that you can't walk the streets. So I don't know which is better.

INT: How do you feel about the changes that are going on in Israel?

FRIEDA: You mean as far as idealism?

INT: As far as everything. There's many things going on in Israel, especially since Rabin's assassination. How do you feel about what's happening in Israel?

FRIEDA: I certainly...you know, you said Rabin's assassination. The idea of Jew killing Jew absolutely devastated me. (Tape stops for a phone call). The changes...what bothers me more about anything...the changes that bother me more than any others are the fact that Israel has lost its idealism. That materialism has taken over. And I can't blame...these people have been in a war time situation for the past forty some years, and they're really tired. And I can understand it. But the idealism of a Ben-Gurion, of a Golda Meir, of an idea building a country is gone, and that's what bothers me more. And it's becoming more and more of a materialistic society, and I would have liked it to be the light onto the nations, which it isn't, unfortunately. But I still think it's very important for a Jewish state to exist.

INT: In light of the assassination, I think the conflicts between the secular and the religious Jews are even greater.

FRIEDA: Exactly.

INT: Where do you stand...?

FRIEDA: And the religious Jews probably can't see the forest for the trees. And in their fanaticism I think are going to cause a lot of trouble. Even though I feel that probably giving back all the territories is also not going to solve it. But something had to be done. I think...I don't think that I or my children will ever see a truly peaceful situation there, but something had to be done. I think that the Arab population is multiplying by leaps and bounds, and there's just no way that an Israel can govern in a democratic way. If Israel is democratic then the Arabs will outvote them. If they're not democratic, then who are we? So it's not what it...unfortunately what it was meant to be, but still very necessary.

INT: How do you perceive the world's interest, or society's interest, in your war experiences?

FRIEDA: Society's interest in my war experience?

INT: Right. With the war experiences of individual survivors.

FRIEDA: I don't think that you can generalize it quite that much. You say society's interest.

INT: Well, let me ask you this. Do you think that society has changed...

FRIEDA: Because of the Holocaust?

INT: No, no...over these forty years in their interest in the survivors' experiences?

FRIEDA: Probably yes. At the very, very beginning when I was in Germany, there was, at least in Germany, there was almost an apologetic feeling. Everybody said, "I didn't do it, I didn't see

it, I didn't know." And I think now, forty years hence, forty-five years hence, when we see the rise of the neo-Nazis and the skinheads, and all of those that, perhaps, some of it has been forgotten. I guess the undercurrents were always there for anti-Semitism to come to the fore. I think...and yet, on the other hand, that's why I said society is too broad a topic, to say, how has society changed. There are some people, as you said, with all this literature coming out now on the Holocaust who are very, very interested, and on the other hand, some people who have not only forgotten, but were probably never interested, or never felt that it was wrong. And there's a whole young group of people who are coming out and are as the band of people that Hitler led. And just the other day we were trying to think how someone like a Hitler, who was basically an uneducated person, could turn the world around eventually. So, I guess, the conditions were ripe. The right condition, the right social, financial etc. so that it can happen again. It can happen again today. Even though, you know, the skinheads are just, oh, they're nothing, they're a small little band of hoodlums. It can happen. It has happened before, and I think we have to be very aware of it.

INT: Do you feel unsafe or do you have greater distrust in your fellow man that you think it might happen again? It could happen again?

FRIEDA: In that respect...not a greater distrust in my fellow man. Yes, I think it could happen again. I think perhaps we Jews would be a little more vigilant at this point and...I mean we certainly have many of our defense organizations now looking at things and watching it, and perhaps we would be a little more vigilant and not allow it to happen. But, as I said, it can happen, and sure, I hope it never does, but sure I'm afraid that it might. I mean it's not a fear that I live with every day, but if I stop and think about it, sure.

INT: Okay. Let's talk about some memories now, maybe that you haven't thought of before. What would you...what kind of memories can you pinpoint as being the happiest since the war?

FRIEDA: Since.

INT: Individual, small individual events. A single day or a single moment that you remember as being an outstanding, happy experience in your life.

FRIEDA: I guess the...certainly life's passages. Getting married.

INT: Well, specific. Be very specific.

FRIEDA: Very specific. All right. The day I was married. The day I had my first child.

INT: Tell me about your wedding.

FRIEDA: Tell you about the day I was married? It was June the 24th. Probably the hottest day in history. My parents could not afford a wedding, and I guess my in-laws felt that their son should have a wedding, so they were the ones who paid for the wedding and instituted the wedding, and my parents were, quote, greenhorns, and really didn't know what to do. In retrospect, I probably, if I were a little smarter, I was nineteen and kind of dumb and didn't know what was going on, I probably would have said let's go to a justice of the peace or whatever or a

rabbi, elope, and...But as it was we had this big party, and I would say probably eighty percent were his side. His relatives. It was a very hot day. The place wasn't air-conditioned. (Laughter)

INT: You weren't married in the synagogue.

FRIEDA: No, we were married in a hall on Sixth and Girard. My in-laws found it. I had no idea what was going on. I had nothing to say. But I was happy, nevertheless, getting married. I was in love, and obviously it worked. To think back, I probably would have said, you know, who needs all this. But I did what I was told. I was really basically very obedient. And I remember having my first child. This tiny little baby who was adorable. And I remember looking at her little fingers and her little fingernails. Really examining her. And that was quite a wonderful day. And of course, subsequently, the birth of my other children. But, of course, I had already had kids so I knew what they looked like. (Laughter) Otherwise, I can't really pinpoint. There have been happy days, wonderful days, there have been sad days.

INT: Well, what was one of the most difficult moments you remember since the war?

FRIEDA: Since the war. I suppose my father's death. Probably. My parents had moved to California and I helped them pack up. And all their things were moved. And three weeks later I got a phone call that my father had passed away, and I had to go to California, unpack, settle my mother all alone, and it was...everything happened in such fast succession. I think it was probably one of my difficult times at the time.

INT: Did you feel that you had a special relationship with your father?

FRIEDA: It was a daughter-father relationship. I don't think anything special. I don't think I had a special relationship with either one of my parents. Depending on your definition of special.

INT: Well, whatever your definition is.

FRIEDA: My definition? I don't think I had any...no.

INT: So that wasn't the reason that his death was so...

FRIEDA: Oh, no. Certainly his death was a blow, but the way it happened. You know, here he left, and not only that, I had to see to it that my mother was settled. There was a problem should we bring his body back. (End of tape 4, side 2)

INTERVIEW WITH FRIEDA TABAK, JANUARY 16, 1996

INT: Frieda, this is tape 5, on Tuesday, January 16th. And I want to go back to some of the things that were on the last tape that I think weren't fully explained. The note I made at the end of the last tape was father's business and I think...

FRIEDA: In the States?

INT: Yes. And I may have asked something about a difficult moment after the war, and you started to talk about something in your father's life that affected you. Is that...

FRIEDA: About my father's illness? Before he went into business? Where he got an anthrax infection? I think we have that on the tape.

INT: Yes, that's on the tape. My note was father's business.

FRIEDA: I really don't know. It was, I mean they barely made a living there. Worked very hard.

INT: Was that very difficult for you that they were barely making a living?

FRIEDA: Was it difficult for me? I was married...I was married, I guess, probably either a year after they went into that business or half a year. Not very long thereafter I was married. Of course it was difficult for me. I felt badly that they did not do well, and certainly when your parents are not doing well, and whether it be economically, physically, whatever, it's difficult, it's upsetting.

INT: Were you ashamed of the fact that they weren't doing well?

FRIEDA: Oh, no, no, no. Not at all. It wasn't a matter of shame, it was just sorrow. You know, I wished that they had more. Perhaps my mother was slightly ashamed, but it didn't bother me in that...saying, gee, my parents are poor, I'm ashamed of that, no.

INT: Did it precipitate your getting married any sooner? Do you think you might have waited to get married another year or so if the financial situation had been better?

FRIEDA: Actually, Ed insisted. I wasn't ready to get married. He insisted that he wanted to get married, and I guess...I did say that last time that a deal was that I was to continue going to school. I fully intended to graduate first. Whether because economically, I don't think so. I never thought of it, never occurred to me. Perhaps subconsciously.

INT: In other words, it was more Eddie's desire to get married.

FRIEDA: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

INT: Than any other.

FRIEDA: Than mine. Right. And he agreed to any of my conditions.

INT: Did your parents encourage you to get married...

FRIEDA: Not at all.

INT: ...or discourage you?

FRIEDA: They would have preferred I did not.

INT: Waited.

FRIEDA: I waited. Absolutely. I was nineteen. And they felt I was way too young, but they also didn't oppose it. They didn't say, "You must not, you may not." But they didn't say, "Oh, go to it, it's wonderful." They really felt I was young.

INT: Did they like Eddie?

FRIEDA: Yes, yes. And, as a matter of fact, I always said my mother liked him better than me. (Laughter) She really was very fond of him. And my father, not as my mother, my father would have preferred a doctor. (Laughter) He would have wanted...he wanted me to be a doctor, I mean.

INT: And if he couldn't have his daughter a doctor then he wanted a son-in-law.

FRIEDA: At least a son-in-law. So he got a son.

INT: Speaking of Eddie and your meeting and your getting married, what was the first thing about Eddie that attracted you? What qualities did he have that first made you...

FRIEDA: He really was always very, very kind and very giving, and I guess, whatever I said was okay, and...it's like kindness more than anything else. And you know, I never, never really thought of it.

INT: Did the fact that he pursued you so ardently, was that a factor?

FRIEDA: I suppose so. I guess any girl who's being pursued...

INT: Well, no...

FRIEDA: But he did not pursue me to the point of being obnoxious.

INT: But some girls don't like to be pursued too...

FRIEDA: Too ardently?

INT: Too ardently.

FRIEDA: Perhaps. You know I never sat down to really analyze as to why I did marry him. It was obviously successful. It's going to be forty-five years.

INT: Obviously.

FRIEDA: Obviously. Three kids later and...we've had our differences but that's common. I don't think that has anything to do with our particular personalities.

INT: One of the last things that you said on the last tape was that you are a Jew first. You're an American Jew, but you're a Jew first.

FRIEDA: Absolutely.

INT: Can you explain what that means to you, because it might mean something different to me than it means to you? What does that mean to you that you're a Jew first?

FRIEDA: What is being a Jew? I am a member of a people whose history goes back five thousand years. I feel a responsibility towards that people. Now that philosophy really...it didn't start with me probably until...although I did take Judaica courses in college, so I guess...but it was after the war. It was probably after we came to America that I became very Jewishly interested and Jewishly involved. As a teenager, right after the war, I resented being Jewish because...I mean for obvious reasons. I couldn't be a teenager, a normal teenager, just because I was Jewish, and certainly I resented it. But...and I don't remember when the transition occurred, but I did become very Jewishly interested, and to me, this is what I am. I'm a Jew. Yes, I'm an American. I think America, my adopted country, has been very good to me, and I still think it's the best place on earth, with all its faults, but when we were in Israel, I don't know whether it's because of the Israelis' European background, that I saw it there. Somehow I felt more at home than I do here. I don't know why. I felt, you know, these were kind of my people. I don't know if it would still be so today, but the first and second and third time we were in Israel I felt that way. I felt...it wouldn't have taken too much to push me to make aliyah. I probably would have. If Eddie had agreed, I would have made aliyah. Before I raised my kids. Now they don't need me. (Laughter) I'm too old. They need my kids. And that's how I feel. I feel Jewish.

INT: Can you think of any example where your Judaism comes before your Americanism?

FRIEDA: Sure. If the United States should...if the United States government should issue an edict, whatever, that I would feel would be anti-Jewish, I certainly...my Judaism would come first. There's no question. I would fight it, whichever way possible. Judaism coming before Americanism.

INT: Does the fact that you're Jewish affect your voting more than your Americanism?

FRIEDA: I would say yes, if there were a Jewish issue. In other words, not all candidates, say a local justice of the peace who's running for office, I'll vote for the man because I don't know where his position stands, nor does it matter probably, or affect us locally, but if a president has a certain stand on Israel, of aid to Israel, etc., certainly that will influence my voting a lot. Or a member of Congress, or somebody who could influence a Jewish issue.

INT: Does that include your allegiance to Israel over America?

FRIEDA: (Laughter) The old question if they go to war, who should win? Maybe America should win, then Israel would be in good shape. That's a tough question, that really is a tough question. Whether my allegiance is to Israel versus America is a...and then again, what is your definition? Is it the present government of Israel? I disagree with many things they do. The only

thing that I really feel if America were to assume a position that they would want to destroy Israel, yes, then my allegiance would be towards Israel.

INT: Would be to Israel.

FRIEDA: Yes, no question about it. And I certainly would hope that this never happens.

INT: Is there anything else that you would like to add on? These are all the topics that we've talked about before. Is there anything else that you would like to add, that you've thought of since we last made a tape, that you wanted to add, before I go on into any other things?

FRIEDA: No, not really. You can go on.

INT: All right. How has your family background influenced the way you have lived your life? The way you've raised your children, the way your relationship with your husband?

FRIEDA: Yeah, I think that I probably philosophically am closer to my parents than my children are to me. Their Judaism, their love for Judaism has permeated my entire being and my entire way of life, and raising my kids and sending them to Jewish camps, and sending them to Hebrew school and sending them to Israel, and working for Jewish causes. I think that has a lot to do with the way my parents have thought about their Jewishness. And I think my philosophies and my parents' philosophies were quite close. There were certain things I resented that they did, and some things that I tried consciously not to do because I resented them, but they were rather minor. I think as a whole that their main philosophy of life pretty much influenced mine.

INT: So you tried to repeat their values, their philosophies?

FRIEDA: Yes, very many of their values.

INT: How about relationships?

FRIEDA: Relationships?

INT: Their relationship with each other, their relationship with their children? Did you try to recreate those in your relationship with your husband and with your children?

FRIEDA: Probably...probably not on a conscious level, but probably subconsciously yes. Yes, because their...my values were truly very close to theirs, with some exception, very close to theirs.

INT: Would you be able to say whether you, personally, were more like your mother or your father?

FRIEDA: I don't know. Probably a little bit of both. Some things I'm like my mother. Other things that I resented terribly she did, one of these conscious things that I would not do, probably couldn't do with my kids (laughter) 'cause my kids wouldn't stand for it.

INT: You need to be more specific. You need to say some things...give an example here.

FRIEDA: Some of things my mother would do. My mother had no compunctions about telling us children what to do and when to do it and how to do it, and I know without even thinking, that it's wrong for her to say. And when I have to say things to my children, I weigh it several times, is it going to...how is it going to affect my relationship with them, how is it going to affect their psyche, and are they going to listen to me in the first place anyway? So if they're not going to listen, why bother?

INT: Can you give an example of something that you would tread lightly where she would charge in and tell you what to do?

FRIEDA: She'd charge in and tell us what to do for everything. What to eat, what not to eat. What to wear, what not to wear. When to get up, when to go to bed. You name it. She had no hesitation about this. She felt...and perhaps it's that generation who felt that we are the children, she is the parent, and you know, are you going out without a hat, it's so cold.

INT: She never questioned her authority or her knowledge.

FRIEDA: None.

INT: Did you...do you ever question your authority or your knowledge?

FRIEDA: Absolutely. Absolutely.

INT: Why do you think that is? You said you patterned your philosophies very much on the way you were raised and your relationships...

FRIEDA: But I said not totally.

INT: Right, right.

FRIEDA: I didn't say to the fullest extent, I said not totally. And this is one of the things that I do not pattern myself. I do question, simply because I know there's still a lot I have to learn, even in this stage in life. And my authority, my kids told me I have none, so...(laughter) why shouldn't I question it? I was never told that I'm...

INT: And nobody ever told your mother that she wasn't the absolute authority.

FRIEDA: And if you told her she didn't listen and didn't believe you. I believe it.

INT: How would you describe the mechanisms by which you were able to build the successful life that you did?

FRIEDA: One of my main philosophies of life, and that is also against my parents, it's different than my parents, is that don't make mountain out of a molehill. If there's something that really bothers me, I will stop and analyze it. I think Eddie has helped me do that. He has told me

ninety-five percent of your worries really never come true. And stop and think about it in a day, in ten days, in a month, in a year. How much difference will this particular situation make in my life? And if it won't make that much of a difference, so why get excited? And I think that has really helped me survive psychologically. That I try to...of course, you know, when illness came around and things...yes, I worried. Yes, I was upset. Because it would...G-d forbid, if illness led to worse illness and G-d forbid to...and I've had...this is one of the things that I mentioned in this questionnaire, and that has been one of my, recently, within the last five years, one of my most difficult times in life, when I had...when Eddie had cancer, and my daughter-in-law Merrie was diagnosed, and Rhea had a life-threatening infection and was in the hospital for ten days. That was difficult to cope with. I managed. I did everything I could and I survived it but that...things like that are what bother me. Whether I get a black dress or a blue dress makes very little difference to me.

INT: Then are you telling me that Eddie's philosophy had great influence on you...?

FRIEDA: Absolutely. In that respect, that philosophy.

INT: Different from your parents' philosophy.

FRIEDA: My parents tended to dwell on little things a lot. Whether they amounted to much...they had a very rough life, even after the war. But sometimes they would dwell on things that really didn't amount to a row of beans, and make a big deal out of it, and I've learned from that. Some things I learned by their example not to do.

INT: To do the opposite.

FRIEDA: Exactly.

INT: Now let's talk about how you coped with your memories of the war experiences. You didn't talk about it until very recently.

FRIEDA: I did a lot of repressing, yes.

INT: Why did you not talk about it?

FRIEDA: I didn't...I imagine...I don't know. I imagine it's because they were very unpleasant memories and I just repressed them. To myself as well.

INT: Was it in any way an attempt to protect your children from harsh reality, to make a prettier picture for them?

FRIEDA: No, no. Never consciously anyway. I think the repression was strictly me. It was something I wanted...I just didn't want to deal with. It was unpleasant to deal with, and I just didn't...and not again on a conscious level. It was just there.

INT: How do you stop thinking about the things that you don't want to think about? Did you have any technique?

FRIEDA: Any techniques? No. No, I just kept myself very busy at all times.

INT: Well, then that's one of your techniques.

FRIEDA: I suppose it's a technique, yes. Always kept myself very busy with things, be they mundane or whatever, but always busy. Never sit and sulk and think. And I guess that was the technique, whether, again, whether I did it on a conscious level or not, I don't know, but that's...

INT: How would you say you coped with the losses of your loved ones since the war? Your parents, your mother, fairly recently died, your father died.

FRIEDA: Yes, my father died.

INT: How did you cope with those losses?

FRIEDA: It was a loss, but I personally think I probably coped with it as well as any other person copes with the loss of a parent. Certainly it was painful, and...

INT: Did you have any techniques or any devices?

FRIEDA: Techniques of coping with that?

INT: Of coping. Of coping with the loss of your parents. Most specifically, that's been the greatest loss that you've had to deal with.

FRIEDA: Yes. I really don't think so. I don't think I had any more of a technique. I think my life has always been so very busy that I did my mourning, and when mourning time was over I said Kaddish. Now, when I said Kaddish...went for a year to say Kaddish for my mother...when my dad died, at the time women didn't do it, so I kind of left it to my brother. But this time I went to say Kaddish for my mother. I did it more for her than for myself. It didn't give me...it didn't necessarily give me, what's the word I want, comfort, the Kaddish. But I knew that my mother would have wanted for me to be seen saying Kaddish for her. For me to be seen giving her respect. She was very hung up on what people would say. On her...

INT: Appearances.

FRIEDA: Appearances. Her name. Her reputation. And if her daughter would go say Kaddish for her then she must have been important. And, you know, basically in the last analysis we do things for ourselves. I did it for myself. But that's the reason I really went.

INT: Do you think appearances were so important to your mother? What people think.

FRIEDA: Oh yes.

INT: I know they were. But was it because...

FRIEDA: To my father too.

INT: To your father too?

FRIEDA: Yes.

INT: Was that because of the culture from which they came?

FRIEDA: I was just going to say. I think it's...

INT: Or was it their personal thing?

FRIEDA: No, I think it was a cultural thing. Because when I speak to people who have parents of that generation, they all sort of...you know, it's very important what people think of you. A reputation. And I'm almost sure it's a cultural thing. Maybe a little more, you know, some people are a little more intense in their culture than others, but that was...I know when my brother went with non-Jewish girls, what bothered my father more than anything is that it will be known that his son is dating non-Jews. The shanda of it all. The embarrassment was probably as important as any other reason.

INT: But it didn't rub off on your brother?

FRIEDA: On either one of us.

INT: Speaking of that, how do you feel about shame and guilt? Your parents...

FRIEDA: Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Shame and guilt are two different things.

INT: Two different things, right. Separate. How do you feel about shame?

FRIEDA: About shame? About appearances? Oh, I suppose I think, I certainly would want to be well thought of. I think everybody does. Nowhere near to the point where my parents thought of appearances, of reputation. Yes, certainly, when people say, "Isn't Frieda great," I like it. But by the same token, I'm not going to go crazy making sure that everybody likes me. I know there will be people there who will not agree with what I'm doing, and will not like me. So, so be it.

INT: Did you always feel this way or when you were younger were you more under the influence of your parents?

FRIEDA: When I was younger? Probably felt this way most of the time. As a matter of fact, I was the bane of my mother's existence, because clothes and hairdos and things didn't mean quite as much to me as they did to her, being she would not step out of the house unless every hair was in place, every single hair. And sometimes I did not dress to her satisfaction. Sure, I like to dress nicely too, but, you know, if I have to run out in the backyard, I'm not going to run and put my makeup on. Whereas she wouldn't want to be seen without her hair in place, and her makeup on,

and her dress just so, and that, and I think that too was what are people going to say about me? And I'm not quite...certainly everybody likes to be well thought of, and of course I do too. I'd be a liar if I said no. As far as guilt is concerned, I personally feel that guilt is a positive thing. I've always felt that way. That guilt is what makes you do the right thing. I went to say Kaddish for my mother because I was afraid that if I didn't say Kaddish for my mother I'd feel guilty. I feel that if someone does the right thing for fear that they will feel guilty for not having done the right thing, the right thing is being done, so the end result is really beneficial, and therefore I feel that guilt is really a positive feeling.

INT: And you are...then you do have feelings of guilt when you do the wrong thing?

FRIEDA: Absolutely. Oh, absolutely. It's, say, a friend's mother or father...or distant friend's mother...not friend, a distant acquaintance. Suppose a mother or father dies and I don't quite make a shiva call or something, I do feel a certain...I should have. I don't like feeling the should have. So I do, in order not to feel the should have.

INT: Do you...how would you say the impact of the Holocaust...what kind of impact does the Holocaust have on your children? (End of tape 5, side 1)

INT: Continue, Frieda, about the effect of the Holocaust on your children.

FRIEDA: My children...all three of my kids are different. My two boys probably are most affected by my being a survivor. Or at least they've, I think I've said that before, that COSTM will read anything, and really involved in researching this. David, too, but in a different kind of way. He...David, even though he intellectually is very interested, he also will, I think his desire, he's very involved in helping people. He works in an AIDS clinic, and always very involved in helping.

INT: And do you think that his helping nature is a result of your having been a Holocaust survivor?

FRIEDA: I think it may. I don't know.

INT: Of course not, of course not.

FRIEDA: But I think it may have had something to do with this.

INT: Now, do you think it has had any effect on COSTM and Rhea in the way in which they live their lives? Not their interests or their disinterests or...

FRIEDA: In the way they live their lives?

INT: Yeah, the kind of people they are. The characteristics that they have.

FRIEDA: I don't know. I don't...Again, I think the boys more so than Rhea, probably. Now it may be a repressed thing in Rhea's case. She's always been a rebel, and whatever I ever was, she consciously, not consciously, openly, or admittedly, did not want to be. There was a certain

resentment. I guess it's a two women in the kitchen kind of resentment. And that may be it. And she hasn't shown any. Now what she's repressing...

INT: Well, could her resentment be a resentment of having a mother that was a survivor?

FRIEDA: It could. Possible. I don't know. I know there is a resentment. Whether that is the resentment or...she may not know herself. So it may be something that could come out in analysis. I don't know.

INT: Would you describe yourself as optimistic or pessimistic?

FRIEDA: Definitely optimistic. My glass is always half full.

INT: Do you think being a survivor has anything to do with that?

FRIEDA: I don't know. Maybe. Maybe it's because I survived. That itself is a positive thing. Never really thought as to analyze as to why I'm an optimist more so. You know, there are certainly some things that I'm pessimistic about, but I always like to look at the brighter side of things, and I don't know whether my surviving has anything to do with it, or just my personality. And I'm sure that the fact that I'm a survivor has something to do with my personality, the building of my personality, so it's...it could be.

INT: Would you describe yourself as trusting or suspicious?

FRIEDA: Both. There are times when I'm trusting and lots of times when I'm a cynic. I tend to analyze more so than Eddie. For instance, I will try to analyze people's motives, and lots of times I'll be right.

INT: But then you're saying that you are suspicious?

FRIEDA: Yes. But I also...you know, I think it depends on the situation. Maybe a little more suspicious than trusting. You know, to try to think about it, if I were to put in on a scale, probably a little more suspicious.

INT: A little more suspicious. When things have gone wrong in the not too distant past, when all of these things seemed to happen at once. Do you feel that this is kind of random? Do you feel that G-d has any part in this?

FRIEDA: Oh, no. No, no. Definitely random. You know, people get sick.

INT: Do you feel that it's personal?

FRIEDA: Oh, no. Because what happened to me? No. No. It happened. I'm very upset...I was very upset and certainly I'm hoping that things will be well from now on, but I still am scared. I'm scared for my husband. I'm scared for my daughter-in-law. I'm scared for my daughter.

INT: Are you scared for yourself?

FRIEDA: Am I scared for myself? It depends what I'm scared of. I am scared of suffering. I'm a diabetic. What I'm scared of is losing my vision, losing limbs, complications of diabetes. If I knew that I could drop dead, it wouldn't bother me. It's civil things I'm really scared of. Suffering. Dependency. Whether it be physical or economic. I'm scared of having to depend on children, and probably would only be one child. COSTM's the only one who could probably support us. That I'm scared of. I'm scared of, even though Eddie says, you know, "Don't worry about it, but we're comfortable now," but if a catastrophic illness comes about, you know, you can be wiped out overnight. And then it's the two things, suffering pain and being dependent are the two things that really scare me more than anything else.

INT: But you still wouldn't describe yourself as being pessimistic?

FRIEDA: No.

INT: So you're not terribly troubled by these things?

FRIEDA: No. I can manage to set them aside. When I stop and think about it, yes, I'm scared, but I manage to push them out of my...

INT: So you manage not to think about them.

FRIEDA: Exactly.

INT: The same way...

FRIEDA: The same way I manage not to think about the Holocaust. I guess it's a technique I developed unconsciously.

INT: A long time ago.

FRIEDA: A long time ago. Probably to handle these things. To just push them aside. And I'm not making a concerted effort to do it. I just get myself busy and get involved in something else.

INT: Are there any secrets connected with your survival that you've never revealed to anyone? Is there anything about that period of your life?

FRIEDA: No, I don't think so. No.

INT: Certainly you do know that a lot of people did do a lot of things that they never revealed.

FRIEDA: Absolutely. And I know what you're speaking of. Luckily I was never in a position that I had to do something that I'd be ashamed of later. And I don't know, had I been in a position where to...people have done some awful things to save their own lives. Self-preservation is a very strong drive. I was lucky that I was never in a position that I had to do something that I would be ashamed of later. And I know where that question comes from, because I know what happened.

INT: This is another difficult area. At any time, were...was life so difficult that you ever thought of suicide?

FRIEDA: Well, not I personally, but I remember, I think on one of the first tapes that we were talking about the very beginning of the war, where my uncle had morphine ready, in doses that would have...I mean for the entire family. I was a child at that time and probably didn't quite understand, fully understand, the ramifications. But I don't think I ever had the thought of doing away with myself. I've had some low moments, but not quite to that...I don't ever remember.

INT: Would you say that your low moments would ever be called depression?

FRIEDA: Depends on your definition of depression.

INT: By your own definition.

FRIEDA: No, I don't have an own definition. I have a definition of what I've read depression is, and they say depression is something that you feel very low for days and weeks and years on end. No, I've never had that. I've had a day or two, and generally not depression. When I felt...I don't like the word depression, because I think it's too strong for me, but when, for instance, when there was illness in my family, and I felt terrible about it. It was something that when things got a little bit better, I came out of it. It always had a reason. I didn't just sit down, ever, that I remember. I can't say ever, nothing is never, that I just was totally depressed without a reason. I can't understand why. There may have been a day here and a day there, but not on a long extended period of time. When things happened that I didn't like, or...certainly, I was upset. And notice I don't use the word depression.

INT: Do you have any recurring dreams or nightmares?

FRIEDA: Not anymore. I occasionally...for about ten years after the war I had recurring...of Nazis chasing me. It's that Nazi uniform that constantly...I still occasionally, very occasionally, very seldom get a dream or nightmare like that, but it's pretty much gone. And I think I said to you in one of the tapes that one of the recurring nightmares was when Rhea was getting married to a non-Jew. And it did not happen again when David did. By that time I was used to the idea. It's the first time that brought it back.

INT: Do you have any other...anything to add, that as we've done this tape, and as you commented, the first time was easy because you didn't know what it was going to be, and each tape that we've taped it was a little more...

FRIEDA: A little more difficult.

INT: A little more difficult. So as we made the tapes, did anything occur to you that either you didn't think of when I first asked the question, or that talking about it brought back to your memory that you would like to share?

FRIEDA: Not really. Bringing back all these memories kind of...they obviously had been repressed. It was difficult. After every session I was exhausted. But I can't think of anything that

I'd want to add to it. I also think that I was among the lucky survivors who had things a little easier, because we were not in a concentration camp and in the gas chambers and in death marches. My life compared to an American person's life is certainly difficult, but if I would want to compare my life to someone, a Jew from Poland who was sent off to the concentration camps, I would say mine was a lot easier. And I know that.

INT: Do you think that was luck or skill or...

FRIEDA: Oh, no, no. No skill. Luck of being born in a certain area. No, no. No skill. No skill whatever. Luck of being in the right, if you would want to call it, the right place. No, it's actually luck of being in a non too wrong place at the wrong time. It wasn't the right place, but it wasn't as bad a place as some other places were. At least my nuclear family survived, which for others did not happen. And as I said, if you compare my life to somebody grown up in the United States, certainly, it was all horrible, and perhaps that has given me a certain, my philosophy is always, you know, could have been worse. Or if something happens, gee, it can be worse. And maybe that's the reason I feel that basis...

INT: The basis of some of your optimism.

FRIEDA: Exactly. Because I know what else had happened. That there but for the grace of G-d. I mean just because I was lucky enough to have been born in an area where things...and really, truly, one miracle after another. I think it was luck.

INT: You don't think G-d had anything to do with it?

FRIEDA: No. And...well, if G-d can manipulate the luck, then G-d had...(laughter) It's just I was lucky. And...I don't even have a definition of G-d. I'm not quite sure who he is, what he does or if he is. And that's about it.

INT: Well, thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study.

FRIEDA: You're welcome.

INT: And I'm sure that you will benefit from receiving the transcript and the tape.

FRIEDA: I was happy to do it, even though, as I said, it did become more and more difficult, and I'm not sure if I'd have to do it again, whether I would agree to it quite as readily.

INT: Well, I'm glad you did. Thank you, Frieda.

FRIEDA: You're welcome.