

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Flory Jagoda
August 10, 1995
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Flory Jagoda, conducted by Joan Ringelheim on August 10, 1995 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Arlington, Virginia and is part of the United States Holocaust Research Institute's collection of oral testimonies.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

FLORY JAGODA

August 10, 1995

01:00:05

Q: Good afternoon, Flory. Can you please tell me your full name and where you were born.

A: My name is Flory Jagoda, and I was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia. You want to know when? I don't think I should tell you -- December 21st, 1923. A lot of years. Actually, most of the survivors are this age, maybe a little younger, a little older. But this is more or less around 70s and so. And they have one thing in common -- silence. They sort of don't like to talk. We don't like to -- it is almost like a wound that, you know, you heal. And you don't want to scratch it. It bleeds. And also, a lot of them do not want to burden their families, especially their children, with sadness. They want to forget. And it works for a while. You have children, and you have weddings, and grandchildren, and music lessons, and piano lessons. And I was teaching music myself for 25 years. So I was quite a busy lady. Then all of a sudden, children leave, and marry, and get a little older. And you know, you don't sleep. You sort of start dreaming, and seeing some images and faces of your family -- and, uh, you wake up in the morning disturbed and restless. And, uh, then you read these horrible stories -- there was no holocaust -- never happened -- and you know what that means to a survivor -- no holocaust? Your whole inner starts screaming. I think the age -- and I also think the story of the holocaust never happened -- is -- I think it broke the silence of a lot of holocaust survivors. Age definitely had something to do with it. So here I am. I'm going to take you to a small little town in Bosnia, and share with you my childhood.

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Actually, I'm not going to start in Sarajevo. We will go about 98 kilometers up northeast

Bosnia, a small town called Vlasenica, very picturesque. It's known for its pine trees. My whole family lived there. Their name was Altarac, the Altarac family. And they were very proud of their name. It meant _____, the high place -- very proud of that. And, you know, all these towns that you read today unfortunately, from Srebrenica to Rogatica to, which is close to Gorazde, to Travnik, to Zvornik -- all these little, tiny towns had -- besides Moslems and Serbs, they also had a Bosnian Sephardi Jewish communities. A lot of people don't know that -- Bosnian Jews -- Los Judeos Bosnia, they would say in Ladino. And they came from Sarajevo. Actually, they were descendants of the Spanish refugees that were expelled from Spain in 1492 -- the inquisition -- Spain and Portugal. The word Sepharad means Iberian peninsula in Hebrew.

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Actually, they had no choice. I mean, they had to leave, or convert to Catholicism, or leave home. They were given three months. A lot of them converted. A lot of them remained. They couldn't leave the country they really loved. My ancestors went towards Turkey. There sultan Bayazid II gave orders to -- throughout his Ottoman Empire -- to let the refugees in, give them freedom, to worship, to build synagogues, and, most of all, freedom to travel through his Ottoman Empire. So there were big communities in Salonika, Greece, Bulgaria -- Sarajevo definitely became a thriving Sephardi community. They called it a _____ Yirushaliam, the small Jerusalem, with their religious schools and -- so, from Sarajevo, looking for new opportunities, they went to these small towns and villages that you read about today.

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Now the life in Vlasenica -- it was a very simple life. The family was very close nit, about 15 families, 15, 16, families -- most of them, Altarac families. And in my family, definitely, the leader was my nona (ph.), my grandmother. My nona was a kind of a grandmother that a child dreams of having, not because only -- I mean, her voice was something that was unbelievable. She sang beautifully. But she was a midwife, a well known midwife, in all the neighboring villages, she knew herbs. Her house was always full of women with babies and children -- "What do I give to this one?" -- "What do I" -- "What herb do I use?". She was the one to put the first pair of earrings through the babies' ears. And naturally, she was the leader of her own band, as we say in America -- leader of the band. She had her own singing family, which was well known as the Altarac family, the singing Altarac family, five daughters and three sons. She was the teacher of religion in the house. Women did not go to the synagogue as much as we see here. The men usually went to synagogue, took their sons, taught them Hebrew. And the woman stayed at home, and she taught her daughters and granddaughters tradition, religion, heritage. All that she learned from her nona, and her bis-nona, the great grandmother, just went on from generation to generation.

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They lived there for about four centuries, and the old peacefully died, and the young were born and married, and there was harmony in Vlasenica -- the Moslems and Serbs and Jews lived in harmony there. I never remember hate or quarrels. The women visited and the children went to school together. I would never, never, never, believe that the madness of the Second World War would bring something.

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So, uh, the life didn't have too much change. And more or less, everybody was quite satisfied, went along with the life as it was. But my nona's family -- there was one daughter -- she just couldn't take it -- that was my mother, Rosa (ph.). And she was actually considered as a rebel. I mean, she always dreamt of far-away places, she read books that she was not supposed to read. If there was something in the family -- or the girls wanted to try something new, let Rosa do it first -- to eat something -- let Rosa taste it first. She was just very, very different. So finally, she talked her family to send her to Sarajevo, which was a thriving -- I mean, big city at that time, huh? And she went to stay with my tia esperansa (ph.). Tia is aunt. And I will be adding some of these Ladino words, because they just fit in with the words that I'm saying. It's, as we call it, Lingua De la Madri (ph.), the language of the mother.

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This was the language in the home. You passed the door, and you did not hear Serb or Croatian words. It was only in Ladino, as we call it, Judeo-Spanish. Sometimes, we would come home and -- with non-Jewish friends -- and I would sort of be a little embarrassed, I would say nona-- can't you speak so -- they'll think maybe we're talking something, you know, behind their back. She would look at me very seriously. She'd say _____. And she'd say, "You know, you are Jewish. You have to speak Jewish." This is her Jewish language. She considered that as her religious, Jewish language. It was written in Hebrew letters, Rashi. And all her prayers were written in that language. So she considered that her religion. She was very religious, and she raised a very, very religious

family.

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Anyway, going back to my mother, Rosa -- she finally managed to go to Sarajevo. And she falls in love. She falls in love with a musician. And what did he play? Accordion and guitar. And he had a gorgeous voice. The moment the family heard a musician -- I mean, it was something you should never even consider. A nice Jewish family -- I mean, a girl, a Sephardic girl, to marry a musician who plays for money? I mean, you are blessed with a voice. That means that God gave you a gift so you can help and share with other people -- not to take the money. But you know, nothing would help. And as much as they really respected the father -- you never questioned grandfather -- whatever he said, that was it. She decided to marry -- Samuel Poppel (ph.) was his name -- very handsome Samuel Poppel. And she found out very, very early that it was no big deal, because Samuel Poppel played all night and slept all day -- and at night, he was out singing _____, which is a Bosnian folk song. And after she had the baby -- she right away had the baby, little Floritza, which is me, she wrote a letter to her father -- "I want to come home." And the father came to Sarajevo, he arranged a real Jewish divorce, and took his daughter and little Floritza back to his house. And she brought shame to the family. A divorced daughter in the family? Never heard of it. Never was a divorce in Vlasenica. So here she was with a child. She couldn't meet with a man because -- the single people -- single men are not going to look -- a divorced girl with a baby. So, she was very lonely. Her life was spent with her family. They sang a lot. They have, every Sunday, a picnic in different gardens. And there was a lamb on a spit, and a lot of singing. So that was, really, her life. And I, actually, was never supposed to ask about Samuel Poppel. It was something you never asked, you never talked

about. I never saw him. I don't even know what he looks like.

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But my grandfather went right away to work to find a husband for Rosa. The marriages were, really, arranged. The father, the grandfather, would call you, you would kiss his hand, and he would say, "I have a husband for you." You would kiss his hand again, and you were very happy. In one way, it was just -- it was very simple. You didn't have to worry about the singles, or "Where am I going to meet a man?". And usually, the father knew what the -- you know, what kind of man their daughter needs. So every little town from the Srebrenica to Travnik as I told you before -- the families kept in touch, they visited each other, and they knew exactly who had daughters, who had sons, their ages. And in between the cities, there were such people as Casmententeros, the matchmakers. They usually -- it was a side job, besides what they were doing -- and they would get 20 percent here, and 20 percent on the other side. They would match, give parties. So they found a match. And it was a salesman who was traveling from city to city. They only spoke in Judeo, in Ladino. The salesman too. Everything was done in this Ladino language in between them. So his name was Mikaiel (ph.) Poppel -- no -- sorry -- Mikaiel Cabeelio (ph.). Poppel was my father who I never met. And Mikaiel Cabeelio comes to Vlasenica, and meets Rosa. And by golly, she liked him. She was very picky, you know? She was a very pretty, pretty girl, pretty woman. I'll show you a picture later -- very pretty. And they arranged a wedding. Naturally, I was not at the wedding. I was sent to play with the cousins. It was something that was not part of me, which -- it hurt, you know, later on -- when you get older, you think back, "Well, how could they do that to me?". You know. Anyway, she gets married, and they go to the city of Zagreb, a big city. This is what she wanted to do, to go live in a big city. And they left. To

my happiness, because I was going to stay with nona. And I adored that woman -- just adored. I think all the feeling that I have for this Sephardic culture, for stories, for songs -- it's all really a gift from her to me that I will have for the rest of my life. It was -- I considered her as my mother. I didn't miss Rosa. It's sad. But that's just the way it was.

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Q: How old were you when they got married and left for Zagreb?

A: Well, before nine. I was about seven, or maybe even younger, because I -- no -- seven, because I stayed with nona two years, until they got settled. And then, one day, my grandfather comes in with a hat on, a real hat. You know, I was used to seeing my grandfather dressed with a _____. All the Jews in Vlasencia and all these little towns -- they were dressed the same as the Moslems. You wouldn't know which one's which. They all had _____, and shuck sheers (ph.) -- that's pantaloons. And he put a hat on because, I guess, he wanted to look a little more modern. He was going to a big city. And, oh, it was tough on me. I hated that day. I'll never forget it as long as I live.

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My nona gives me an orange bag with the pictures of my family, all my aunts. And she said _____, don't ever forget your Mishpachah (ph.), which is, really, a Hebrew word. But it's family. And she gave me a little gold locket, which I still carry with me all the time. And she said, "Anywhere you go, carry that with you. So those were the two very precious things that I had all my life with me, even today. I'll show it to you later. 01:18:19

Coming to Zagreb is like day and night, a difference of life and people and -- my mother -- I mean, I couldn't recognize my mother before anything else. She was very dressed up in very beautiful clothes. And my stepfather, my new father, who adopted me -- and I became Floritza Cabeelio -- he started a necktie business, and she was in business with him, very active, very -- this is what she wanted. This is the kind of life she wanted. She could not take that small, village existence. And she mingled with -- socially, with the Ashkenazi Jews, who are a little different than the Sephardim in that part of the world. They were modern. They were from Austrian background and they spoke German at home. And socially, this is where she felt more important. The kosher that was completely gone. I don't remember anything that was connected to Vlasencica that I could see in her. We did not speak Ladino. It was all SerbaCroatian. And not only that. She had so many things prepared for me -- I think all the things she wanted for herself that she could never get -- had music lessons, piano lessons, ballet, and drawing, and went to Maccabi (ph.) -- that's like, a health club -- three times a week -- had tickets for the operetta on Sunday afternoon -- Lahar, I knew all the Lahar pieces by heart at the time. It was too much to take actually. She had a maid who spoke to me only in German because that was the language, you know, a fine language.

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I couldn't -- I -- the only thing I would like to do is go back to nona and her Sephardi cooking, and her _____, and _____, and _____, all that Sephardi cooking. It was so good. And to hear their language -- I miss that the most, that Lingua De la Madri. And besides, I wasn't too crazy about Mikaiel Cabeelio. I always felt maybe he'll take a knife -- and come in my room -- I mean, I had that fright, until one day I come out of school, and there is Mikaiel Cabeelio waiting for me. He said, "Floritza (ph.), we are going

to buy a harmonica today." A harmonica we called an accordion. And it was my dream to have an accordion. If you have a harmonica, you are usually very popular. Everybody wants to be with you. You can start a party -- but just the dream that I would never believe it would happen to me -- and we go to this -- the store in Zagreb, right near the park, called _____ -- I'll show you that picture too -- and, uh, we went to the music store, and he said, "Floritza, pick any one you like." Well, I saw that little white Honer, 24 base (ph.). And I said, "That's the one I would like to have." "That's yours." And, you know, I fell in love with Mikael Cabeelio. I just-- he was my best friend. The harmonica did it. And we hopped home through _____, west of the park. We live in the -- the _____ is the name of the street, not far from the railroad station. And we come home and I'm all excited. I said to my mother, "look, I have a harmonica." Oh, she was very pleased. She knew how much I wanted to have that harmonica. I took it out, started picking notes. She says, "Oh, no way. You are not going to play music the way our family plays, in Vlasenica. No. You are not going to play by ear. You are going to have music lessons. This is the way the people in big cities do." And she found a teacher, a charming young -- charming young woman -- her name was Edat Schatsberg (ph.). And I took lessons twice a week, walked to her with my little friend, and she loved me. We just connected, you know? Not that I would come to the lesson -- she would give me a hug and a kiss -- you know, you don't hug and kiss every student who comes in. We really developed a deep friendship. Besides, I was a good student. I would ask her, "Let me just hear what that sounds like," and I would copy it by ear, and she would say to my mother, "I never had a student like this right away knows the song." It took two years to get to adjusted to this big city life. I did get adjusted to pretty clothes. I never left the house without a hat and gloves. That was the "Zagreb life", you know?

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Then '41, and the war started, and everything went down, just from one thing. Every day was a new day of new pain, and new fright, and new disappointment, and waiting for something terrible to happen everyday. The first thing that really killed me is we went to school, the teacher gets up, and she says, "Pinto (ph.), Abuhari (ph.), Stein (ph.), Schiller (ph.), Cabeelio, leave and don't come back." That was -- kicked you out of school, so you couldn't go back to school. Then the second day, you were all called to a place, and they put yellow badges on you, badges too, with a 'Z'. Zidov means Jew. Then everybody had to bring their radios in. I mean, every day was something frightening. Then comes Wednesday day it was my music day -- music -- and that was, to me, a day I lived for, because I always had my lessons all ready for Edat. And I come to her door, and she opens the door, and there were two German soldiers in the back visiting with her. This was early '41. The Germans have come and occupied Zagreb. She saw me, and she saw my 'Z', and she froze. She said, "Floritza, I can't teach you anymore. Don't come back." And that was tough and that was hard. That was tough. And I just turned around, and me and my harmonica, my friend, just walked home broken-hearted, just broken-hearted. Since that day, I play only by ear because that was my salvation.

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Everyday was worse and worse. My father had a friend in Split -- that's a Dalmation Coast that was under Italy -- and arranged with him successfully to receive some tickets with Gentile names, so we would get away. I hear my father talk to my mother next -- in the next room -- "This is getting worse. We have to get out of here. All three of us can not go to the

railroad station. We'll have to send Floritza first, and then the two of us will follow." And I couldn't -- couldn't believe what I hear. Me? To go alone? And this is what we had to do. "What do I take with me? What do I take with me?" My mother said, "Take a couple best dress that you have, put it in an old suitcase and, naturally, your harmonica." And I picked up my nona's orange bag, and a little piece of gold, and I was ready to go. Our Gentile neighbor was kind enough to take me. And my father said, "Floritza, the moment you come to that station, to that compartment, don't talk, _____ gavoriti" -- in SerbaCroatian -- "samo svira harmonika, just play your harmonica." And that's what I did. I sit in the compartment, find myself a little corner -- there were three women sitting there and two men -- and I took my harmonica out, and I started playing every song I knew -- repeat and play -- and, you know, we had a party because everybody joined -- some soldiers traveling -- and the conductor came -- he didn't even ask me for my ticket. He sang with us. It was very beautiful.

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Now, the two of us -- you know, there's something about a harmonica that I have to tell you. It is -- you can hug it. See, you put both hands around it, and you always have it almost like a shield and somebody that you could be very close to. And the two of us -- you know what we were going through. But we sort of spilled everything out through the song. She saved my life. She really saved my life. And many times later, the same thing happened. This harmonica really came in so handy when I needed it so badly.

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Anyway, we did come to Split and arrived , I found the _____ family waiting for us, two sons and a very, very friendly wife, and we went home. And every day, I sat at that station waiting for my parents, one day, two days, three days, four days, sitting there. There were two trains coming in. 2:00 and 6:00. Finally, the eighth day, I see Mikael Cabeelio fat, like this. I said, "How he'd get -- how'd -- how'd he gain so much weight?". And later on, I see he put four suits on to save, you know, as much clothes as he could. He liked clothes, you know? He loved to look city-like, pretty. And that was our new beginning of life in the City of Split, a Dalmation Coast.

Q: Could I ask you a question?

A: Please do.

Q: The day that your teacher said, "Don't come back," did you say anything to her --

A: No.

Q: -- or did you just turn around and --

A: I turned around. I turned around. I knew. What is there to ask? German soldiers there who were her friends, or brothers, or whatever. The whole city was in a turmoil with this -- "Jew can only walk on the street, you can only go to the store" -- I mean, it was every day -- that this was just part of bad things happening, that just was one thing after another.

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Q: Did the same thing happen to you with your friends who were now Jewish?

A: I didn't see my friends anymore. Nobody came around anymore. Not that they were bad people. They were afraid. They were afraid. The moment and the -- every knock on the door was something that -- you would freeze -- "Uh oh, now what?" -- and they were already taking people to the camps, see.

01:31:04

Q: What did you know about what the Nazis were doing --

A: What did I know the Nazis were doing?

Q: -- at that time?

A: --All I knew is that they are conquering, going from country to country, and killing Jews. That's all I knew. A teenager is not so much into politics. They're with school and friends -- and maybe go to a dance or learn a new song -- a teenager, a young teenager. I knew there was danger. I knew that they didn't like me. I also knew to get away from them as fast as you can.

01:32:42

Q: But you knew that they were killing Jews?

A: Oh yes. Oh yes. So we knew that they don't want us alive. I did not hear of Auschwitz. I didn't hear of these places yet, no. It was too early. But the rumor was "Get away. Otherwise, you will not be alive." This was right from the beginning and this was why my father worked so hard to get out of Zagreb and thanks to him we did.

01:32:18

Q: And this friend of his, was he somebody who was in business?

A: The friend of his, Sylvia, was a friend of his. He also came from Sarajevo. They were friends as children. Then he moved to Split, the City of Split and luckily was able enough to send us tickets with gentile names. All three of us were gentiles. And it worked. For hundreds of them it didn't work because then it became a regular thing, that they knew--"let me look--is this the right paper"--this was the beginning in '41. So in Split, we found a room, started a new life, my mother found a music teacher right away and I continued my lessons. It lasted a couple months, not too much because refugees were coming from all over the place to Split. The City couldn't take so many new people. So instead of sending them to Germany, which they were supposed to do, they sent them to different islands on the Adriatic Sea.

01:33:38

Q: Who's the "they"?

A: The Italians. And they to me were the most wonderful people in the world. I still--I hear an Italian language, I hear an Italian song, I meet an Italian--I melt because they gave us life. So they send about 300 Jews to Korcula Island. That is about three or four hours by boat--beautiful Adriatic Sea. And we started a new life on this island--nothing to do. The men were going absolutely crazy. The worst was that they were not in contact with the world, to what was going on. We didn't have a radio. You didn't have news. Once a day a boat would come in, a ship, from Split. And everybody would be there--01:34:46 "What's new, what's new?". I became a harmonica player on the island, walked around -- and anybody who was celebrating anything would call Floritza. And I became a teacher. My students were all older, but I was a teacher. They had big accordions. I had a small Honer. My student was a butcher's daughter, she would bring a piece of meat, a baker's daughter--I got a piece of bread. And I had olive oil, and bread, and meat, and cheese--we were rich. We had a house full of food. We ate. It was wonderful. The diet on the island was sardines. That was it. We ate sardines two and one half years. But you know, thinking now, now that we're into a fish diet--we ate sardines and big long leaves like kale a lot of it grew all over the island, and bread -- good diet.

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Life was tough on parents. We children -- we had no worries -- you know, we swam all day. But the men organized sort of a school among themselves to teach because we didn't go to school. So, we had language lessons. We studied English, and we studied Italian, and we studied stenography. We studied anything that anybody was able to teach. And that came in later very handy, very, very handy. We lived there for two and a half years.

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Q: Where did you live on the island?

A: We lived in different houses, whoever had a room to give us. With the natives. We went from room to room, from house to house, seeing who has a room to let.

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Q: So what is the relationship between you and the Italians who were occupying--

A: These were Yugoslavs.

Q: These were Yugoslav?

01:36:56

A: These were Yugoslav islands, former Yugoslav. Speaking SerbaCroatia with a dialect of Italy, but -- and they were occupied by Italy. But they were Yugoslav, spoke the language and generous-- how would you like somebody to come to your house tomorrow, a bunch of refugees-- and says "here, have a room", not so easy. Every house, more or less, had a refugee family and we had a room and a half, starting from scratch, from nothing, you know one box or something--a barrel to use as a table, I mean nothing. Two and a half years we lived--I made a lot of friendships with the local friends, boys and girls--we sang and we swam had a good time. _____ until one day my father says Floritza the captain of the island knows you well because he likes your music and I'm going to get permission from him to go to Split to buy you a bigger harmonica, because yours is a child's harmonica. And

he did. That same day the most horrible news came to the island. The Germans are retreating, going up north, coming through the islands. Well, I was very much frightened. The decision I had to make is do I go with all the local friends to the forest to become a partisan, because that's what they decided to do. Or to stay with mother who was going crazy "My Mikael. My Mikael. My Mikael." I naturally stayed with my mother. And that night, late at night, very stormy horrible night, we all got in a tug boat and went over to Italy. Again, what do I take with me--hurry, hurry, hurry. My orange bag, my harmonica was gone, which was the worst, and my nona's little gold piece--and we were on our way. The most horrible, horrible trip toward the mainland of Italy. We traveled nights.

01:39:25

Q: Why was it so horrible?

A: Well, the weather was very, very bad and the Germans--You could hear planes overhead bombarding everything before leaving. It was frightening. And we were afraid to travel during the day. So we, you know, hid during the day, traveled at night. Finally arrived to the main land of Italy, two days later. It was like arriving to a promised land. I mean it, when we saw that land, You know. And there were boats all over the place. People coming from all over the place to Italy. And the scene that I will never forget was the Italian women dressed in black with big, big, big baskets of grapes, black grapes. And we were hungry. That was great. Anyway, all the refugees came to the Piazza, the middle of the city, and a couple of the organizations, humanitarian organizations, had big tables full of clothes and they took care of our daily needs of bread, but they couldn't find places for you to live. So it became the same situation as when we arrived to Korcula--door to door. The worst was my

mother, to live with my mother, that was the worst. I mean she cried about her Mikaiel. It was impossible. So at the Piazza I would say "You sit with this one and that one"--there were so many refugees there. I would go from house to house from apartment house door to door and see if we can find a place to stay. And after walking about six hours, you know, a lot of them had a way of "No, gratzi" and close the door, you know. I come to a door, knocked on the door and here comes this big heavy set lady dressed up pretty. And I explained to her my situation. Thank god I had learned Italian. And, uh, that I need a room, just my mother and I. "I have a room for you. Bring your mother." So I ran to get my mother to come in. She had a, what you call a "_____." A little room. That was just for her and a couch that she gave to my mother, and two chairs together for me. And we had-- this was a start of a new life in Bali. You go to the bathroom, you couldn't get in the bathroom. There were women coming in and out all the time, all night. And we found out she was running a prostitution, house for the prostitution. So, but she was a good women. I mean, good hearted lady. See, she shared. Okay? And we stayed there a couple of days and kept on looking. There was nothing to do. We walked the streets. And everybody would come to this Piazza. Everybody was coming to the Piazza--"What's new, did you hear anything? Who arrived, what news did they bring?" They were arriving every day with this horrible news. All the Jews in Split were killed and all the Jews from Belgrade are gone. Nothing good. And my mother Rosa, she was hard to live with. She was sure Mikaiel was finished. So one day, I don't know how many days after we found this lovely room. We were walking down the street and all of a sudden I hear my mother, I hear her screaming. A piercing scream right through you. And I turn and I see her frozen. And I look in front of me and I see Mikaiel Cabeelio. Okay. You know, everything in the story is smooth until it comes to this scene. Because there's just no way that I can explain this scene. I don't even know if, uh, Spielberg or whoever it is that makes a movie could duplicate a scene like that.

See, it was so human and so, uh, unbelievable. So -- so everybody stood and everybody cried. And he says--"You're alive. They told me everyone in Corsica is gone. You're alive."

Well, it was the most wonderful reunion and new way to start. Where do we go to sleep. Again, door to door. Door to door. We found a small little apartment, Cassa Popolari. It was a place that Mussolini built for the underprivileged and the poor. A whole unit, unit of little apartments. And we end up very--we were very lucky. And a new life started. And thank god for the lessons, I found myself a job. American army, they were hiring civilians, their offices. And I come in and say I'm a typist. They were hiring civilians. And there was a very friendly Lieutenant Evans from Indiana and he says "well sure come in and, here type this." And I started this (type with two fingers) and the poor guy knew right away I'm not a very good typist. He says Signorina-- they all called us Signorina. We were all Signorinas.-- You know Signorina I have a better job for you.-- He really had a heart. And uh, he takes me to the next office and he says--You see, this is a salvage depot where they bring all the material that is left and brought into Bari-- American army material. So he says, uh, -- "Every morning there's a big black board, write what's the day, the date, and then a young Corporal is going to bring you a piece of paper with numbers. And you take these numbers and copy them in this book ." That was my job, perfect. And every lunch hour he would teach me English and he would bring peanut butter sandwiches and when I saw peanut butter first time, "ew", you know, it was not a very pretty sight, until I got used to the taste. And one day this very handsome Sergeant walks in. I mean handsome. His name was Sergeant Harry Jagoda and he comes from Youngstown, Ohio--and very devilish. All the girls went with him. Full of jokes. And I -- I also was thought his name was BTO. And later I found out it was Big Time Operator. And if you needed a jeep you would go to Sergeant Jagoda. If you needed eggs he would fly to Africa and bring back eggs. I mean he really was a big time operator. he walks to my desk and he says " Would you like to go to a Sergeant's

dance?" I said, well, I have to ask my parents. --"Where are your parents?"--Well, this is where we live.-- "Well can I come and ask your parents?" --Sure. See, you couldn't get out of the house after six o'clock they call it at war time. He come to our house he really does, full of presents. He had a blanket and all kind of good things, you know. And it was Rosh Hashanah -- and my father had a Machzur, a prayer book on the table. Well, he looks at the book and he couldn't believe it. He says "_____." And my father says "Look at _____. You. "Sure we're Jews". Well, that was big excitement because he was Jewish too. And my father says yes, we can go and we all went together. We married that June 24, 1945.

Q: Was he your first boyfriend?

A: No, I had boyfriends before. I had quite a bit of boyfriends before. My first boyfriend actually was in Zagreb right before we left and uh, I saw him quite often. In fact I received a very beautiful picture of him. I'll show you the picture. Uh, asking my father to help him that his parents were already taken away. My father didn't. And I never forgive him for that. The poor guy I guess, you know. War time, everybody watches their own head. Everybody thinks about themselves. And that's what happened, you become kind of selfish, unfortunately. So, who knows where he is today? Who knows--a very handsome boy. Anyway, I was going to go to America. And Harry asks "Are you ready? Could you leave your parents?" I said well, well maybe they'll follow me. What did we have in Italy. Just broken memories.

Q: How was the wedding?

A: My wedding was gorgeous. I mean, I could spend hours telling about my real American

army wedding. He brought a half a parachute so I could make my gown and all the lingerie. He brought a piece of leather and we made the shoes. The whole company came to the wedding and hamburgers to order, hours of making hamburgers and the cook made a big cake and we had a big orchestra. And everybody kissed the bride. You know how many kisses I had. Anyway, beautiful memory. Uh, Sergeant Jagoda had to go back to America, it was the end of the war. I stayed behind and left after. One day coming from work my father, is sitting next to Rosa and she is, I mean a stage again in that I would never imagine her to be in. She received a letter from her brother. It was a day before I left for America and the brother, Lezo (ph.), writing to her that he is the only survivor of the whole Altarc Family. I left the next day. It wasn't fair to her but my ticket and Red Cross Papers from Naples, everything was ready to go. And I left. I arrived to America and it was almost like reading a book and saying "I'll never go back." I'll never _____ this way. Let me start a new life. It's a beautiful country. I fell in love with the country the moment-- I spent a week, I said "This is it, this is a dream come true." Anyway, a life went raising children. And grand-children. Taught music. 'Till one day, I mean, I did go back. I went back the first time with my son Andy and Lori, just to see Vlasenica. But, you know, I was so into being an American lady, an American mother, raising American children and even giving them names like my oldest daughter, her name is Betty Lou (ph.). She hates that Lou. To me it sounded so American. Okay? Anything that would be American was just a dream come true. So I didn't even want to mentally think what happened to this one, or when it happened, or how it happened. I wanted to be an American. So going back to years or how many years I could go back to go to this point where I came to 40 years later, sometimes you don't see day-to-day. But in the whole. You could see I spent great 40 years just being busy with things I love to do. Mostly raising children. I filled my house with song and folk dancing and folk singing. And it was always parties and maybe I was covering up. You know?

Covering up what I didn't want to think about. Kept always very busy. And when I went back with Andy and Lori the first time, my son Andy tells me "Mom, you act so American. You dress in pants." And I didn't even want to even know what happened, I talked to nobody. And then the second time I went with my whole family it was for my 40th anniversary present from Harry to give concerts. We went from Belgrade to Zagreb to Novisca to Sarajevo. Bringing all these songs back to all these communities that have not heard these Sephardic Songs for years. I, myself, could not sing these songs in front of my mother. My mother arrived three years later -- two years later to America and Rosa was a, really a holocaust victim . She was never the Rosa that I knew. I wish my -- I wish my children would have met Rosa the way she was vivacious and romantic and full of spark. She was always very depressed and what hurt her the most was she was very a proud Jewish and the communities that we lived in --it was only Yiddish her generation. One day she asked me "What is shiksah (ph.)? What is shiksah?" That hurt a lot. That hurt her a lot. She couldn't take this uh, the whole life around her that was Jewish life and it was not her kind of Judaism. The language was tough and you couldn't sing in front of her, the Ladino songs. She would say "My harmony died." See her sisters and her brothers, they had an unbelievable sense of harmony. You would start a melody, they would harmonize it either way. No notes. And if you hear, if you would sing in front of her, her face would go like this, you know. She developed a policy. So there was no Ladino singing till after her death. Then people approached me, "You are Sephardic, do you know anything about Sephardic Music?" Well, do I know enough about Sephardic Music. It was just sort of inside. And the first time was when the Rockville Jewish Community Center had a Sephardic Music Festival and that was '77. And I performed that day. And since that day it just poured out. And here I am, still doing it full time. Not just myself, but with two daughters and a son, and we just do the same thing--I think what my nona did in Vlasenica. Same thing, just going around

and singing for people and bringing music. So the second trip was just to go and give concerts which again, I had nothing to do with questioning or asking, but came in as a performer. And all of a sudden again we go back, the children leave and marry and, again you start dreaming. It's terrible. And I had this overwhelming need, I don't know, growing in me somewhere to go back. And that was -- I talk to myself. I say "It's crazy. This is 43 years after, it's forgotten." But I couldn't fight it. I had to go back and see what happened to this family that I loved, with my own eyes. Maybe Uncle Lazo didn't have the story straight. Maybe my mother -- I mean, I found -- I started looking for excuses that I had to go back to find out for myself. And I did. I have a wonderful husband who puts up with all this. Very supportive. And we went back to Vlasenica 43 years later.

Tape #2

A: So when I stopped -- go back to the ____ ____.

02:00:07

Q: Flory, before we go to the time that you returned to really find out what happened to your family, I'd like to go back to those -- first to those two years that you spent with your grandmother, while your mother and her new husband are off in Zagreb--Tell me a little about the kind of relationship that you had. What she taught you. What you talked about, if that was part of your relationship, because she's obviously a very important person to you.

02:00:39

A: Well, the most important person -- I told you before she is the kind of a nona that a grandchild dreams of having. I think what tied me to her more than anything else was the music, because I was very much of the music myself. And, uh, she had a full drawer of lyrics. She really had a hobby. And my mother was one of the best singers too. She was way ahead of her time because she played a guitar. And what girl played a guitar in Vlasenica? And her sister Hannah too. The boys all played tambouritzas (ph.), and violins, and guitars, by ear. And every woman had el pandereta, the tambourine. I mean there was no wedding, or bar mitzvah, or festivity, where this Altarac family were not asked to come and do the music with my nona, Henia (ph.), which was beautiful. And I think why I was so close to her is because of her music, because of her -- naturally, cooking. But teaching us the music, teaching us the prayers, see -- the prayers were all in this little book that was only for

women, Machzur (ph.). And in Ladino and -- would you like to hear a prayer? I have one that is La Bendision Di Madre -- that is, Mother's Benediction -- which you usually sing -- a woman sings as her husband, or her sons, or her sons-in-law, went to the synagogue to pray for her and the whole Mishpacha (ph.), the family. So she's thanking God for giving her children to continue. So she sings in this very -- I mean, the style is very Bosnia, because the language -- yes, it's 15th Century, Castillian (ph.). We know that. Today it's a mixture of many languages. Because wherever they settled, they picked up the words from that country, because they forgot the real Castillian Spanish. So the Ladino that we know today has a lot of Turkish words, has a lot of Slavish words, Italian -- like nona, in real Spanish language, is abuela. So nona is Italian. And we all called our grandmothers nona. And the rhythms have changed. They adopted the rhythms of the region where they settled. So the Ladino, as we know today, is a mixture of rhythms from different countries and many words that were added to the real -- so she is thanking to God for giving her children.

02:04:03

Padre Santo

En Esta Klara I Solemna Ora

Ke Esto Despuesta Para

Bendizir A Miz Fizos

Segun El Dezeo De Madre

Ke Konsiento

Se, O Djo Siempre Pronto

A Eskucar De Loz Alto Sielos

Mi Orasion I Bendision Ke Jo

Bendigo A Miz Fizos

Mi Djo
Tu Ke Me Isziste Alargar La Vida
Endandome Fizos A Mi Lado
Az Me Esta Buendad
Emprezenta Me Los Para Buena
Vida
I Ventura
I Meresime A Ver Kon Miz Ozos
Suz Mazal
I Suz Prospero Inflorisido
Padre Piadozo

Now, these sounds are the sounds that tied us to nona. It has its nigoon (ph.). It has its own style that was part of a Sephardic-Bosnian household that you don't write and you don't teach. You just pick it up as you live in that household.

Q: Did she have a sense of humor?

02:05:58

A: A lot of sense of humor. She had sense of humor, and she was very generous. On Friday, every Friday, at 2:00, we all had to come home from school. At 2:00, she had all the baskets ready. She called it "la tsedaka," (ph.) the good deed. And she would have prepared food for the poor. And we, the children, would deliver the baskets of food. And she would always say, ____ ____, "Don't wait that they should tell you thank you," ____ ____,

"You are lucky that you can give." That is what ties us to nona.

02:06:51

On Saturday morning, all the daughters las fijas, las nietas, the granddaughters, the daughter-in-laws -- they would all come "a besar le mano de nona", to kiss her hand, and wish her Bueno Shabbat, a good sabbath. And she would be sitting there with her _____, the little hat, that is -- hat covering that all the Sephardic women wore. And her pockets were always full of the _____, the candy. In the afternoon, the men would come -- all afternoon to study the Torah with the grandfather. He was a very important man in that household. He was the king. I mean, to have him -- if you don't feel good, if my nonu (ph.) would come, and just put his hand on your forehead you'd feel better. That's so much power, see, of a family leader. So the whole afternoon, they would be reading and studying. Toward the evening, my nona, as I remember -- for years, she always had _____, a headache. So she would take a potato, and she would slice the potato, and she would put in a hanky, _____, and she would put it on her forehead, and she would -- they felt and believed that that draws the heat. Try it, you know, it's just a potato. And with a potato on her head -- and also a cigarette -- they were heavy smokers. All the women smoked with their Muslim neighbors and their strong Turkish coffee, _____, _____, all the little -- a little coffee pot with the round little cup. They smoked and drank coffee all the time. So with the first cigarette and potato on her head, she was just like a new nona until next weekend again.

02:09:07

Each one of the songs that I'm telling you -- stories had a song that I performed, because I

have written all the holiday songs. Thinking of this wonderful family, wonderful aunts, and going from house to house -- that that this is what childhood was all about to me that tied me to this little town that I could not -- I mean, Zagreb-- the big-city life could never make it up to me, you know. I missed this closeness of the Mishpacha a lot. She used to sing songs like, oh, from -- not only religious songs -- but she was full of long stories, like 20, 25, verses. And evenings -- how were evenings spent? I mean, no television, no radio. You sang and you tell stories. All her stories were told cappella singing, real old Bosnian style. One of the songs that she really was good at, because we loved it -- it was a song of a slave whose name was Andeletto (ph.). And Andeletto was a slave who the Queen was in love with. And, actually, the Queen had two sons with Andeletto, and she had two sons with the King too. So she's singing to Andeletto, "Mi Andeletto," "My Andeletto, I love you more than the King and his Kingdom. And your sons are always in my arms. And sons of the King have gold and horses."

Andeletto, Mi Andeletto

Mi que (ph.) ditu en amourado I(ph.)

Mi que ditu (ph.) en amourado

Mas de kill (ph.) y mas diamour (ph.)

Que le de e con amourado I

Que le de e con surdanadu (ph.)

And this goes for 25 verses. But this was her style of telling stories. So naturally, once I left this nona, the life was never the same.

02:11:56

Q: Did she ever talk to you about your mother and being --

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No. That was never touched. The father was not touched. The mother was not touched. Just the family daily life was spoken. Never about her. Actually -- Rosa never returned to Vlasenica. She never came back.

Q: So, she never saw her mother once she left?

A: No. She never came back to Vlasenica. Her summers were spent in fancy resorts on the Dalmation Coast. I was all dressed up and went with her. I couldn't wait for summers to go back to nona. But she never returned.

Q: So you would go back in the summertime?

A: When the school would stop, I'd get on the train, go to nona's. She never went back.

02:12:54

Q: What was it like for you after being with nona for two years alone, essentially without your mother and the man who would become your father, when you first saw your mother?

A: It was terrible. It was terrible. I knew that was my mom. But I had no closeness only because of the not being able to know about who Samuel Poppel was. I was not part of her life. There must have been something closed, where I did not fit, I guess, at that time in her life, see? And I think that was the reason of being far away, one from the other. She gave me all of the beautiful things. I have really benefited out of things she gave me in Zagreb. I mean, I'm a musician today, I go do aerobics like everybody else, and I play golf, and I do many things, because she opened the world to me, see? If I would have lived in Vlasenica, I would just do what nona told me, and I would teach my child, and just go on. So I benefited a lot from her culturally. But I didn't get the love that a child needs from a mother, see? It was very foreign. The whole life in Zagreb was foreign for me at the beginning.

02:14:31

Q: Did you think that in some way she didn't want you there?

A: She wanted me there. She left the idea that I would come in two years after they got settled right away. And when I arrived, everything was laid out -- what I'm going to be doing. She wanted me there, definitely. I had letters from her all the time, packages, clothes.

Q: When you were with nona?

A: When I was with nona, yes.

Q: And did you write her also?

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A: Yes, I wrote to her. I wrote letters, usually, what goes on in school. I sent her drawings, because I was very good in drawing.

02:15:14

Q: Did you become close as time went on, or was there always a distance?

A: I don't know how close did we become because she was a very business person. She was very busy. I got -- I became very close to the maid. She was a great woman. But, you know, she worked all day and went out at night to dinners. No, we never had a time really to get close. Never.

Q: And her husband?

02:15:45

A: Her husband adored her, absolutely adored her. And they were a wonderful couple together, see? And he was good to me afterward. After I had my harmonica. Then it was great. But when she came to America, the sad part of it, seeing this successful, proud woman to become nothing, broken up, just a broken bird -- that was the saddest thing for me to see. And she ended up in a nursing home because she developed -- she had arteriolar sclerosis. He had strokes. They were young and they were very old. They were hurt and they suffered all the time. They both ended up in a Hebrew home. She would not let him go alone. He had to go. I mean, he was really, completely paralyzed. But she would not let him go alone. She wanted to go to. And the last scenes that I see of this couple that were so successful and so

beautiful -- in a Hebrew, she is pushing his wheelchair -- he was in a wheelchair -- like nothing, and she spoke to him only in Ladino, and he sang only Ladino songs. And she spoke to him only in the language that she wanted to get away from. She went right back to it. That was tough. It was tough to see, see?

02:17:32

The meantime, when I did go back to Vlasenica, my cousin there -- I had a cousin -- actually, we will go back and forth a little bit, until we come sort of in the middle. She was the last survivor of the Altarac family in Vlasenica, the only Jewish girl in Vlasenica. And, uh, she lived in her father's house, my mother's brother, Layzo (ph.), and she was a professor in a local high school. And when my husband -- my husband said, "Okay, we'll go," I said, "Let's go and spend our Rosh Hashana with her. So we went to Vlasenica and -- to my Uncle Layzo's house -- she had a friend, Soyvanovich (ph.), who was the Vlasenica newspaper -- was a journalist. He knew what I came for. He knew what I was searching for. He also made his business to research, a little bit, the Jewish Bosnian community, of Altarac. So he said to me, "Flory, I will meet you tomorrow and we will cover the whole Vlasenica." He was there 9:00 in the morning with his camera. And naturally, we went from house to house. But I've seen these houses before, when I went with my children.

02:19:18

Something else I was searching for. I was looking for the roses in the windows of my aunts. Carnations-- They loved flowers. I went to the cemetery. I was searching for gardens, where we had picnics every Sunday -- the _____, we called it -- looking for different things

than when I was there the first time, just to show them I'm an American lady with my American children, and I'm all dressed up in pants. So we -- finally, he said, "Well, I don't have a car. But we'll take a little trip. It's about six to seven kilometers from Vlasenica." And we rented a -- there were two taxis in all of Vlasenica. We took one, which unfortunately broke down half way. So we walked up. It was quite a walk up. And we stopped at a farm, and he called the farmer out. He had his wife there, and the cow, and the -- real farm look -- and he said, "Could we go down to the valley. I would like to show them the place." And the farmer in his little Bosnian accent said " _____," "Why not? Go." So we went over one fence, and another fence, and another fence, just going down. I have pictures of that. I would really like to show -- share this with you. And there was a small tree in the middle. Everything was surrounded with this beautiful forest of pine trees which is known in the whole area, valley. And in the valley there was a ravine? Is this what you call it, ravine? And the farmer says, "I bought this farm in 1956. And one day, we had a storm that lasted three, four, days, rain, rain, rain. And it just filled up with water. One day, the pigs, the dogs -- they're all walking around with human bones in their mouths. And I got all excited. I went down and followed them. And this ravine was filled with bodies that came up." And the farmer stood there and he said, "That's where your family is. All of them." 42 people, nona, the daughters, the grandchildren, the babies, bottles. All of them. All the songs, the culture.

02:22:51

The story was that a _____, who worked with Germans, in 1942, had the local Muslims do the killing. They took all the men and closed them in a big barn, and went to every house, and forced the women to dig backyards, because they, for some reason, had the idea that every

Jew had gold, which was not the truth. They had stores-- were ordinary people. Store in front. The family works in the back, or upstairs. Every-day living, nobody had gold. After they dug all the backyards women had to dig, they took all the women, and their nonas, and the grandchildren, to the same barn where the men were closed, and they had a great reunion, not seeing each other for a long time. Father hugged son. The son hugged his son. And after they had this happiness for a moment, then they killed each one of them, separate, one in front of the other one, and through them in this big, big hole, a mass funeral.

02:24:38

Can you imagine a father seeing his son being beaten in the head, and the grandchildren being beaten, half alive, thrown in a hole? It's hard to believe that one human can do this to another human. And today, you see the same things being done, this mass grave. I don't know if it's a Balkan mentality, or -- it is -- again, I said, like the last time, when my father met us, there are no words that I can use. Maybe, I don't know enough of these words, that I could really give you the picture. But that is the end of the Altarac family from Vlasenica.

02:25:32

Now, one member, my mother's brother, Layzo (ph.), the night before he loosened a board and ran away. And when he saw what happened to his family the next night, he ended up as a lunatic himself, never forgot this. Even after the war, he tried to marry, he had a little girl, Berta (ph.), Berta Altarac, like his mother. But he never survived this. He finally went to Israel and died. He couldn't live with it. Even if he was alive, there was no life.

02:26:17

So this is really the story. We stood there frozen, listening to the farmer. My husband Harry said the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. We were numb. But in one way, you know, I was glad finally to see with my own eyes and hear what happened to the family. I went home and I wrote songs. I just threw myself into music. And every song I have written about holidays -- there is an cappella song, there is a _____, the aunt's song, there is a song about Pesach, Purim, Hannukah song -- it's all about them. So they're with me. They're with me, they're with my children, and they're with my audiences, because they sing these songs. And it's for them. And every holiday, we're together. So that trip had a purpose. And I'm very glad, as horrible as it was, that I did go.

02:28:17

That evening, what is really unbelievable -- friends of mine of Berta, all Muslim kids, they knew who did it. I mean, the city was silent. Nobody remembers what happened to anybody. Nobody. They knew. They came over and we had a party for Rosh Hashana. And I have pictures of that too that I want to share with you. They invited a musician and we sang and we danced. Can you remember a day like this? After which you found out what happened, we sang and we danced.

02:29:07

Q: When Layzo wrote to your mother the day before you left to go to the United States, is that the information that he gave to your mother?

A: Yes.

Q: So --

A: He wrote to my mother that he's the only one who survived of the whole family, that they were all gone.

Q: And did he explain in the letter how -- how he --

A: He explained the same thing I told you. They were all closed, and they were in the barn, and he managed to escape.

Q: So in some -- but in some sense, it was never a reality to you until you --

A: I wouldn't believe it. I would not believe it. I thought maybe Uncle Layzo was not right, or maybe -- I had to see this for myself. There was something -- I don't know what you -- you know, what I had -- the worst -- the worst things that I had -- worse -- is religion.

02:30:10

I had a tough time with religion when I came back. The whole family was so religious. They were raised with the fathers telling them about the inquisition of burning of their ancestors -- our ancestors never had a chance to enjoy their religion. It's our duty to go on and teach it. What did these young kids think as they saw, one by one, being killed? What

did they think? The women screamed ____ ____, "God, help us." Where was the God? I had a tough time with religion. The tough time I had sitting in a synagogue, hearing Hebrew -- because Hebrew, I don't understand -- it was Judeo-Spanish that I understood. But the Hebrew sound had a magic sound, something that my grandfather -- I would see him and my uncles -- he had a magic sound. You didn't have to know what they sang. It just gave you a good feeling in your soul. That disturbed me the most -- praise the Lord business. I had a tough time with that. Thank G-d I had a husband who's a believer, who didn't go through this. That he could take over the religious part in my family. I gave them my songs. I drew the prayer at the seder, the Ladino prayers. I had a hard time with myself. And my children knew that.

Q: Do you still have such a hard time?

A: I'll never be 100 percent with it anymore. No way. I'm a good person though. I make up in other things, okay? I go to nursing homes with my harmonica. I'll show you a picture of that. I cover all the nursing homes and play for the old, I cook, and I -- the refugees who came late, the Muslim refugees, Serb -- who cares. I try to help them all. I give benefit concerts so the money is sent to Sarajevo, which is, really, a feeding kitchen for the rest -- a little bit that's left in Sarajevo today. We spend -- we send money for that. I think I do my religion a different way. But I can't sit there and listen to Hebrew sounds. Can't. The worse is Yom Kippur when they have Yizkor. 11:00, I dread it. I don't know who to pray for. They're all gone. I can't pray for them.

02:33:05

And I guess there is an answer to this. If you would go and really analyze this, I'm sure there's an answer how to overcome this. Since I do my religion in an other way, I'm satisfied with myself. And that's very important, to be satisfied with myself.

Q: Do you ever think that it was your mother's rebellion, her desire to not follow the tradition of your favorite nona --

A: Well, she was not really -- she abandoned religion completely in Zagreb.

Q: No, I know --

A: Everything I know, everything I learned, is from nona when it comes to Sephardic culture. Not from my mother.

Q: But it's your mother who saved your life?

A: It's my mother who saved my life many times. She had that quick decision way of doing things, quick decision that saved our lives most of the time.

Q: Can you give some examples?

A: The example -- one of the examples in Zagreb, when they started collecting all the Jews of the City -- they knock on the door -- there were two officials who wanted to know "Are you the Cabeelio family?" -- "Yes, we are." My mother took her pocketbook and she said, "Floritza, _____," or "Take this pocketbook to your mother." I understood. I took the

pocket book, started running down the street, I ran and ran. And finally, I stopped and said, "Where am I going?," "Why am I running for?". This is when the _____ came for the Cabeelio family. Luckily, my father had wounds from the first war, and he told them that he had a disease. That was right at the beginning. And they let him out. That's when he wrote to _____ to Split right away, "Send me anything, Let me get out of here." But this is how Rosa always acted. Fast decisions.

02:35:16

Q: When you were in Corsila, in the island, was it for you the life of a kid? I mean --

A: It was the life of a kid.

Q: -- without -- but you had some responsibilities. In fact, you were providing food for --

A: Well, I played the harmonica and taught music. That was about it. It's the old people who had a very tough life not knowing what's going to happen tomorrow with us. They could be sent to Germany the next day. That was the worst.

Q: And were you frightened of this as well?

A: No. No. No, I was not. It was a way of life. And when you have people around you who are in the same boat, you're not alone. I had a good life. I play music, see? It's them who suffered.

02:30:25

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

A: No. This is a story. I would not say an Auschwitz story. I don't have a number. This is an experience of a survivor. And all of us have a different story. Each one of these stories are filled with a lot of pain -- and as we find out -- the kind of a pain that does not leave you. I mean, you can be busy, and you can do all of these beautiful things, but it's there. So to carry it for as many years as I did, there must have been a reason, okay? And I accomplished what I wanted to accomplish -- of raising an American family. That was very important to me. I didn't want them to be had. Now, some survivors say it's wrong, they should know, they should grow with this. And I would always say, "What for? They'll be old enough. They'll understand later. Then, grow as happy." My family is a very happy family. You should see my daughters. I mean, they take over when they walk in. And when get on that stage -- I mean, they're stage people. My son, too. So all four are very, very -- I mean, a pride and joy to me. So I think, through that, I have accomplished -- I've done right, see? And a time came when it had to come out, that also I'm happy that I've done right and gone back. The timing to me was right. It worked for me. The pain will be always there. I don't think I'll ever get rid of that. I don't think I even want to get rid of it. That's the way it is. This is the reality. I live with it, see.

02:38:31

But at least I know who I am, where I come from, what happened, and why am I what I am today. People come see me on the stage. They enjoy the songs, because I put all my heart in

it. I feel it. It's not a "Let me sing a song and get it over with." It has meaning. So I'll go on as long as I can, and do my thing, and -- I enjoyed this, I really enjoyed this. I thought -- I dreaded it. I thought, "Oh, how am I going to go through all of this and talk, talk all that" -- maybe, this is what psychiatry is. Maybe, people go -- and to spill it out -- and here I am spilling it for you and the camera. I enjoyed it. I really did.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much.

A: I really enjoyed it. And I hope many people and children, especially, can sort of learn a little bit from this. And maybe I can help them in some way. But I enjoyed it.

02:39:37

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Yes. Well, this is actually two pictures. The one to the left is my nona. It's her engagement picture. As you see, they're dressed very much like the Muslims. But she already has her head covering, because she's a bride. And from that day on, she will be wearing a ____ that you see on your right-hand side. And this is maybe, let's say, 1938. This is the last picture of nona. She's older. They are dressed in the modern clothes of today. But they had never abandoned the ____ and ____ that my grandfather is wearing.

02:40:39

This is nona's family. This is the singing Altarac family. Unfortunately, the men don't have

their instruments -- which I'm so upset and so sorry. But my mother, Rosa, has her guitar, the one to the left -- actually, to the right from where I'm sitting -- and her sister, Luna (ph.), has her guitar. As I said before, they were known as the singing Altarac family. There's my mother, Rosa. Always very pretty.

02:41:21

Now, this is my mother, Rosa, with her brother Layzo. I think this was taken right before she left, after she married Mikael Cabeelio. They were very, very close. And the way that history brings things together, they were the only two survivors. Can you believe that? The only two survivors of the whole Altarac family.

02:41:53

And this is Mikael Cabeelio. He's handsome, isn't he? He's blonde, has blue eyes, blonde hair, not as usual Sephardic men looked. They were more on a dark side. This one was very, very handsome.

02:42:54

This is one of the streets in Zagreb. We are actually going to the kazaliste, to the theater. One of the afternoon outings that was in our program almost every week. These were my very dear friends, ____ and _____. Who knows where they are? Who knows if they're alive? But look at the fashion. I mean, we were all dressed up, always dressed up. Well, I'm, here, I would say, about 13 years old in Zagreb when I was taking accordion lessons.

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02:43:10

This is it. This is my friend harmonica. She has survived it all, she traveled, and she is right here in my music room.

02:43:24

Now, the picture next to it is -- it's her sister. This is not the little Honer, because I have gone to a bigger accordion. But I'm still doing the same thing, I'm walking around, playing, playing mostly to nursing homes, and playing the songs of our people, from their country. And I would usually ask them always, "What country do you come from?". And if it's an Italian lady, I would play some Italian music. For a Polish lady, I would do a polka. So she is still with me. And I love her.

02:44:06

This is Corsica, a beautiful, beautiful island. As you see, the piece of blue water in front, that's where the ships would dock daily. And we would all stand there and wait to get any kind of news, anything; that is, what's going around the world. Also from there, we took that tugboat at night and -- when we ran away toward Italy. Also, the children -- if you see that whole island -- we'd swim around it all day, every day. And it's a beautiful place to go, even for a vacation, today. It brings bad memories to me. But it's a beautiful place.

02:44:57

Well, believe it or not, the one in the middle is me, the teacher, the music teacher. All of my students were a little older. But this was the butcher's daughter and the baker's daughter. And that's where my meat and bread and olive oil came from. So they were really very important people in my life. And this harmonica, actually, is not mine, because my father went to the City of Split to change for a bigger one. So this one is borrowed. But these are my students on the isle of Corsila.

02:45:39

Well, this was June 24th, 1945, the wedding day. Take a look at that Sergeant Jagoda. Isn't he a handsome man? The wedding was really first class America from the cake to the hamburgers to my dress made out of parachute. I mean, everything was just first class. And I love this picture.

02:46:12

Well, this is the farmer who started talking to us and telling us the story of the stormy night. And we are standing, actually, on the spot where he was telling us that that is where my family is, both of these places. And this is where we were standing, just frozen. This is really when I heard the whole story about the Altarac family. And the little tree -- that's where they are. One day, I hope to be able to go back and put something there, a stone, a music lesson, anything that is sort of connected with this Altarac family who gave me so much and left so much behind.

02:47:16

This is the badge that I talked about before. It brings a lot of memories, a lot of pain, actually. This was issued to every Jewish person in Zagreb -- and I'm sure in many other cities -- and you would not ever leave the house without the badge. Because, God forbid, if they catch you without it, you are really in jail. So miraculously, it just traveled with me. I would make sure that this goes with me, plus my nona's bag with family pictures, and the little gold piece that you will see very soon.

02:47:56

There it is. This is the locket that she gave me after I left Vlasenica -- and "Keep it with you anywhere you go" -- and I sure did. It's very old. It's broken up. But it's very, very dear to me.

02:48:22

_____, keys from Spain. Most of the Sephardic communities know the legend of the key. When our ancestors left Spain, they took their -- the keys of their homes with him hoping that, one day, they will return. I have written this song maybe 10, 15, years ago -- and it's on my first album, or second album -- where I'm asking where is the key that used to be in the drawer that our ancestors brought from Spain. My cousin, Berta, when she left Vlasenica ____ that this Bosnian war -- she called me and I tried very hard to bring her to this country, which I did, thank God. And she said to me on the phone, "I left everything. But I have the key."

02:49:17

This is my Uncle Layzo's watch. Actually, my grandfather gave it to him for his good grades in school, when Vlasenica had all that trouble and all the Jews were taken to that forest mountain. After that -- the reason, I guess, that the City was such in silence -- everybody had something -- because all of a sudden, 15 families -- all their houses were empty. Somebody had to have all these things that were in their houses. My Uncle Layzo, after coming to Vlasenica, looked, searched, all over the place for something to remember his family. He found nothing. Finally, he went to Sarajevo. In one of the pawn shops, he bought this watch. And this watch -- his father gave to him. And in fact, when you open it, you can see his handwriting, "To my son, Layzo, for the good grades in school." Education was always very important.

02:50:32

Again, a story of -- this, Berta gave me the first time I went to visit. One of the neighbors was dying. And she called Berta and she wanted to give her something. It was on her conscience. And she gave her this buckle that belonged to the Altarac family. As you see in the middle, it's a Magen David, and it was worn by one of my uncles, or -- I don't know whom -- but it belonged to the Altarac family. It bothered the lady a lot. So she gave it to Berta.

02:51:18

You know, a very talented musician of Sephardic music -- the group is called the Voice of

Sepharad in Saint Paul, Minnesota -- David Harris (ph.) is his name. He called one day. He said, "Flory, I would like to commission you to write a song for my group." And he gave me two words, "You return what you find." Well, what did I think of about? I thought about going back to Vlasenica, _____, and "What am I looking for, the houses?". And this is what the -- this song is all about. I will sort of speak it as you are listening to it.

02:52:03

I start with thinking with the guitar. That's what the guitar is coming out and doing. And as I'm thinking, the scenes come out of the family houses. I look at the windows, I look for roses. And this is what you will hear now.

02:52:36

"The streets are empty. The houses are without happiness, and the windows are without roses, and the carnations, and the beautiful roses that these people love so much in their windows, and the gardens, the gardens without the lovers, and the worst of all, there is no nonas wearing the little head covering, and the mothers with cradles that used to sing to the children -- where have they gone? Where have they gone? Where have they gone? Everybody -- everybody is gone. Everybody, everyone -- everybody is gone" -- the guitar is always your thinking and your searching -- "And the Rabbis that used to pray, the prayers that used to give us so much peace, and the weddings, the weddings of the young ones that used to sing and dance with the tambourines back to the mothers with their cradles that used to sing to their children -- where have they gone? Where have they gone? Where have they gone? Everybody -- everybody is gone. Everybody -- everybody is gone."