United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Eugenia Weiss Greenberg
May 9, 2013
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PREFACE

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Transcribed by Margaret E. Steinberg, National Court Reporters Association.

EUGENIA WEISS GREENBERG
May 9, 2013

Question: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Interview with Mrs. Eugenia Weiss Greenberg on May 9th, 2013, in Brooklyn, New York. And I would like to start by thanking you, Mrs. Greenberg, for agreeing to seeing us today, to telling us your story, to sharing your experiences with us. I will begin at the beginning, and I would like you to tell me your name at birth, when you were born, and where you were born.

Answer: Eugenia, that's the Italian name; Weiss, that was my maiden name; and I was born in Abbazia, Italy.

Q: Abbazia?

A: Abbazia. And it's on the Adriatic Coast, right above Trieste.

Q: Is it a village or a town?

A: It was a resort town where all the royals of Austria and the Hauptburg Empire used to come and spend their holidays. It's a really beautiful little town on the Adriatic, and it's since become Croatia after World War II.

Q: So it's right at that border?

A: Right where Tito, you know, he appropriated that area, and nobody contested him because there was a Cold War and whatever, and it's now called Opatija.

Q: Opatija?

A: Opatija.

Q: So Opatija in Croatian?

A: Yes, and it's right near Fiume. It used to be Fiume. Now I think it's called Rijeka or something like that, which means river.

Q: And when were you born? Give us your date.

A: March 4th, 1932.

Q: March 4th, 1932?

A: Yes.

Q: So you grew up in the 1930s in this little lovely resort town?

A: Right, it was more like an international little village because a lot of languages were spoken there.

Q: What do you remember from your childhood? What languages did you hear?

A: Well, we had a governess, and she was Croatian, so my parents tell me that I learned Croatian, and my parents spoke German, so I spoke a little German and Italian.

Q: What language did you speak at home with your parents?

A: We spoke a kind of a German. We didn't speak Yiddish then.

Q: Oh, so you spoke German but not Yiddish?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you didn't speak Italian with one another?

A: Yes, oh, yes, but not with my parents, with other children; and even though after 1938 when the sanctions came into existence, Jewish children were not allowed to attend school.

Q: We'll get to that point.

A: Okay.

Q: Right now, so at home, you spoke German with your parents?

A: Yeah.

Q: And Italian, Croatian?

A: Well, with my governess, you know, but I forgot Croatian. I don't remember it, but that's, you know, what my parents told me, but with all my neighbors and children, other children, I spoke Italian. We spoke Italian.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: I have a -- I had a brother who was 14 months younger than I, who unfortunately died last year.

Q: What was his name?

A: Beno Weiss.

Q: Beno Weiss?

A: He was a professor, full professor at Penn. State, a really wonderful human being, and he would have been so proud to be here today, but he died unfortunately last year.

Q: Well, my condolences for your loss.

A: Thank you. And then after the war, my parents had two more children.

Q: Oh?

A: My sisters. So my brother and I, we were pre-war, and they were post-war.

Q: And just for right now, give us the names of your sisters.

A: My sister, the older one, they are a year apart, Ruth Weiss Schneider is her name now, and Judy Weiss Gentile.

Q: And what years were they born in?

A: One, '45, and '46, right after the war.

Q: So you're ten years apart, basically, ten, twelve years?

A: No, a little more.

Q: Yeah. So what were your parents' names?

A: Rachel Weiss and Isaac Weiss, and in Italian, he was known as Isaco, and Rachele.

Q: Let's pause just a little bit. We will let the train go by. So how is it that you spoke German with your parents at home? Were they native to Abbazia, the village? Is that how I say it?

A: No, my parents were born in Poland.

Q: Oh. What part of Poland?

A: Galicia. And my mother was born in -- no, not Presburg. It will come to me in a second. Can we --

Q: Yeah, we can stop. We can keep on going, and when it comes to you, just say.

A: My father was born in Yashanitza {ph}.

Q: Were these areas part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire?

A: Yes, that's why they spoke German, and they -- I think they were forced to go to elementary school, and I think they probably learned German, but my dad ran away from home when he was 16 because he didn't want to go into the Army. So he was like a real traveler, and he lived in Vienna for five years before going up to Cannes, and then he traveled down the coast and then ended up in Abbazia, and that's where he settled and married.

Q: How did your mother end up here?

A: Well, my father went to visit his parents, in Migrot, my mother comes from a town called Migrot {ph}. Her father was a shoykhet.

Q: What's that?

A: A kosher butcher. And he came to my father's town. You know, they needed, I guess, a shoykhet, and when he was there, he met my mom, and then they were engaged for five years, and then finally they got married.

Q: Okay.

A: And my mother came to Italy.

Q: Did she like living there?

A: Oh, yeah. The only thing she missed was her parents and her brothers and sisters. She had a large family, but she adapted, you know, quite well, and she had a very good life till things started going badly.

Q: So talk to us a little bit about that life. What was your father's business? What did he do?

A: Well, he was a -- he imported materials.

Q: Textiles?

A: Textiles, for linens and for clothing, for men's suits, from England and Czechoslovakia, and apparently, you know, I think we lived very well till things started going wrong.

Q: Tell me about your earliest memories.

A: Going to the park with my mother. My father would go to the cafes every day after he did his business, whatever. I remember this hotel called Principe Umberto where they had

dances for children, and swimming, you know, on the beaches, and my brother and I going deep in the water, and my mother standing there and screaming, and we wouldn't listen to her. And then poetic justice, my granddaughters did that to me when they were little. So my memories of my very early childhood were very good, except that I developed polio when I was about five years old, and I had to spend quite a lot of time in the hospital in Fiume. It was during the polio epidemic, but --

Q: Do you remember that?

A: Yeah, I remember that, the treatments, and being separated from my parents.

Q: Well, you were a little girl, yeah, yeah. When you were little, did you hear anything about politics? I mean you were a child, but --

A: No, everyone was, you know, sort of enamored with Mussolini; you know, I mean all the children wore their uniforms and marched, and I mean as a child, I didn't sense anything going wrong, but my parents, of course, must have kept a lot from us.

Q: Did you already start school in the '30s?

A: No, I never went to school. I never went to elementary school.

Q: Okay. So tell me a little bit about the larger political context for Italy and the town, then how it affected your town, and then how it affected your lives. What was going on in the late '30s?

A: Well, my father couldn't work anymore.

Q: Why?

A: Because of the sanctions that Germany imposed, and then Mussolini followed.

Q: Okay.

A: So Jews were not allowed to work.

Q: And this was from '38?

A: I think it started in '38, and we weren't allowed to go to school. There were a lot of limitations imposed on us, but nothing threatening physically. It was all economical; a lot of squeezes on my parents. Now, we lived in this house called Villa Jaime, and my mother used to go to a park, as I told you, all the time that had orchestras and famous people coming, and so she would meet people from Austria, and so she connected with someone that wanted to get out of Vienna, and they lived with us for a whole year.

Q: Do you remember them?

A: Yeah, the name is Hellreich. As a matter of fact, he's a dermatologist in Manhattan now, and my parents remained good friends with them throughout their lives, and so that supplemented and helped pay for the rent. My mother had to give up, you know, some rooms for them, and somehow she sold possessions that she had, and somehow we got by. We even went back to Poland. My mother took my brother and I to Vienna and Presburg because she had family there.

Q: Presburg, Bratislava, you mean?

A: Maybe that was in '37. I'm not so sure when. It must have been before the sanctions.

Q: So do you have vague memories of having been on this trip?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Very vague, though.

Q: Okay. Does anything stand out?

A: I remember the houses. Apparently, my father's father was the richest man in town. He owned the bank. He owned the grocery store. He owned the only brick house in the town, and, you know, and some of it was also like supplied by my mother who, you know, said that everybody was so glad to see us, and so that was the last time my mother saw her parents and sisters and brothers.

Q: What happened to them?

A: They were all killed. Every one of them.

Q: Did she ever find out how and what the details were?

A: Well, she found out that they all had to dig their own graves, and they were shot. And my mother always felt so guilty because she had a single sister, Esther, and she wanted to come to Italy so badly, but because my grandparents were heartbroken when my mother left, she didn't want to do it to them again, so she did not encourage her coming because she always said if she had only brought her to Italy, she would have been alive maybe.

Q: That must have weighed heavily.

A: And one brother ended up in Auschwitz, and he lived till the very end, and then he -- I think some kind of accident in the camp killed him.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the Hellreich family. What -- they came from Vienna?

A: From Vienna.

Q: And why?

A: They were waiting for their visa. They had family here. He had brothers who were willing to sponsor him.

Q: "Here" meaning the United States?

A: The United States. And they just got out, and, you know, they lived with us for a year, so they must have gone just before the war. Their visa came through.

Q: And how many people were there?

A: Four.

Q: Four people in your house?

A: Yeah.

Q: So a mother, a father?

A: And two children.

Q: Boys, girls?

A: A boy and a girl.

Q: A boy and a girl. And it's the boy who was the dermatologist?

A: Yeah. And the sister, Edith, just died. She had Alzheimer's.

Q: What is his name?

A: Freddy, Alfred Hellreich.

Q: Alfred Hellreich. Did they tell you stories, your family stories of what was going on in Vienna?

A: Well, they must have told my parents. I was a very young child, so these things did not penetrate. I just knew subliminally, you know, that things were not going so well. And we didn't have that much cash. I remember taking a walk with my father, where before he would like lavish on us, and we wanted a banana, which was quite exotic back then,and he took the last of whatever he had, and he bought it for us, and my brother and

I shared it, so I knew that, you know -- and we had, after the Hellreichs left, we had to move because we couldn't afford that big house anymore.

Q: Did you own the house, or were you renting it?

A: No, we rented it.

Q: And you had a whole house before?

A: Well, it was -- it was a whole floor.

Q: In a house?

A: In a house.

Q: Do you have memories of what it looked like?

A: Well, I went back about three years ago.

Q: That would have been 2010?

A: And I found it.

Q: Really?

A: I didn't go inside, but I took pictures of the outside because I was born in that house, in Villa Jaime. Years ago, you know, you gave birth at home.

Q: Yeah. How big was it? Did it have many rooms?

A: Yeah, apparently it must have if my parents could give up a section.

Q: Do you remember where you moved to?

A: We moved to a much larger building, and we just I think rented. We had a room or two.

Q: And how did life change by the time you moved? Was there more things going on?

A: Well, in between I got the polio. I know that I had the polio in the other place, not in Villa Jaime.

Q: Okay. So there was a lot of stress in the family?

A: Yeah. I mean my poor parents, I mean they were beside themselves. Things were getting hard economically, and things didn't look good for the Jews, and here they had a daughter that had polio, and they didn't know what my future would be, and so they went through a lot.

Q: Were there many Jews in Abbazia?

A: Abbazia?

Q: Abbazia.

A: I know it had a hotel that had kosher food, and they had a kosher butcher, but I really, you know, couldn't tell you how many Jews lived in Abbazia, but Fiume had quite a lot of Jews.

Q: So did your parents, when they socialized, who did they socialize with?

A: Oh, they -- you know, my father socialized mainly in the hotel Principe Umberto, that he would go to there and he would read the newspaper, he would play chess. And he belonged to a synagogue, so he knew people from there. And they had friends in Fiume, very good friends with whom they stayed when they would come and visit me because I was in the hospital there.

Q: So did they have friends who were Italians or who were non-Jews?

A: They probably did because they were very friendly, outgoing people, so but I, you know, neighbors, and --

Q: You wouldn't know them?

A: No.

Q: What about, did they ever speak Polish with one another?

A: No.

Q: Yiddish?

A: They probably did speak Yiddish to one another, but we kids did not speak Yiddish.

Q: Okay. Did they tell you much about their lives in Poland and what it was like when they were growing --

A: They might have, but I don't -- my father's tales I knew of because he went off so young, and I know he traveled all over Europe. He was in Hungary. He was in Austria. Then he ended up in France, and he ended up in Italy, so he really --

Q: He saw the world?

A: Yeah, he moved around.

Q: How did things develop further as time went on, and how did it affect your family?

A: Well, we lived like that till 1940, when Germany declared war, and Mussolini went along with Hitler.

Q: Okay.

A: And so one night we were all sleeping, the carabinieris came, and they just took my father away, and I remember, you know, standing at the window screaming, "Papa, Papa," and they took him to a prison in Fiume where they kept him for a while, and we didn't know what was going to happen. They didn't take my mother and my brother. And

then eventually they sent him to a concentration camp in Fiera Monte. Have you heard of it?

Q: No.

A: It's in Calabria. It was one of the camps that they had in Italy for Jews and other political prisoners, whatever, and then a few days later, they moved us, also, and they sent us to a very small town near Rome called Atessa.

Q: Atessa?

A: It has all kinds of ruins. It's historically very old with walls around the town, you know, and they called that internment. We were interned.

Q: What did it look like? What kind of places did they put you?

A: It was a very small little village. We were not allowed to go to school. We were not allowed to leave town. We had to be in after "Ave Maria," you know, when the bells ring in the evening. We had to report to the police station with our number to make sure that we didn't escape. We weren't allowed to associate with the community, but Italians, they didn't pay any attention, and we as kids had a lot of friends.

Q: Were there more Jews who were brought to this place?

A: There were other Jews and some people who maybe were alleged to be Communists or politically undesirable, and but Mussolini paid us a stipend, and so we were able to exist, and he did not go along with Hitler's extermination plan, you know. I mean he said that he would take care of the Jews in Italy.

Q: Do you think he did?

A: Yes, he did in his way by isolating us. And then my mother wrote a letter petitioning, you know, that we wanted to be reunited with my dad, and about a year later, he came to Atessa.

Q: Okay. So he was in prison for how long; about a year and a half, two years?

A: About a year, I would say. But it wasn't a torture camp. It wasn't an extermination camp. It was more a containment camp.

Q: Was it labor? Was it forced labor there?

A: No.

Q: He just had to stay there?

A: He just had to -- you know, they had no liberties to leave, but they weren't harmed. And so then my father joined us.

Q: What did he look like? Had he changed in his manner?

A: My dad, no, because he wasn't harmed in any way, except all his rights were taken away from him.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then we lived in this town, Tuscania, for several years.

Q: Hang on a second. Before we come to that, you mentioned that all his rights were taken away. Did you feel that? You were a child at the time, but did you feel what that meant?

A: Well, I knew that I couldn't go to school like other children did.

Q: Okay.

A: And my parents made every effort to get us tutors, you know, because there was some English people that were also interned because they got caught up being in Italy, and so, you know, my parents made every sacrifice to, you know, have us become literate, and which we did, but we never went to any formal school. And also they had to sacrifice and sell things in order to, you know, pay for tutors and our education.

Q: So his business was simply confiscated way back in Abbazia?

A: No, he was just stopped from operating it.

Q: So it closed down?

A: Yeah, he was prohibited. Jews were prohibited to, you know, to work, period.

Q: By this point you're eight or nine years old when you were in this village; is that so?

A: Yes. Yeah. '32 -- yeah. I was eight.

Q: Were you able to understand more of what was going on around you?

A: Well, I knew that we had limitations and that we weren't from that place, and, you know, you become very smart very quickly when you are under stress and your parents are being displaced, and but we made the best of it, you know. We kind of got by. And then they sent us, because we were so dangerous, they sent us to another town after about two years, I think.

Q: What was the official reason?

A: Well, they never gave it to us, you know.

Q: I see. Do they just come and announce it?

A: They just said, you know, you have to now go to the Abbruzzi, which is like a mountainous region of Italy, and we went to a town called Atessa.

Q: And what was that like?

A: Well, you know, we found nice lodgings in this tiny little villa out of the way, small little rooms. I remember that. It had a garden outside. We started planting things. And somehow, you know, we managed. But then in 1943, when Mussolini was executed -- I don't know if you know that story.

Q: I thought he was executed at the end of the war.

A: It was in '43, the end of '43.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: I think.

Q: Okay. So when he was executed?

A: Yeah, when he was killed and hung upside down over that bridge in Torino, then the German -- the Italian government became an ally of the Allied Forces.

Q: Of the Allied Forces?

A: Yes, the Italians, and so then the Germans felt free to invade Italy, and that's when things really became bad for us.

Q: What happened?

A: Well, then we had to hide and run because they were hunting Jews, and even though the Italians, you know, were very good, they didn't turn you in because there was very little anti-Semitism in Italy. There weren't that many Jews to hate. And so then things

became, you know, quite hectic for us. We had to run and hide, and then the bombing started, so we had to protect ourselves from that.

Q: How did you -- excuse me. How did you hide? Would you leave?

A: We would run, you know, when we would hear, somebody would tell us that the Germans were looking, we would run into the countryside and look for farmers, and I think some of them my parents must have bribed, you know, and they let us sleep in their stalls and whatever.

Q: And then you would return back to --

A: Then when we heard that they left, and once they caught us, the Germans.

Q: What happened? Tell me in detail.

A: Well, we were very lucky that he was a humane German S.S. lieutenant, whatever.

Q: Tell me the circumstances of how you were caught.

A: Well, we were running, and, you know, they had dogs, and they had guns, and they caught us. And my brother and I, we started crying, you know, "Please don't take my daddy," and "please," you know, we cried, and somehow, you know -- oh, there was a German woman also interned because she was married to a Jew from Hamburg.

Q: So they caught you and they took you to –

A: We were running, you know, with this other couple. They were staying in a neighboring farm, and so she started speaking to the -- she was a glamorous-looking blonde -- to this captain, lieutenant, whatever he was, and somehow by a miracle of miracles, they let us go back, you know, to hiding, whatever.

Q: In other words, they never brought you to a prison? You were caught on the road?

A: Yeah, we were caught running in a countryside.

Q: I see.

A: And the funny thing is that my mother tells me that he told us we can go back home.

Q: Okay.

A: And that the next day, he came with some provisions.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. So I guess there were some humane, you know, Germans, also.

Q: Was he alone when you were caught, or were there lots of soldiers?

A: No, he had a lot of soldiers, but he was in command, so, you know, I don't know what he told them.

Q: Because that's unusual. That would sound unusual.

A: I know. We always talk about how lucky we were that --

Q: And she said something in German to him, do you think?

A: Well, my parents spoke German, too, you know, so they spoke to him, and he had pity on us, and he just let us all go.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah.

Q: But frightening for children.

A: Oh, I never forgot that, how it was, you know, muddy, and how we lost our shoes running, and also the Germans had set mines all over the place, so it was very dangerous where you were going because one day while we were running, one of the people running in back of us just got killed from a mine.

Q: Stepped on it and blown to bits?

A: Yes.

Q: Also very terrifying for a child; I mean terrifying for anybody.

A: For anybody.

Q: Anybody, but a child at age ten, eleven, and your brother even younger; do you think that that affected you?

A: Well, you know, always people tell me that I'm emotionally, you know, a strong person. It kind of hardens you in a way. In a way, we were like wise beyond our years because my parents would tell us to go and listen to what some of the Germans were saying, you know, because --

Q: You could speak German?

A: Because we understood what they were saying, so I know we did that when we were quite young.

Q: Were there Germans in those villages before Mussolini died?

A: No.

Q: So Germans only appeared in your lives --

A: Appeared after, after.

Q: His murder?

A: He didn't let them interfere.

Q: I see.

A: I mean one thing about him, he didn't let the Jews be sent to concentration camps, and he protected his Jews as long as he was alive. I mean even though we lost all our

freedoms and everything, but that was a compromise, I guess, that we had to live by and in a way be grateful because we are here, and, you know, we did survive, and then there was a whole conflict in that area.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: Because the Germans were there, and the Allies were coming in, and there was like –

Q: So there were battles?

A: Oh, terrible battles. We saw people getting killed right out near, looking out the window. There was actual war right where we were.

Q: But give me the name again.

A: Atessa.

Q: Atessa. And again, war comes upon you, and you're children?

A: Yes. Well, they mined everything. They destroyed all the bridges, you know, so that the Allies couldn't come in easily. And at this point I developed a very high fever, temperature, while we were running. And we were staying in this farm house, so they had a hospital there, so my parents took me to the hospital, and they let us stay in the hospital, and they had cannons on top of the hospital, even though they had a big Red Cross on top of it, and we could hear the bombs coming and going, you know.

Q: So this was the Italians who had those cannons, or whose cannons?

A: No, the Germans.

Q: And you were in a hospital where there were German cannons?

A: Underneath. And, you know, they gave us shelter, and at that point they weren't looking for us because they were just fighting and retreating.

Q: So my question is this. Two questions. Did you ever feel under -- insecure around Italians that you might be betrayed?

A: No, no, never. They were very brave, or maybe they didn't understand the consequences of their deeds. I don't know which it was. But wherever we went, somebody, you know, would give us succor, you know, would give us protection.

Q: And did you look -- I mean, again, would it be easy to recognize you?

A: No, because, you know, we were running, and my parents negotiated, and we just hid in this stall. Every now and then they were kind enough and invite us to a meal, but, you know, most of the time, we just subsisted on whatever we could find. So, you know, my brother and I said, you know, maybe if we knew who they were, we might go looking for them, you know, but it was so transient because we didn't stay in any place for that long because it was dangerous.

Q: Were you limited by a certain area, though, I mean that you moved from place to place, but never very far from where you were before?

A: Well, we stayed in the countryside because we thought we were safer there, and also maybe safer from the bombing and from all the --

Q: Where were some of the larger towns so that I'd get a geographical sense?

A: Atessa. I really don't know, you know. It's in the Abbruzzi.

Q: And while you were in the hospital, and there were the cannons up top, what happened? Did they fire from there?

A: They fired from right up our roofs, and they would fire back, and that whole part of that hospital was demolished.

Q: So it was not safe at all?

A: It wasn't safe. So then we ran. Someone told us to run to this hotel in town, and practically the whole building fell on us, but, you know, we went to a basement, whatever, and, you know, we survived.

Q: You hid in the basement?

A: We were just lucky.

Q: How long did this go on for?

A: Seemed like forever, but I guess it wasn't that long, but then, you know, the Allies came in, and they liberated us.

Q: Do you remember what they looked like when you saw them?

A: They were British. They were British troops that liberated that part of Italy, mostly Indians.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Yeah. The Indians, you know, fought for the British, and they found us a place to stay, an apartment that, you know, if it was empty, they just took it temporarily, and one of the Indian officers lived with us, and then all of a sudden things started looking up because we had food, and we had protection, and we --

Q: And this was 1944?

A: The end of '44.

Q: Okay. So --

A: And then in -- and then we went -- we stayed there for a few months, and then we were sent to a DP camp.

Q: And where was the DP camp?

A: The first one was Palazze, which is near Naples, but they were old Army barracks. They were not equipped for winter living. So it was really pretty there because it was near the Mediterranean, and we had a very nice summer, and then when fall came, they sent us to Barletta.

Q: Where is that?

A: No, well, first when we were liberated -- I'm sorry -- we went to Palazze. Then they sent us to Santa Maria de Bagno, it was called, in the Apulia section. And then they had confiscated all these villas of rich Italians who were, you know, using them for the summer, and they put all the displaced people in these villas.

Q: Were there many displaced people?

A: Oh, yeah. Then all the people started coming from Poland, from Auschwitz, and that's when I learned Yiddish.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: So is that also when you learned, your parents learned, at least, what had happened in Poland?

A: No, they had heard rumors.

Q: Okay.

A: While the war was still going on.

Q: That must have been so heartbreaking.

A: Somebody came to our house one day, I remember that, and told my mother, and then she was hysterical, crying, and somehow, you know, we found out what it was all about, that she was told that her whole family was, you know, was killed.

Q: Which house would this have been? Where would this have been?

A: That was before, that was before the Mussolini.

Q: Was murdered?

A: Was murdered.

Q: So that would have been when you were in one of the villages?

A: Yes, we were in Tuscania.

Q: You were in Tuscania.

A:So rumors, you know, traveled. People got mail or whatever. I don't know how this man found out. And as a matter of fact, when my sisters were born after the war, and then in the Jewish religion, you are not allowed to name after the living, so my parents named -- they gave them both Biblical names because they weren't absolutely sure who had survived and who didn't because this was all hearsay.

Q: Well, tell me this, something I meant to ask and forgot momentarily. Were your parents very religious?

A: Well, they were -- came from a very religious background, but when we lived in Italy, my dad tried to maintain all the Jewish traditions, you know, Passover, and mainly I remember Passover, where he made his own matzo because we couldn't get that, but there was no such thing as having kosher food or, you know, anything like that, but we

maintained, you know, at home. So then we were in the DP camps, several different DP camps. Let me see. One, two -- about four of them for five years.

Q: Why?

A: Well, because you needed -- you know, to have a visa to come here.

Q: So you didn't want to stay in Italy, your parents?

A: Well, we couldn't go back to Abbazia because it wasn't Italy anymore. It was Communist Tito.

Q: And your father didn't --

A: And we didn't want to go back to more oppressions, and we didn't know -- things were not the same.

Q: Okay.

A: So my parents debated whether to go to Israel or -- and then he opted, he said, you know, after what we went through, he wanted us to come to a safe place.

Q: So --

A: So we waited.

Q: So you were in these various DP camps for five years?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you go to school?

A: Well, after the war.

Q: Okay.

A: We took -- my parents hired again tutors to prepare us to pass an entrance exam, because in Italy, you know, you have to pass entrance exams, each level of schooling that

you go through, and we made it, and then we started middle school, and then from then on we went to Genoseo {ph}, and then {undecipherable} for one year, so I had -- which is like almost a year of college.

Q: When you were in the DP camps, did it feel like internment, or did it feel like just temporary housing?

A: Yeah, temporary housing, in barracks. We had one room for six people.

Q: Who was there?

A: Communal. My two sisters.

Q: Oh, they were born.

A: My brother and my parents. And we had communal showers and bathrooms, and very primitive. They had mess hall, you know, for people. We were fed that way. And the school was very far away, so in one town, my father hired a man with a donkey, and he would pick us up every morning and take us to school --

Q: A chauffeur.

A: -- you know, and then pick us up because he started working, and they had like a K.P. thing in the camp itself, and he was running it.

Q: Well, that's what my next question is. How did your father earn any money that he would be able to --

A: Well, they gave us, you know, provisions, cans of food, and we had lodging, and then when he started, you know, working in this K.P., he started earning some money, and they, my parents, sacrificed a lot for our education, hiring math professors, because, you

know, we really didn't know anything about math, and but somehow we did well even without --

Q: Formal schooling?

A: -- without having any elementary education.

Q: That's pretty amazing.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's pretty amazing. Were they – had their personalities been affected?

A: My parents?

Q: Yeah, by everything that they had gone through.

A: Yeah, my dad was, you know, quite nervous. I'm sure it affected them deeply, but they didn't really -- you know, my father was a very positive-thinking man. He was always grateful, you know, that we survived and that we were healthy and that, you know, things, when we came here, even though they struggled, you know, my dad could never earn much money, and he had to go and learn how to be an operator.

Q: What kind?

A: Clothing, you know, sewing, because he couldn't find -- he didn't speak the language. He spoke a little English.

Q: So was he a tailor here?

A: Not a real tailor. I think they did piecework, whatever.

Q: That's tough.

A: It was very tough for them, yeah.

Q: Did both of them do this?

A: Well, then my mother, because she had twolittle children --

Q: Of course.

A: -- and so she couldn't really go to work. And then we came here to join finally an uncle in Hoboken. My father promised him that he would never ask him for anything if he --

Q: Sponsored you?

A: -- if he brought us over here, and we never did. And we came in 1950 to the United States. And we stayed for seven weeks in a hotel. The Joint {ph} put us up there, and then we went to the {undecipherable}, which is where the Shakespeare Theater is now.

Q: I don't know where that is in New York.

A: It's on Broadway.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: In the village.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: And then they found us an apartment in the Bronx, a five-floor walk-up.

Q: And how big was it?

A: It had enough rooms, but the Bronx was turning, and it wasn't such a safe place anymore. So my parents sent my sisters to a Yeshiva, a Hebrew school, and my brother and I, he was 16 and I was 18, so we went to work, and so we managed.

Q: That's tough.

A: Yeah, it was very tough.

Q: All that displacement.

A: Yeah.

Q: All that displacement. So actually you kind of lost home?

A: Many times.

Q: Many times. Did you ever have a feeling of home?

A: Well, home was where my parents were, you know, and we had a very strong family bond. So because of my parents, somehow, you know, knowing that we were together and we were with them, that gave you a sense of safety, but we were always, you know -- everything was unpredictable. We never knew what would be tomorrow.

Q: But the one thing that was stable was the family?

A: Was the family.

Q: That's pretty big.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, family is very important.

Q: How did your life progress here in the states?

A: Well, I married in 1952.

Q: So pretty soon?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And first I went to work in a factory. Then I progressed to a clerical job. And then when my daughter was born quite soon after, and so I had three children.

Q: Okay.

A: And I stayed home.

Q: When were your children born?

A: Well, Debbie was born in '53, and then a son was born in '57.

Q: What's his name?

A: Steven. And he died two years ago, yeah.

Q: My condolences.

A: And I have another son, Richard, who is going to be 50. He's not 50 yet.

Q: So he was born in the '60s?

A: Yeah. And as soon as they were a little older, I went to college.

Q: Oh, what college did you go to?

A: Brooklyn College.

Q: Okay.

A: And I did well in school, and then I got a master's in school psychology.

Q: I wanted to ask you about that.

A: Yeah, and I worked for 27 years as a school psychologist, and I am now retired.

Q: Well, tell me, why did -- how -- or how was psychology something that drew you?

A: Oh, I don't know. When I graduated college, I started teaching, and I thought that that's what I really wanted to do, to teach, but New York City at that time, you know, it was not ideal to teach, especially not middle school. I made a mistake. If I had gone into elementary school, probably it would have been better for me because in my nature, it wasn't in me to be a police person.

Q: And middle school you kind of have to?

A: Thirty percent of the time having to discipline kids.

Q: Yeah.

A: So I realized very quickly that that wasn't what I wanted to be, and so I said I'll try and find something within the school system that gets me out of the classroom, and so -- and I made the right choice because that was, you know, the right decision for me.

Q: Did psychology intrigue you?

A: I don't know if it was so much that I was intrigued. I just knew that it would be a good job for me.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I like people, and I'm very, you know, sympathetic to other people's plights, so and it worked out well.

Q: What is it that your parents -- in the things that we inherit, we can inherit things, but we can also inherit things that are not tangible. What are the intangibles that your parents kind of bequeathed to you?

A: My parents, you know, I have four siblings, and we all, despite everything that we went through, we all turned out to be resilient, and humanitarian, and upstanding citizens with very good moral values, you know, so whatever my parents did, they did something that just worked, you know, and we all turned out to be pretty successful in our own pursuits. Everyone in my family is a professional, you know, and so my parents made the right choice coming to this country.

Q: Tell me how their lives progressed after they came here.

A: Well, when the Bronx turned so badly, my brother helped them buy a house in Brighton.

Q: Okay.

A: He put down the down payment, whatever.

Q: Brighton Beach?

A: Yes. Brighton, First Street. It was a two-family house because they had two, you know, they had two young children, and they didn't want to have to deal with the changes that were happening, and they were very happy with this little house. You know, they rented the upstairs, and even though my father didn't make very much, but with the rent, and they lived frugally, and they didn't have any excesses, you know, they somehow managed to have a very nice life here.

Q: Were they happy people?

A: Yeah, my dad was a very happy person. He was very gregarious. He liked to tell jokes. He loved people. He became very religious, though, and he went to a synagogue regularly. And he died in 1978.

Q: And your mom?

A: My mom died in 1986. She was 93.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did they ever talk to your children about—

A: No, not really. My kids interviewed her, you know, for school, different things like that, but nothing, nothing formal.

Q: And did you, amongst yourselves, the – all the children and your parents, without your children involved, did you talk about these things?

A: Yeah, my brother and I did, and especially we went back together a few years ago, ten years ago. We spent a month in Florence. We had an apartment, and we rented a car, and we went back to both Tuscania and Atessa. And it's really strange, you know, that what you remember and what is is not always the same.

Q: So how did that show up?

A: We went there. We found the places that we lived in. We remembered it, you know, between the two of us, we located the places, and, you know, where I had remembered a huge park, it was a tiny little nothing. The villa that we lived in in Atessa, you know, was --

Q: Not so big?

A: Well, it wasn't big. I don't remember it being big, but we scouted around, and we went to places that we remembered. So that was very nice. Now no one knew, remembered anything.

Q: Okay. Okay. Do you think there were any -- it's so transient, so it's almost like in the areas where you were during those years, there were probably no footprints left of what happened, or are there?

A: Well, I'm sure that some people do know, but maybe, you know, because we were just there for two days, we couldn't really do any investigative reporting, you know, and see, but we went by where we had to go and give our number every day, and we went to, you know, different sites that we remember, so we did do that.

Q: I remember we were looking at a photograph of maybe it was the same trip or another trip when you were there with your daughter?

A: No, no, that was -- you know, that's the -- that's a different part of Italy.

Q: That's where you were originally from, right?

A: No.

Q: Where your daughter and --

A: No, that's Apulia {ph}. That's not --

Q: Did you ever go back to Abbazia?

A: Yes, I went back a few years ago, and that was also a big, you know, blow to my memory, but I did find Villa Jaime where I was born, and I did find the park, and the places we went swimming, and Principe Umberto, which I remember as being this huge hotel was broken up into different parts. But the general atmosphere, the palm trees, and the beauty of the little place, you know, remains.

Q: Doesn't mean your memory was wrong; it just means life changed?

A: Yeah, it just was distorted, and even though it's Croatia, you know, people still speak Italian there. Many stores still have Italian headings, and so the -- you know, the Croatian government now is making it -- you know, is resuscitating the allure of the place.

Q: Did your grandchildren express interest in what had gone on with you?

A: Not that much really. You know, they ask questions every now and then, but they never, you know, never explored. But my brother has some tapes, but, you know, he is not here anymore, and he lives in Pennsylvania.

Q: He lived in Pennsylvania?

A: He interviewed my mom before she died.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, I think. I don't know if – what happened to the tapes.

Q: Because those could be very interesting to have at the museum.

A: Yeah, I don't know. I'll have to ask my sister-in-law if she has them, or if she knows where they are.

Q: That could be quite -- that would be very, very important, you know. We would value that.

A: I don't know what, you know, the interview is all about, but when I speak to her next, I will ask her if she remembers.

Q: And for yourself, those formative years, when -- when you had such an insecure life and sometimes a life that could have been easily taken away, how do you think that that's -- what does it play -- when you think of your life in total, how big is that portion of it?

A: Well, it's at the core of me, you know. I think it made me who I am. It made me strong and flexible, and it's something I'll never forget. It's a history that, you know, that will be with me forever, even though it's kind of not always there, you know, on the outside.

Q: I think your daughter mentioned to me when she got in touch with us that you had never given your story before. You had never told –

A: No, I mean they know bits and pieces, you know, but it's not something that my parents dwelled on, and I think that that's some kind of a pattern of people who have gone through a lot, that they don't really talk about it.

Q: So were you reluctant to do so?

A: Well, you know, I mean once I realized the importance of it, you know, but it's not something that is spontaneous.

Q: Got that. I've got that. Is there something -- excuse me for a second. Is there something that I haven't asked about that we haven't discussed that you think is pertinent to all, to our subject today?

A: Well, you know, I had asked my daughter, because she has all the names of the people that -- my uncles and aunts that, that didn't survive, and so many cousins, and that, you know, that I think my brother, when he went to Yad Vashem in Israel, I think inscribed their names. I'm not so positive. But she was at work when I called her this morning, and she didn't have it with her.

Q: So you would want to have those names?

A: Yes, I would like to add them to, you know, the victims' list if they are not there yet, you know. I don't know if the museum has them or not.

Q: I don't know, but when she finds the names, and if they are sent to me, I will forward that to the people who handle those, those data bases, and see that.

A: But I do want to say that of all the people in Europe, the Italians were probably the most noble and life savers than any other nation. The people, not so much the institutions, like the church, but the people. They did not turn anybody in. Maybe there were a few

cases that I don't know of that I'm sure, but they were the most civil of, you know, of all the people.

Q: You have touched on a subject that I think sometimes is very, very important and one of the losses that so many people had who had different experiences, that very often part of the experience a person went through, if they were in Auschwitz or if they were in a concentration camp or they were in an area further north, is that neighbors that they knew --

A: Turned them in.

Q: -- betrayed them.

A: Not the Italians.

Q: And so consequently, people lost faith in humanity.

A: Yeah.

Q: That wasn't part of what your experience was then?

A: Well, I used to somehow wonder, you know, why so many innocent people had to die for what, you know, but I still have faith, and as the Italians, you know, proved, there is, you know, hope for humanity yet.

Q: Okay.

A: I think I've said what I had to say.

Q: Okay. Well, then, thank you very much.

A: Okay. So what happens? Am I being taped now.

Q: Yes. Hang on just a second. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Interview with Eugenia Weiss Greenberg on May 9th, 2013. Thank you very much.

A: You're welcome.

Conclusion of Interview