

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAYMONDE FIOLE

An Oral History Conducted by Barbara Tabach

Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage Project
Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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PREFACE

Raymonde "Ray" Fiol is president of the Holocaust Survivors Group of Southern Nevada. A Jewish Holocaust survivor whose parents were killed in Auschwitz, Fiol was hidden by a Christian family of Resistance fighters during her childhood in Nazi-occupied Paris, France. She married American serviceman Phil Fiol and left Paris in 1957. The couple lived in New York City where she worked in inventory control. She retired to Las Vegas, Nevada around 2003 and became active in the local Holocaust Survivors Group. In 2007, she became president of the organization, which provides essential services to Holocaust survivors and helps them share their stories.

Fiol is also a member of the Nevada Governor's Advisory Council on Education Relating to the Holocaust and the coordinating council of Shoah International. Her dedication to preserving the memory of the Holocaust and caring for survivors earned her the Nevada Senior Citizen of the Year award from the Nevada Delegation of the National Silver Haired Congress and the Aging Services Directors Organization in 2014, and in 2013 she was named Mensch Volunteer of the Year by the Jewish Federation of Las Vegas.

In this interview, Ray reflects upon her traumatic childhood experiences, and shares how she learned details of her family's history from a woman in France who had researched the destiny of the local Jewish community. She also discusses her involvement with the survivors group, and the positive impacts of its outreach activities, as well as goals to ensure future generations learn about, and from, the Holocaust.

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on August 12, 2015
by Barbara Tabach
in Las Vegas, Nevada

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Today is August 12, 2015. This is Barbara Tabach and I am sitting with Ray Fiol in her lovely home.

Ray, we'll start with the participation. This is going to be a unique interview for me. I want it to be unique for you, too. You participated in the Holocaust Resource Center's writing program with Liz Spalding...Tell me about this writing called "Pieces of My Life" that I'm looking at.

I was contacted by Liz Spalding to engage the survivors and relate their story to teachers. I think the teachers were in a graduate program at UNLV. I put a group together and we met almost weekly for several weeks at the JCC.

I became familiar with the program when they did a reading at the Holocaust Resource Center. So this didn't happen there.

No. That was the first one.

All right. This was 2012?

Yes, three years ago.

So that was the first group she had put together to do this.

Yes. It went very well and the teachers were very involved. They really had never spoken to survivors; that was their first experience. The teacher that interviewed me, worked with me, is a cancer survivor and she could do some of the parallels. She was very, very interesting. She was at the student teacher conference last year, at the Venetian, from Clark County.

Do you remember her name? There was something in here about Vicki; is that her?

Yes. She got that story out of me. It's incredible.

Had you spoken about your experiences and life story of Holocaust surviving before that?

Yes, I had. But it's very hard for me. Not only that, I have a memory gap. We were interned in a labor camp and I have no memory of that. I have prior recalls and then getting to the family that saved me. I

don't know how I got out of there. Everything that happened there I couldn't tell because my parents never made it.

But the family that saved me and I have...My story was told to me by a phenomenal woman; I would love to invite her to come here. She is a retired teacher. She lives in eastern France near Sedan. That is where we were interned, in that part of France. She was a teacher in a very small town and an elderly gentleman came over to her because he was looking for facts, historical facts during the war, and he starts telling her there were Jews interned in this village. She says, "I never heard of it." She did not believe him. He kept on persisting. By the second or third time he came over, he got her curiosity because she's also a historian. She went into the town hall records during the war and, sure enough, there they were. He was trying to do some research or maybe find facts about his own family. He was a survivor. She got the bug. She traced every person named in the records to see whether they had survived or not. She was successful except for two; she couldn't find me and another woman. She had no death certificate for me. And you know very well that the Germans kept fantastic records. So there was no record of my death and another one.

Ultimately what she did with those stories, she has dedicated a monument to all of the victims who died in those camps in the area. There were multiple camps that are not known. Nobody talks about the forced labor camps and how the French cooperated willingly with the Germans and said, "Okay, go ahead." She's still doing it. Of course, after she was done with the village she lived in, she's doing the entire area.

Also, let me say this. About eight years ago I get a phone call, this lady with a very strong French accent who was trying to speak English saying, I am looking for...me. She gives me my name and I said, strange call. I don't want to give out my identity. She's still speaking English and I said, okay, I'll be kind; I'll switch to French. She tells me that she's looking for me. And I said, "You found her." She said,

"Is it your mother?" And I said, "No, it's me." She had a huge sigh. She said, "I've been looking for you for four years."

Oh, my. So she called you Raymonde?

Yes. She even had my married name and my maiden name. Of course, she had my maiden name and she was able to find out about me because I was there locally. I think she had found my school records. She just didn't know where I was. So she said, "Oh, my God." She proceeds to tell me. I'll never forget it was a Saturday morning. Phil was out. I'm crying hysterically when he comes in. He says, "What's the matter?" That was the first monument which she was dedicating to the Holocaust victims including my parents. She said, "It's next week." I said, "I can't go." It's like news. I never wanted to go back. When Phil heard about it—he worked on me—he said, "You have to go, not this week." He said, "We have to go back."

Turns out that I decided okay. It took about a year and we planned a trip. I was surrounded by family from everywhere; my family from the States, England, Israel, Spain—they all joined me. We were about thirty people. My children. We went to the monument and dedicated it again.

I can't imagine how that must have felt. So that was the first time that you had gone back?

Yes.

And her seeking you, what is—I can't imagine that somebody would be seeking me so long and so earnestly as this person would have.

Yes.

What did you think of her?

She's incredible. She's not Jewish. She has no relationship. She's just a fantastic human being. She still teaches the Holocaust in the schools.

And this is in France?

Yes, to Muslim children.

Wow. Did she talk about that experience with you, what that was like?

Not really. She doesn't want to be unkind. But she said she makes it her business to teach the children and she brings them to the monuments. She's trying to say don't be unkind to whomever.

I'm thinking about current events, in the past few years, in France particularly. Have you ever spoken to her about her work and the fact that the feeling of anti-Semitism in France seems to be high? Am I wrong in that interpretation?

It definitely is. I think that spurs her to continue. Her daughters, who are teachers, she's trying to convince them. They're younger and they're building their own families. I'm trying to reach her. She sent me an email, "I'm moving because one of my daughters is having twins and she needs help." I said, "Do you ever try and have your daughters teach?" She said, "I'm trying to convince them." So she's really pushing it. She's involved with the Holocaust Museum in Paris, which is part of the museum in D.C. and it's run by Rothschild. He's the director. I was there. She told me about it. She basically has told me part of my story.

Wow. What did she tell you about your story? Can you share that with me?

Yes. Number one, when we were there...Like I said, she's a historian and she'll dig and dig. She had incredible documents. She knew the exact day my parents were taken from the camp because I was gone already. The family that took me, Mr. Cailac was a supplier of agricultural products to the Germans who had come and the Jews were forced to work the land, which they had never done because Jews were not allowed to own land at some point in time. That is why they had to develop other crafts, different means of making a living. All of a sudden my parents are put in the field. The Jews were basically growing crops to feed their troops. There was this French gentleman who was a supplier to the Germans for agricultural products. They used local support. But this gentleman and his wife—she ran a cafe and he

was selling the products— were part of the French underground. They were using money that they made off the Germans to supply the French underground. Somehow my father and mother may have met him inside the camp. What Christine said—that's her name, Christine Dolard-Leplomb.

Pretty name.

Yes. They were no communications, obviously, in those days, especially when you're in the camp. Even though they had been in the camp for a while, things were status quo. Then suddenly families start disappearing. What Christine explained was that they were plucking families here and there and sending them off to the camps, but they didn't really know; even though there might have been rumors about the camps, they really did not know. When my families started to disappear, they realized the danger not only of being in the camp but of what might happen. So I think that was when they looked to get me out of there. How I got out, I don't know.

About what year would this have been that you got out?

May have been '42.

And you were how old?

Six.

It's funny because I remember things when I was three and I cannot remember that camp.

Why would you want to, right?

Yes. I remember getting to the Cailac family who saved me.

Going back to Christine [finding] documents—when my family came to the village where the monument had been erected, she had panels full of documents detailing my life and my parents' [lives], to the point where [she had] the date that my parents were taken, where they were transferred to Drancy. The Drancy was the railroad point when the French railroad had the cattle cars available to the Germans to take the Jews to Auschwitz.

There's a monument now in Drancy. I guess it must have been a railroad tie or something like that outside of Paris. I could not believe it...I mean, she has the documents. I can ask if she could photocopy and email them to me. The Germans wrote down the staircase that they went through down the stairs into the cattle car. That's how authentic; that's how detailed their records were. It's like I was taken back.

She also told me that there were letters from my parents at the museum. I said, "There were letters?" She says, "Yes." She said she saw them. I went online and, sure enough, they are in the website of the museum in Paris, and those letters are between my parents and a group of French Jews who were controlling the foreign-born Jewish laborers in the camps.

Let me explain. The French-born Jews, who had been there probably for centuries, made a deal with the Petain government, the French government, who were cooperating with the Germans, the Nazis, to convince the foreign-born Jews—my parents had been born in Poland—to willingly go to the camps, just entice them. They were told that they would be saved and so were the French Jews. So there were allocations of monies given to the French Jews who spread the word that if you go to the camps you'll be fine; nothing will happen to you; you'll work, blah, blah; we'll support you because we have funding. But the funding went into people's pockets.

The letters from my parents to the French Jews are all located in Paris saying, "We have no clothes; we have no food; we just have a room." They said it was freezing. It was like being in the camp, in the concentration camp. It made no difference in that they had to work. "Help us." My father's concerned because they left Paris and the apartment. They said, "Well, when we go back I have to keep on paying my rent. Can you pay my rent for me?" They were so believing, gullible, thinking that someday they'll go back.

I went to the museum and I was thinking. I said, "Shall I ask for the letters?" Because the

museum knows where I am. But I said, "No, they belong in the museum." I have copies.

That's an amazing story. I think maybe your thought process—that would be of interest to know about leaving it. Why was it important to leave it there, your letters?

I have copies. They look authentic—I'll show them to you. They're in French.

Here's the dedication to the monument.

So these are family pictures of you with your parents?

Yes, that's me and my parents. Some pictures I had through my uncles who survived and my cousin in Paris. This is the family who saved me. This is their daughter who passed away, a young lady. I remember when she was a teenager. She was eighteen or nineteen, maybe less. She would disappear at night. She was the one that was bringing supplies to the French underground at night, risking, I'm sure, her life.

Were you aware that you were Jewish while you were with them or did you have to pretend you were Christian?

Yes, I had to go to Catechism. The story they had made up...And of all things, his name is Gabriel and her name is Sarah, biblical names. I was tall. I haven't grown since I was ten.

Because you're not tall now.

No. I was tall for my age. This is her. I guess at that time they had sent me a picture. Christine sent me pictures. These are pictures from another camp my father had been in, and he's here and here. She sent me those.

That gives me goose bumps. I can't imagine what it must have done to you to see those.

Here is the monument she dedicated and this is my family. These are pictures from all there. It made the local newspapers, obviously, a lot of publicity after sixty-four years. There's my son and my daughter.

People sent me documents. Here are the letters.

Oh, goodness.

I'm looking. This is my father. He wrote perfect French. I know he was fluent in German, in Polish, in Russian and Hebrew. My uncle told me that. These are their responses.

So your uncle was your father's brother?

Yes.

He was younger?

No. My father was the youngest of six. My uncle in London survived.

Okay. So he was living in London?

Yes. He survived and my uncle who brought me up in Paris survived in Italy. The Italians were very good to the Jews in spite of the fact that they were allies of the Nazis. They brought me up.

This is my mother's. This is my mother's. This is my father's letter and documents. This is the dedication from Yad Vashem because they're righteous among nations; I proposed their names. It took them two years to do the study.

It's amazing to me that she was able to retrieve these letters.

Yes.

It's hard for me to even imagine that they were preserved.

Exactly. It is amazing.

What do you make of that? How do you get their arms around that?

I don't know how it could happen unless they were actually sent to the French group and these were acquired by the museum, and she found out about it. But she has great connections at the museums.

When I was there the lady was nice. This is authentic; they have museum quality copies and she made them all for me. I have a couple of sets. It was very traumatic. Some of those pictures Christine sent me. They all came via email. This is her research book on many people in the area.

What dedication she's exhibited.

Yes.

Tell me about how you shared your family history—did or didn't, I guess—with your own children.

I never did. Everybody was sort of saying, "Okay, Mom, it's about time." But I was never pressured by anybody.

They knew that you were a survivor somehow or another?

Yes, but I never spoke about it.

At what point did you feel comfortable with that? How does a person get comfortable with that?

You come to the realization that you don't live forever and it's time to say, okay, I'm going to at least pass it on. It's hard because I don't have the memory. How do you express it? It's still traumatic to me.

Of course. So you really didn't talk to your children about it until after Christine had helped fill in that gap of memory.

That's right. They still don't push because I had a heart attack when I was speaking in the schools here.

Really?

It gave me a heart attack, yes. It's not a regular heart attack. It's called broken heart syndrome.

We're going to be okay today, right?

Yes.

I don't want to go where you don't want to go as we talk about this. I think it's important to understand—we've talked about this before at the Kristallnacht round table we had. I learned so much from the different perspectives that were shared.

I find that older survivors are better able to talk about it.

Explain that to me. Older in the sense that they were older when they survived?

Yes. I don't know...I'm not a psychologist. That the trauma on younger children is probably greater

because I have PTSD.

Sure. I don't know how you could not have that. Now that we understand that it helps us appreciate that.

So coming to Las Vegas, you came here...?

Two thousand one.

In 2001. Before that, where had you and your husband, Philip, been living?

We lived in New York; that's where his family was from. I met him when he was in the service. I came as a nineteen-year-old bride.

You met him in France?

Yes, met him in Paris.

Tell me about that.

We met on Rosh Hashanah. I was hanging out with my girlfriends. Our youth group had just gone to Israel. It was maybe a couple of weeks before Rosh Hashanah, and we were just hanging out and going from synagogue to synagogue to synagogue. The center that we belonged to—I don't know what made us go there—the director lived in the building and we were there hanging out. There was nobody there, of course; it's a holiday. He comes down. I don't know why we rang the bell. He comes down and says, "Oh, I have two Americans here." They were soldiers, one being Phil. They were, I guess, a little homesick. They were stationed in Orléans and came into Paris and tried to find a Jewish place. It was in their book; I guess they get reference books. He points to me and says, "This one speaks English," because I had spent my childhood going to school in Paris after the war with my aunt and uncle, and the summers were spent with my other uncle and his daughter in London. He was the second oldest, so she's like fifteen years older than me. She was married with children. I would spend my summers there, so I was totally bilingual. So I start to speak with them and our date was on Yom Kippur.

So you assimilated into the Jewish youth culture quickly.

Yes.

You didn't lose your sense of Jewish identity.

It was brought back by my uncle, not religiously. My uncle was a rabbi and lost all faith. So that was not given to me. He sent me to Yiddish school. He said, "You have to learn Yiddish." I learned the alphabet. At the time I could still write my name; that's about all I could do. But no Hebrew, no Hebrew school, nothing. He had lost everything as far as his belief, which I found very interesting. God bless him, he lived to be ninety-one.

One time we went with friends, and our friend had been a scholar as a young man; they sat down and they start speaking in Yiddish. He spoke Yiddish. My uncle would not speak English because he had been in Palestine and did not like the English for what they had done. He understood. He had a thing. He spoke several languages, but he wouldn't speak English. He would go to London with me and say, "Translate."

Really?

Yes. It was a thing. Anyway, they started to talk and to discuss the Torah. I'm looking and said, "How come you never told me that?" I guess when he turned into his eighties, it came back to him. He was an interesting character.

Wow, what an experience that must have been to have been raised by him for a while there.

So meeting Phil, other than falling in love and becoming a bride and moving to the United States, what else could happen to a girl? It's like Cinderella.

It was a nice adventure. We got married in Paris. His parents could not afford to go to France. My cousin came in from London. She's going to be ninety-three or ninety-four. Her and her husband did our

wedding for us in Paris. Phil had to reenlist because of my papers, until I was accepted into the U.S. legally. They checked me out. I imagine they probably have more of my story than I know of because I was investigated by the army.

Yes. You would think they might.

They probably do. We came to New York. Phil found a job. He wanted to go back to CBS where he had been before the service and didn't have anything for him. He should have gone back, but that's another story.

Being bilingual I said, "Okay, what do I do?" I went to Air France and applied for a position, which I got because I was bilingual. It gave me free travel back to Paris.

How convenient.

Yes.

You were resilient.

Yes. I'm very independent.

Because you had no siblings.

No.

That's a great quality. So you did this for a while. Where in New York were you?

We lived in the Bronx and then made our way to Yonkers. That's Westchester County, just border with the Bronx. Then we moved a little further up, White Plains, which is the seat of Westchester County, and there we stayed until 1998.

What happened in 1998?

We moved to Florida.

Which is what a lot of East Coast Jews do; they move to Florida.

Yes, we moved to Florida. Phil's sister lived there. Most of our friends had already moved or were about

to move and that's a logical thing for us. Our son was living in Manhattan. My daughter was already living in California. We figured, okay, this is where we're familiar with. So we moved and when we closed on the house, our son tells us, "Oh, by the way, I decided to move to California." So here we are in Florida with both our kids in California.

Where in California were they?

Ellen was in Pasadena and still is, and David moved to San Francisco. So for three years we struggled, them coming maybe once a year and us struggling with travel. All of a sudden Phil says, "I'm tired of traveling. Would you like to move?" I said, "Where?" So we looked in California and realized it was a little too expensive for us. We had friends living here and said, "How about Las Vegas?" We came. We bought a house in three days. Three years later here we were, so '98 to 2001. Actually, we closed on the house just after 9-11, and I don't think transportation had been restored. We came here just at the end of September.

It was an interesting trip because we were selling the house, but had a trip planned in Europe for a month. I said, "Oh, my God, how am I going to sell the house, move and do all this?" In like a three-month span because we bought the house in June and here we are and we have to move in September 2001. They were growing these houses; they were watering and overnight there was a house. But we managed. We got home, our house was sold, and here we are.

So Vegas and you. So what's the story of living in Vegas?

We liked it better than Florida. Knowing one or two couples helped. They introduce you. I joined the Newcomers Club. Somehow I found out about the Holocaust survivors group. I joined without really being involved. But I figured, okay, maybe I should start because I was not involved in New York. Yes, for a while I joined in New York The Hidden Children; it's a group, which is part of ADL. I would go and it became so traumatic for me that I stopped. It was more like round table and we would exchange

stories; some of them could and some of us couldn't. So I stopped. When in Florida, I really had nothing to do with it. I joined here and basically attended luncheons and just met people, but nothing involved. However, when we came back from France, at that point the director or the president of the survivors' group...It was not Henry anymore.

It wasn't the Schusters at that time?

No. It was Bruno Borenstein who was getting sick. So he resigned and they asked me to get on the board. I said, "Okay, I'll get on the board." They said, "Well, who's going to continue?" I said, "Well, I'll help." That was five years ago.

Famous last words.

Famous last words. I really got involved in it, and I said, "Well, I'll help; I'll help." It got me involved in Holocaust education, being involved with the schools, speaking and making sure that the story is told.

Unfortunately, history seems to be repeating itself. But I think this one is going to be a whopper; it's not going to be only Jews, I'm afraid. That's my sense. We were back in Paris a couple of years ago. I went to see my cousin in London. I said, "Well, okay, let's take the Autotrain and see another cousin in Paris." I said, "I never want to go back to Paris."

What did you observe in Paris that made you say that?

My cousin's attitude is—we're about the same age—where is she going to move to? It's the underlying feeling that you get. Her son just moved to Florida and she's eighty-one. She gets on the plane and goes to Florida, spends a month, goes back to Paris. But I know that she's trying to escape France. It's not good. I believe in equality for all, but you can't impose your mores on other people. You have to be fair and let everybody live. If you migrate to a country, assimilate, keep your religion on the side.

I want to make sure I understand that correctly. So she was telling you her observations of the immigration of people into France, that's changed the energies that are there.

Yes. Look what happened last year.

Right. That was terrible last year.

That was terrible and that was exactly where I lived, Place de la Nation.

Isn't the French Jews or somebody within the French jury encouraging people to move away, to leave the country.

Yes, they are. It is the largest Jewish population outside of Israel and the USA. When the French gave up their North African colonies, the North African Jews moved—they were French citizens so they could move into France. So that increased the Jewish population dramatically.

Sure. When we talk about Holocaust education, what is your knowledge in Nevada and with the organization that you belong to? Exactly what are kids learning? What's the history of that that you know of?

It's a mixed bag. Holocaust education, even though the school district may be saying, "Okay, you must have Holocaust education," depends on the principal and the social studies and history teachers, how much they're willing to present. You could read a half-page paragraph and say, "Okay, this is the Holocaust education." Because it's part of World War II. I think it stems from the principals who are totally dedicated and they do a wonderful job.

I think there's a new law that was passed, but I'm not too sure of details. I don't know if it's going to affect Clark County School District. So it's sporadic. There's the student teacher conference and you find all these teachers who are dedicated. They come and listen to a speaker and all my survivors. We try and participate.

It's an important story to tell because it's bullying at the utmost if you want to get rid of somebody. Look at poor children. They get bullied and they commit suicide. It's horrible; who gives these children the right to pick on another child? It could turn around on them and they would get their lesson. It's

terrible and should not be done. Everybody's entitled to live their lives. That's the ultimate goal. Will it stop? I don't know.

Have you spoken to school groups?

I have.

What age group do you think is most appropriate for introducing them to Holocaust education?

There are different levels of Holocaust education. Unfortunately, bullying can start when you're five years old, six years old. I think females are worse and I've seen it in my daughter when she was that little. I tried to intervene and this is before social media. The word gets around; those kids manage. You can be mean to a friend. She was mean to us, so we're getting back at her. I saw it. I tried. I said, "Don't do this. It could happen to you. How would you feel if somebody did that to you?" You have to be kind to other people. If you don't like them, don't talk to them. Why do you have to be mean? I think it's important that everybody be totally aware of other people's feelings. You never know when you'll be the next one.

So that's the kind of thing you would talk to school-age children about?

Yes, absolutely, and tell them a story. Going back to the age level, I think you could tell eleven, twelve, thirteen year olds, start by saying people were mean to other people. Don't go into details. It's like one time—unfortunately, with the Holocaust survivors, I'm losing a lot of speakers—I said to Ben Lesser, "You're going to a middle school." He said, "Well, I can't." I said, "Shorten your story and leave the details out." I went with him and these kids were sitting on the floor. They were absolutely mesmerized. It was middle school. So you can. Lydia—she's not well; she had to move to Reno—she was phenomenal. She held those little kids' attention. It was like grandma talking to them.

What happens when grandma is gone, that generation? I think you're touching upon that.

Second generation. Esther (Finder) is working on the group.

Yes. So the second generation then has to step up.

Yes. They will be.

Esther is training speakers. She's spoken with me. Sometimes she'll speak or I'll say a little bit without saying much because if I get involved...we were speaking together when I had the heart attack and I drove home. She said, "You almost killed me." So you get a different perspective. It's amazing. I was speaking in North Las Vegas to high school students. They come over and hug you. They feel. One time they were presenting—do you know Norma Zuckerman from the Jewish Repertory Theatre?

No.

She is bringing "The Diary of Anne Frank." I just got her mailer. Eighth grade.

In May.

May 6th.

Zuckerman. I probably need to meet her.

Yes. I could give you her [contact information].

That would be great.

She and Charlene Sher started it, but Charlene backed out. I think she will play in it and she's staging. She started doing it in the schools. She would do the production and then have survivors speak; I was there. Then one kid got up and said, "I want you to know I get it."

How sweet.

Yes, it was, really. You're touched. So she's doing this and it's helping. She did it in a smaller version at the last student teacher conference. The Holocaust Resource Center was importing stuff. I said, "Support your local person." They finally did, and finally she's doing it with the Clark County School District. So bringing the ultimate story is "The Diary of Anne Frank." That really works.

Do children of all cultures and colors relate to the story?

I think so. There's always something. I think if you possibly come from an underprivileged group, you

really feel it, or if you're a recent immigrant you feel it more so. I think you can be the tenth generation white American and still feel something because somebody did something to you; you could relate to it. It touches you.

But somebody has to tell you the story to keep the story alive through the generations.

Yes.

It's a legacy of experience, good or bad.

Exactly. You have to remind people that we're all equal.

So you came from a background of what, in my opinion, is the ultimate anti-Semitic story. You come to America as a young bride. You go to New York where there's a large Jewish population.

What did you learn in this country or experience as far as anti-Semitism?

I really never felt it here. Maybe because it was more of a Jewish environment, but I never did. My kids went to schools where it was always a mixed group. We didn't necessarily live in a totally Jewish area. I always find that there are people from different backgrounds and I like that about Las Vegas because we had never experienced the Midwest. You find people who are down to earth. I don't think there's that much prejudice in America because people left [other places] for opportunity but also because of prejudice. God bless America; that's all I can say.

At least anti-Semitism isn't a frightening cloud.

It isn't, but you have to watch out how social media affects that. There was just a couple being arrested on their way to Syria yesterday.

Yes, I saw that. A black lady and a white young man.

Yes. What are they seeking? I don't get it. I think the story of Israel is being misrepresented and it's creating the anti-Semitism. Students don't know the Holocaust. I've seen an interview with UCLA students. They don't know. What's the Holocaust? You're in college and you don't even know the word?

That's sad. America better step up on their education, period, including the Holocaust.

Yes. I think you've hit upon a nail there. We can't take our eye off the ball.

No, you can't.

That's the responsibility of the older generation to keep.

Absolutely.

It seems that in this community through the Holocaust Resource Center, how it came to be with Edythe Katz and that story, the support of Henry Kronberg and Judy Mack—

Absolutely.

It's not a city that has an anti-Semitism story, that I know of.

I have not seen it. Maybe I lead too much of a sheltered life.

No. I think it's the ultimate assimilation. It's interesting. How many Holocaust survivors live in Las Vegas? It seems to be a substantial number.

Considering. I'm involved a little bit with JFSA because of my position. We guesstimate that there may be about two hundred and fifty, though not all want to be involved—that's the past where you have a spouse that's American born and says, "Well, she had enough; she doesn't want to talk about it." Even though she does, he doesn't want to deal with it. Then they never came out of that cocoon that I came out of. Or you have people who spoke in their younger days and say, "No more." I have probably about a hundred participants.

In the organization.

Yes.

What do you do in the organization? What are your goals? What have you been able to achieve in the last five years?

To get involved in the educational system. We have Yom HaShoah, which is the Holocaust

commemoration. It's twofold. We preach to the choir, which is getting involved in Jewish organizations, but we also reach out to other organizations. Every year we now have had a fantastic group at Nellis Air Force Base because they have to commemorate it; it's in the air force or the government's instructions, but they can do it as little as they want. In the last couple years, we've done a weekly program, which exposes a lot of airmen to the Holocaust. We get speakers. The commander comes in and we go do a lighting commemoration; we invite dignitaries. We try and get other schools involved. I think it's working. I work with Esther. We do the Seder with the Holocaust theme once a year. We've done it two years and now we hope to have it at Beth Sholom.

When do you do the Seder?

A little before Passover because we serve bread, because that's what the victims were served, a piece of brown bread. Of course, that was never respected, obviously. You try and do the parallel of the Exodus and the Holocaust. We invite students from different schools. They get a good education. It's more of a revelation to some of them. They never knew. And hopefully they spread the word.

How do you involve the synagogues around the city in the message and activities?

Usually the Yom HoShoah rotates from synagogue to synagogue. This year it will be at Temple Sinai. We already have a speaker, the son of a perpetrator who's a professor here.

Oh, really?

I was trying to get another one, but he's very hard to get.

Who is that, the son of a perpetrator?

He's a professor in Arizona and his father was a camp guard or something.

Wow.

Yes. The one I was trying to get, he thought to ask questions from his family and he realized what they did. He went really ahead, converted to Judaism and moved to Israel.

Oh, my.

He's a doctor and now practices in Florida. I tracked him down. Every time I call him, and I tried him last year, he was busy and this year he's busy. But he wants to come here because he's in the same field as Dr. Adelson, drug addiction. He speaks. He's phenomenal. I've seen him on YouTube. We'll try and get him at some point in time.

Like I said, we do programs. Sometimes it's very hard to get participation in other parochial schools, but we try. We're trying to get into Bishop Gorman. It doesn't seem to work—I don't know. Do you know anyone there?

No, I don't, but that seems like it would be a good thing to do.

Exactly, to bring the Holocaust. We do obviously to the Adelson School and the Meadows, which is a good start. But we'd like to go in Faith Lutheran. If I could get into Faith Lutheran and Bishop Gorman that would be great. It has to come from the principal or somebody who's head of social studies. We contact teachers and they say, "Yeah, yeah," but you never hear from them again.

We have organizations, sometimes they call up and need a Holocaust speaker out of the blue—clubs, associations, organizations, churches. There's the CUFI church.

They're Christians, but they believe that the coming of Christ depends on the Jews living in Israel. They're very good. They have Night to Honor Israel every year. I spoke with the pastor. It's a husband and wife pastor. They're lovely people. They've gone to Israel with Federation. I'd like to bring in some of their students—I know I could succeed because I've spoken with them already. We could bring some speakers and maybe create a program about the Holocaust. They're on Buffalo and Gowan.

Interesting. You've had a lot of energy to keep going after all this.

I keep busy.

Yes. What other stories would you like to tell me that you think would be significant in

understanding this story in general? What other experiences have made you who you are?

Obviously what happened to me and postwar was not easy. As a young child you need your parents to create your character and I miss that.

And the family that took you in, how did you separate yourself from them?

That was hard. That's where I come from, a lot of separations. You get attached.

You were with them for how many years then?

Over two years. Then I was yanked from them and I was placed in an orphanage until I went to an uncle, to another, back and forth constantly.

Wow. That's difficult to relate to. It's wonderful that you've come to a place where you know the value of sharing that story and the lessons of it.

Now, do you have grandkids?

Yes, I have one granddaughter.

How old is she?

My son started late. She's four and a half; she's a treasure. They made reservations to come for Thanksgiving and they were trying to call us on Skype and couldn't get through. So they did a video message and Leah says, "Hi, Poppa and Nana. I love you very much and I look forward to coming"—maybe her mother coached her, but it's okay—"I look forward to coming to see you in a few weeks."

Oh, bless her heart. That will be nice.

Yes. She's adorable. She's hot stuff. We just spent a week at the beach with them. We went to Morro Bay. She's spoiled. [Laughing]

It's a good spoiled, I'm sure.

And I'm not spoiling her; Mommy spoils her. It's okay.

Everything you're doing will leave a nice legacy of strength and lessons.

Sometimes in life you have no choice. Take the reins and you can only go forward.

That's beautiful. Anything else you want to add today?

No. I really appreciate the fact that you took my story, if somebody could listen to it and see what experiences bring and make you stronger.

I appreciate your time and candor.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]

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