FELA URLIK 9-25-89

FU: We came here because of my husband’s cousin.

WH: Otherwise you would have gone to Israel?

FU: Everybody was going to Israel, because we wanted to be in our country, we went through so much and we didn’t want to go to be strangers in other countries. So, but my husband wants to get to America, it’s a wonderful country, and he loves it, and when I was in Europe, we was thinking the best about this country, but if we wouldn’t have nobody here, it makes no sense, see? If he didn’t have relatives, what makes sense? So you go with people, what they left from the concentration camps, everybody went to Israel, so we went to the same people. But here, it would be strange, we don’t know nobody here. Since my husband (inaudible) it’s a golden country, I can say it. I love it. And it’s always will be here, and I hope, (inaudible) but you want to go after the war, you was looking for somebody that you know, if you go to a place. You didn’t think about being rich, or this. You didn’t think nothing. You just thought to be with somebody close to you, a friend, a relative, so my husband (inaudible) the HIAS was, my husband went to, he ask he knew he had somebody in America, but he didn’t remember what town and where, because he was a young boy when he went from Europe, before the war. My husband’s cousin went as a young boy to America, so he know he has in America a cousin, and this cousin, when he came to him, he was like a father to us. Very, very good people. Very lovely. They weren’t rich peoples. He was a cantor, the best respect I have. So his wife was working, and then they give us their room until they find a place for us. They treat us very, very good, and that helped I say, listen, what can I do for them. I’m gonna give a gift, but what they did for us, I say, “God should pay you back.” So my husband’s cousin passed way, he had sugar, and they moved to Florida, and they have very big nachas from the daughter. A daughter and a son. The daughter married a doctor, and they are in Florida millionaires and very famous people. They worked very hard, they own a hospital, they own a medical center, they own a nursing home, offices. Now they bought something new, she just built a house, but they did so good, they deserve the best in this family. Seven children, and I say this, what they did for us, because they wasn’t rich people. They worked hard, and they shared the food with us and everything.

WH: You came in 1949. You went directly to St. Louis, by boat to New Orleans, and then when you got to St. Louis, the cousin was waiting at the train station for you. What was your first impression of America?

FU: Listen, you know, in Europe you think that here, walking around, only millionaires on the street, and you pick this one, this street (laughing). And every one is a millionaire. But if you don’t want to work, you work out. We worked very hard.

We had a store, we worked seven days in Bedford Stuyvesant, New York --kosher delicatessen with a partner. It didn’t work out, he was cheating him. It didn’t work out in a few places, so he bought with a partner in Bedford Stuyvesant, and then my husband bought him out. It was a grocery.

WH: Did you go on vacations?

FU: When the children was little, I went to the mountains with my children. I took very good care with them, South Fallsberg, a bungalow.

WH: Is it true that survivors learned to get along on less…I think that Americans have more expensive taste.

FU: Because, you don’t come from home, you come from a place where you was waiting, and then they give you a little piece of bread, and a little bit soup. So you don’t have big aspirations. So, if you make a living, you glad. And you know that you can build yourself up, and you have children, and they have to go to school and everything. So you work, you’re young, and I was very young and healthy, and it’s better to work than to sit around and think.

WH: Was this bungalow colony all survivors?

FU: Mostly, yes in the 50’s. I had one sister here, she gave me her apartment when they moved to New Jersey, it was in the Bronx, East Bronx, 140th, near Cypress Avenue.

WH: Why did you leave St. Louis after four years?

FU: Because my cousins, they moved to Florida.

WH: When you first came to New York, to the Bronx, what kind of work did you do, you and your husband.

FU: My husband he, it was very rough. He worked, and then he couldn’t work, and all kinds of jobs, then he was partners, he worked for this man in the delicatessen, and then he took him for a partner, all my husband put in was $1,000 to be a partnership, so I said, he fixed up the deli for $20,000. I say, if this is such a good business, that he fixed the deli because he worked for him, he saw the customers, he thought that this business is okay. He didn’t know what he owes and what income, you know he didn’t tell you, you’re not a partner. So he says to me, (inaudible), for a $1,000, so I say, “You don’t have more than that. What do you have in the bank? You gonna give away the last penny.” A $1,000 was a lot of money. And it’s a good thing, you know, I (inaudible) from Europe, European women, they cook, they clean, they do everything. So, so you have a little money. You don’t go to the beautician every week, you know.

WH: You don’t go to the movies?

FU: No, you don’t have what to spend, you don’t have what to go, you have little children, so, you know, I was glad. I have two lovely children, and I enjoyed every moment. To be home with children.

WH: Did you get together with other people?

FU: I had a lot of friends. From the old country. I have a friend, she is American-born, I met in St. Louis, through my children. My daughter, her daughter went to the same school. They become friends until today, we friends, and I’m like a sister. With my (inaudible) brother’s friend’s mother, and we become very friendly. She don’t hear from me, she calls me. She moved to Florida. And whenever she is in New York, she comes. And whenever I am in Florida, she comes and visits me. We are very close. Why do you ask if I have friends? A lot of friends. I like people. And we make dinners home, and birthday parties for children, and…

WH: I ask because I want to know about your social life.

FU: The social life is okay. We belong to – like my husband is from the town, Radom, and they have a society. And they make parties.

WH: Most of the friends you had, were they Americans or survivors?

FU: Of course survivors. Americans? What Americans have in common with survivors? This one, particularly, she is very intelligent, she likes me and I like her.

WH: Some survivors said that that when they came here, they felt that the American Jews looked down on them. That they were “greener.”

FU: Some of them, came to relatives, and they also looked down, because you have to listen both sides. Maybe they expect too much. Maybe they expect from the relatives that they should share with them or something. I didn’t expect. I didn’t want, I didn’t expect. If they were even millionaires, I never like to take. I just like to work out myself. People like you, it’s just how you are. If they don’t, don’t forget, Hitler didn’t let many, the high intelligent class, a high intelligent people, he killed them all. It’s (inaudible) just a few, most was in a (inaudible) post, you can’t associate with them. If you’re intelligent, and you’re smart, you associate with everybody, believe you me. And I have the biggest respect for the American Jewish people. More than from the European. Because they work hard, they belong to organizations, and they are intelligent, and I respect them very much. Look at in Florida, who works there? And they are people from (inaudible, old?) countries, and they nice, but not intelligent. This was (inaudible) not many are intelligent. That’s my opinion. I tell you the truth. I’m a simple woman. But I’m honest.

And I don’t mix in nobody’s business, and I don’t ask if I associate with you how much your husband makes, and what you cook today, and what did you buy or something. I have something better (inaudible) to talk and to discuss. You take a paper, you look in, I don’t sit and watch Dynasty day and night or other (inaudible), you know, so what do you expect? What do you have to talk with people who are – many people they can’t sign even their name. So they say the American looks down on them because they refugees. No. The American people they respect very much, and they feel sorry for the refugees. Because everybody had (inaudible problems) there and lost, whoever is Jewish here, they come from the old country, and they lost. All the families there. So why should they look down? What do you (inaudible) did they rob anybody? We killed anybody? It’s just because you can’t associate with them. You can have it here, and can tape it. It’s the truth.

WH: What you’re saying is that (inaudible) didn’t have that much in common with them.

FU: No. They’re not intelligent. And a lot what I know. A lot of people what I know, what they survive, I had woman, came to me, write, the bills, and hold me up for hours to write it. And she know, cause she looked on the envelope, that she’s from (inaudible). And so, I had many, many like this…When we were in business, my husband, he was, the bills and everything, writing and he knows reading, writing English, he didn’t go to school. If you don’t know the writing in Polish, you never learn English.

WH: Do you think the goyim here are any different than the ones in Poland?

FU: They think the Jewish people are rich and they take away from them. They don’t look that the Gentiles are the big millionaires. They just look the Jewish are rich. They contribute a lot, they pay taxes. Look at us. The first moment we stepped into this country, we worked and we paid taxes. Me and my husband. We didn’t go to welfare, like they born here, they can work. If you want to work, it’s plenty work! You try. This is not good, is this --. You work, you go, wash dishes. And do anything, and you make a living.

WH: What was your impression of the schvartze?

FU: I tell you, the schvartze, you have to know how to deal with them, and you have to know ho to talk. If you treat them good, they appreciate very much, because they know, that they lower class people, that people don’t respect them. If you talk to them nice, and you don’t trick them if they buy…in 1972 I sold (inaudible), a schvartze was working with me, he was in the store for years when we bought it from another man. I’ll tell you, you couldn’t believe what a gentleman he was. What a nice, and I wouldn’t stay with another one for no money in the world, and yet in my store, he watches me like anything.

WH: Did you ever have a holdup?

FU: Never.

WH: Did you feel that they were less anti-Semitic than the white goyim?

FU: See, the schvartze, the old people, there they don’t do monkey business. They Jewish, not Jewish, but they (inaudible) white. The schvartze now, what they educate, they are the anti-Semites. I had troubles once with a gang of boys, teenagers. Every time they came in they throw cookies down. During the day I saw these boys. I called them and I talked to them. I told them, “Listen, you know, you see I’m working very hard, working very hard here, glad that we can pay the bills and make a living. You come in and throw the cookies down, I let you go, but if you gonna do more and more, I will call the police, they will not put you in jail, but you will have a record. You listen to me, you don’t accomplish nothing by throwing down. You go the right way, the nice way, you be respectful, and you will be a man. I know your parents. Your mother is a lovely lady. Why you have to throw it down? Ask me, I give it to you. You want to pay back? You pay back the ten or twenty cents. If you don’t want to, I give it to you. They listened, never again they came and give me trouble.

WH: It seems to me that you have a lot of common sense. Did this common sense

FU: Make me survive? If I would have tell you how I survive, if I would tell you how people survived…

WH: Can you tell me a little?

FU: My mother had a lot of jewelry, my mother’s parents were very rich and she saw what was going on and gave everybody a piece of jewelry. They told us we would go to work, but we know that they send, we know first they send was Treblinka. A very, very, very – it’s Auschwitz, Treblinka, (needs translation) if you say it’s a hell, believe, the hell was here. It’s not such a thing in another world. The hell, we will not say it ends, the hell, that is hell, what is there? You dead, you there. It’s unbelievable.

WH: Do you believe in anything?

FU: Ya, I believe in God, I light candles Friday, but you know, (inaudible) holidays, all the holidays, but not like with a belief like home. Like if you make Pesach, you don’t clean on the walls. They didn’t do, it was Pesach. Like by the Lubavitcher here. Now, what we have to celebrate Pesach even worse times than Pesach, and if they would have let people go.

FU: Then they come once in a while, (inaudible) the S.S. “Who has jewelries?” And who has this, to give it away, not to be killed. So I had this ring in my girdle, sewed it in, and I gave it to a leader, maybe he was Jewish, so one day I saw him, and I say, “Listen, I have this ring, and I’m giving it to you. And I don’t have nobody now. Because I was the only one in this place, and I didn’t know where everybody is. I know that I am all alone, and I say, “Now you are my father, and you my mother, you my sister, you my brother, you are my everything here. I give it to you. But I want one thing, one request. I want you when it comes to a moment, to remember me. Maybe there will come a moment when, that you have to help me. So I want you to remember this.” And this ring make me to survive. I was very young, and very healthy there, and very strong in the old country. And I was once very beautiful, too. I was really, I was very beautiful. And if you didn’t look like a Jewish, so they respect you also, more.

WH: You felt that?

FU: Yes. Not S.S. We had there on the place Polish people watching us. So one day I was on the list to go with the transport (to be gassed), so there was the chief of the place, not this what I give the ring, he was also there but the other one picked the people. So he was standing behind the table and we have to walk through him, how we talked, he wanted to see how healthy you were, and they read the list to go away, and I’m on the list, I was 17 years old, healthy like a horse. I say, “Me he picked to go? What can you do? And I was crying, and I met this man what I give him the ring, and I said, “Do you know I’m on the list to go with transport?” (needs translation, hide yourself), he says to me, so where do you hide? Where do you go? I went into his office, and they were looking for me for hours. He came in, he looked at me, and I looked at him, and he was whistling when he came in. He didn’t say a word to me, I didn’t say a word to him. The minute he moved in, I run out. I worked in a kitchen there, and later I went to Auschwitz.

WH: Did you see people helping each other out in Auschwitz?

FU: What can you help? They give you the piece of bread, you ate it. What can you help? They give you a little soup. So what can you help? With what can you help? It was 1944 and we were transferred to factories to work, airplane pieces. So what were we doing in Auschwitz? What do you think? It’s there that you TALK to somebody? We still, (inaudible) what are you going to share? With food? They give you the piece of bread, you glad to have the piece of bread. What can you do? You can buy it for money. They give you another piece of bread? You live on the piece of bread. You hungry, you eat it. Everybody has the same portion, what can you share? If you have the same portion what I have, you have the same portion, so you gonna give me from you, you have the same portion. What can you share?

WH: How did you go on living, after everything you went through?

FU: I was crying again very much in Auschwitz, I was crying that I’m so young, not that I’m going to die so young, this wasn’t on my mind nothing, and not that’s it’s a beautiful world. That, how will I die? That’s what I cried. I was worried that it would be impossible for me to die. And that’s how I was more afraid.

WH: You mean that you would have to continue living in torture?

FU: No. That when they put you in the gas chamber, how will I die? It’s a very terrible thing go in the crematorium, they burned. But I was so healthy, I was crying very much that it will be impossible for me to die. See, that I would suffer. That’s what was it. And then we want to survive to see (needs translation/inaudible). And then, you know, if you in it, and you become like a soldier,(inaudible) like soldiers in the army, and then you have to (inaudible) then you used to it. That is that. So we know it. This is the end. And that’s all. And then, about living after the war, it was very rough.

WH: What was it like after the war?

FU: Very rough. Without anything. Without money. Without clothes. Very, very rough. That’s all. But, we managed. You were free. And you have two hands, and you had a head, and you want to work, be healthy, and little by little. You know, it’s a big story. We suffered a lot, everybody. If you had a trade, you come to this country, you go and work, but without a trade, it wasn’t so easy. Without a language, without a trade. But, we learned a little (inaudible) and we managed.

WH: How is your health?

FU: I have arthritis in my knees, but alright, I don’t take care on myself so much. I don’t like to go to the doctor so much.

WH: Your daughter married?

FU: My daughter have two children. They go to the Flatbush Yeshiva.

WH: Your daughter is more religious than you?

FU: Yes. Shomer Shabbas, they become baal teshuva.

WH: You’re happy that she is more religious?

FU: Yes. Shabbas and all of this, it is good. Special there, in the Lubavitcher, they have – the Lubavitchers are – but I want her to move in here. What I need eight rooms?

PAGE

PAGE 7