

Interview with Esthy Adler

November 15, 1995

Answer: After the war, I came to France as part of a large transport of children who had been collected behind the Iron Curtain and by small stages, brought out from Poland, the Ukraine, Russia, Czechoslovakia and etcetera. We ended up, this whole group of children ended up in a home in Barbizon(ph), which is near Fontainebleau(ph) in France and the home was, I don't know exactly who ran the home, but it was some Jewish organization and most of those children were destined to go to Israel to the kibbutzim(ph). It was run by a couple and their son, they lived on the premises and the man, by the name of Eric Shot(ph), befriended me. And when all the children were moving out to go to Israel, they decided to keep me. They had a son and they wanted a daughter, so I was it. As soon as the home was closed up, after the children left, I moved, with the Shots(ph) to Paris and that's where I really started my life in France because in Barbizon(ph) I was still part of a group that didn't speak French, but as soon as I moved to Paris I had to start going to school and I had to start learning the language. So that's when, when really my French experience started. And I started school and I was one of the oldest in the grades of course, because I was past 11 and most of the others were young children who were learning how to read and write and so was I, but in addition I also had to learn the language. I lived with the Shots(ph) for quite awhile, until Mr. Shot(ph) died and then I went to live with friend of theirs by the name of Katz(ph), Mr. and Mrs. Katz(ph), because they were my guardians. Mr. Shot(ph) was my guardian and then Mr. Katz(ph) the back up as a guardian and when Mr. , Eric Shot(ph) died, Mr. Katz(ph) became the guardian and I had to go and live with them and I lived with them and during that period, I was also going to school, you know, and trying to really catch up, I had to play a lot of catch up, I had to learn a lot of things of course. I found it very exciting, the French schools, I think France was a very exciting country to me, they offered a lot of wonderful experiences I had never had before and I found the people extremely friendly and fun-loving and I had a great time in France. At the same time as I was living with the Katz's(ph), or the Shots(ph) for that matter, I was also very friendly with a couple, they were both Doctors, because in Barbizon(ph), they used to come to examine the children, you know, to provide medical care and they lived in Paris too, with their daughter and that was Dr. Lehman(ph) and Mrs. Lehman(ph) and their daughter Rene(ph). And I stayed on very friendly terms with them, so even when I lived with the Katz's(ph), I

was seeing the Lehmans(ph) quite a bit and then at one point Mrs. Lehman(ph) asked me to come and live with them. It was rather difficult to live in the Katz's(ph) household, Mr. Katz(ph) was a very uptight, very exacting individual and it was very hard to please him and I was really looking for ways to get out of that home. They had two sons, one of them was married and he made his sons very miserable. He didn't pick on me particularly, but he was not a pleasant man to live with and I was a young girl and I wanted more freedom and I wasn't getting any freedom at all and so with the help of Mrs. Lehman(ph), who inquired about it and gave me the information, I was able to become of age before I was really of age. You were, you didn't become of age until 21 and at the time I was 17 or 18 and you had to appear in front of a judge with two or three witnesses to testify to your maturity and your character and then you could be of age and responsible for yourself. So at the age of either 17 or 18, I don't remember what age, probably 17, I became, I became an adult so to speak and I was responsible for myself, legally, which was very nice. I lived with the, with the Lehmans(ph) for awhile, while I was still going to school and finishing up my secondary education, which was I, I have a baccalaureate in philosophy, which I did through the French school system, which wasn't easy, but it was sort of fun. And, and at that point, Mr. and Mrs. Lehman(ph) had to move to Germany, because he was a doctor who had taken his training in Germany and he was not able to practice in France, he had tried to pass the exam, but he wasn't able to practice, so they decided to go back to Germany and open up a practice together and they left their daughter and me in their apartment in Paris. But during the school vacations we always went to Germany to stay with them and on one of those vacations, during the summer, that's when I met Jim. Jim was an American soldier, stationed, the American forces stationed in Heidelberg(ph) and I met him at an afternoon tea dance given by the University of Heidelberg(ph). So I met him, but I spoke hardly any English and he didn't speak any French or any German for that matter, he only had a few words of German, I spoke German and French, but very little English. But we saw each other during the couple of weeks I was there before I had to go back to France to go back to school. And then he began visiting me in Paris and then when he was discharged and sent back to the United States, he continued to write and to send me friends, you know, I had a whole, there was a whole collection of friends who came through Paris and they all stopped off to visit with me. And let's see, what happened at that point, yeah, one of his friends who, whom I had met at the same time as I met Jim, at that tea dance, was a man from Minnesota who was working after his discharge from the army, actually during his army career he was working for intelligence and after his discharge, the American government put him in radio free Europe. So he was in Europe and he was visiting with me quite often and on his way back to the United States, because at one point he decided to go back to the United States because he was going to go to the Woodrow Wilson center at Princeton and, and work there for awhile and teach and

then go back to Minnesota because he had a job at the University of Minnesota. So on his way back, he stopped off in Paris and he stayed for about a weekend there and when he left he asked me to marry him. And I wasn't sure, you know, I mean, you know I wasn't so sure I wanted to go off to the United States and I wasn't so sure I wanted to marry him. But on, when he got back to the United States, he went through New York on his way to Washington to be debriefed and he saw Jim and he told Jim. Actually he didn't tell him he was going to marry me, but he told him that he had spent time with me and that I might come to the United States, because what happened was I said, "Well, I'm not so sure I want to get married." And he was looking for other ways and we had started applications for a Fullbright for me to go to Princeton. So he told Jim that I might come to Princeton on a Fullbright and when Jim heard that, he sold his car, he took his money and he came back to Europe. And about three weeks later we were married. So that's how it happened, that I met Jim, I got married and from then on my life in France was finished and I was moving to the United States. So I came to the United States as a bride of an American, who knew very little English and who had to find her way again in a new country. I must say it was a challenge, it took me a couple of years to, to really get the better of it. But I had to get a job right away and I got a very good job with a, a French government office in New York, it was a French film office, which was a very glamorous job, everybody envied me because I was receptionist, but I was also squiring around the French movie stars when they came to Paris for the release of their pictures, so it was a very glamorous job I had. And Jim worked for NBC and we had about four single years like that, where we really, I really got to enjoy New York and learn the language and you know, and try to fit myself in to the United States. And then we had a child after four years, Laura, our daughter, who is 35 now and we moved to a house on Long Island. Actually we moved to another apartment. I really got used to living in the United States. And then we had a son and after we had two children we decided we better buy a house, so we bought a house on Long Island. I have to explain when I'm saying we bought a house, it seems like a landmark. All my friends wanted houses, I didn't want a house because I never wanted possessions because it scared me to own things. So it took Jim awhile to talk me into for us to move into a house. But eventually I realized that he was right, you know, with two children you don't live in an apartment, it's nicer to have a yard and to have swings and such. So we moved into a very nice house on Long Island and the children started going to school. By then Laura started kindergarten on Long Island and Eric pretty soon started nursery school, where I think I spent more time than he did because I was very often a volunteer there and lived the American suburban life, you know and that was again a different kind of life I tried to fit myself into. So first I was working and then I was a mother and then at one point, Jim had an idea for a publication, an index to congressional documents and for that we had to move to Washington. So here we

were with two small children, two young children, packed up everything and came to Washington to start a new project. And Jim made it perfectly clear that he couldn't do it on his own, I had to be part of it, I had to be his partner. So I had two small children and for a period of 10 years I managed to somehow to be a mother and a homemaker and a cook and also at the same time, create a system for, by which we collected documents on Capital Hill, made contacts in every committee, learned my way around the American government, including what it does and how to best bring on the control of this unwieldy output of paper that the American government produces. And we did. We started a very successful business together and we run that business creating indexes for research and academic libraries, which are extremely valuable. And we run that company for about 10 years and then we sold it, we sold it to a Dutch company, Elsevier(ph), but the company's still going on and most of the people we hired are still there, hired and trained. First I started doing the, the set up of the system on Capital Hill on how to collect all those documents and when that was under control, I put two people in charge of that and then I had to come in because by then we had lots of people working for us and Jim was the creative man, doing the indexing and the dealing with computers, but somebody had to take care of personnel and administration because at one point we were each 300 people, so that was a large business and it needed ... so I came in and I took over administration personnel and I created salary administration systems which I'd, I only stayed one step ahead because I would take seminars and then decide, you know, how we needed to do it and administration, we had a plant by then, producing microfiche and I was in charge of the plant also, which employed about 75 people, which was out in Rockville(ph) Excuse me. (pause). Okay, so where did we stop, yes, so we were running this very large business and I was in charge of personnel and administration in the plant and Jim was in charge of the editorial end of it and after 10 years we sold the company. It was an unusual company, was one of the first of information retrieval companies that we had created and was an extremely valuable company and it made Wall Street history, because of, you know, of the era it sort of brought in to the United States business world. We were extremely proud of that company because not only did we create tools which were very valuable for researchers in academic places, but also it became a tool for law offices, there isn't a law office that doesn't have our index, when they used to create legislative histories, I don't know if they still need it as badly, but there was a long period of time where a law office couldn't operate without our index because that told them immediately what was going on on Capital Hill, to follow through a piece of legislation, from the various stages, with all it's documents, you know, attached to it and whereas they used to have to employ people with long hours to create those histories, they, from us they could do it almost immediately with our tools. So it was not only a profitable company, but it was a useful thing to have created. And we also ran a very unusual

ship, in terms of our employees could buy stock, they owned part of the company. We felt it's much better to share and to have employees, you know, who were loyal to a company because it was partly theirs and also we started one of the first practices of flex time for women with children, where they could work only part-time, you know, as a consequence we got much better workers. Many intelligent women didn't want to take full-time jobs because they had young children at home and that gave them an opportunity to do intellectual work and still have flexible hours. So we were sort of _____ in many social ways too. At this point, did you want me to continue in Washington or do you want me to go back a little bit to New York? You wanted to ask a few questions?

Question: Yeah, I wanted to go back to New York.

A: Right.

Q: And tell me, did you meet up with survivors when you were in New York?

A: No, no, because I, I stepped into Jim's kind of life. Jim worked for NBC, I worked for, for a company on Madison Avenue, you know, a French office and most of the people we saw were Jim's friends or the people we made friends with at work. By and large it was a crowd of reporters, television people, radio people, you know. Advertising people and mostly people like that and maybe some people whom Jim had known as a child, because in fact I had met a couple of, of people he had gone to high school with and I became extremely friendly with one young woman who had gone to high school with him, who stayed my best friend until she died a couple of years ago, you know, they lived in Connecticut, but that was a couple who was extremely close to us. So I started making friends amongst the Americans, but I did not see any survivors. I don't think survivors search out other survivors. I think, particularly in my case, I wanted a normal life and I wanted to step into a normal life. I didn't want to live in the past, I didn't want to talk about what happened to me and in fact I very seldom talked about it. Most of our friends didn't know I was a Holocaust survivor. As far as they knew I came from France and that was it, I was learning the language, I was learning the customs, I was becoming Americanized, but they did not know I was a Holocaust survivor. In fact Jim knew very little about it, he knew, but I never talked about it and he didn't quiz me about it, so I very seldom talked about it and I did not search out any other Holocaust survivors. However, a very funny thing happened. Jim was very politically inclined always and I began to get, to take an interest in politics and we went to a Stevenson rally once in Queens, a huge rally and I looked across the arena and I saw a young girl and I said, I know this person, I knew her in Bratislava. So we went up and I said, "Are you Blanca(ph)? Blanca Bruner(ph)?" and she said yes. I hadn't seen her in like what, 10, 11 years and she was just as amazed as I was that I had recognized and she recognized me too, so we sort of started contact and I wanted to see her and

she called me up and she told me that her father forbade her to see me. And I said, "Why? He doesn't know me." And she said, "yes, that's just it." They were very Orthodox Jews and they didn't mix with any other Jews and she was not allowed to see me. So the only one I could have had contact with, her father cut it off, he absolutely forbade her to see me, because I was not a practicing Orthodox Jew. So that was the end of that. So to answer your question, I did not see any Holocaust survivors, I did not talk about it very often, I didn't read about it. I really concentrated all my energies on adapting myself to a normal life in the United States and I think I succeeded pretty well, so.

Q: Did you ever, at any point, feel that you were missing something, or was it just kind of, you just wanted to put that in the past. Was there a part of you that was curious, wanted that sort of bond or was it lonely? I was just ...

A: Yes, there were times when it was lonely, but it was also amusing, like I would have a friend who would sit over coffee with me and cry that she had an identity crisis and here I was, I didn't know my name, I didn't know my age, I didn't know where I came from and I felt, well, I'm not any worse off than she is. She's having an identity crisis? I don't think, you know, I don't think I'm any worse off. At least I don't know, you know, it's a clean slate. So yes, I did feel at times lonely, because nobody I knew could share with me what I'd gone through, but at the same time I thought, it gave me a certain perspective where more trivial things didn't bother me the same way as they seemed to bother my friends, okay? Many of them were bothered that they didn't have, they were hoping that their careers would have been more advanced and they were busy at home with the kids and they couldn't do this and they couldn't do that and they were very bothered. It didn't bother me to be home with the kids. It's true that I worked until the kids were born. I tried, I had a very good job when I was pregnant with Laura and I would have liked to go back to it, but by then I was working for the United Nations and I had a very good job. I was working for the ambassador from Laos to the United Nations, you know, one of the IndoChinese countries, French speaking. I had a very good job, I mean I worked until two weeks before she was born and they wanted me back and I started negotiating and they wanted me full time and I knew I couldn't walk out of there at five o'clock and yet I had a child and I couldn't see myself leaving the child, so I decided not to work. So I made the decision voluntarily and I somehow didn't feel that I was being penalized in any way. So I had advantages that others didn't have, in a way. And then, before I even had time to turn around and feel that oh my goodness, what am I going to do with my life now that the children are going to start school, Jim said, "We are starting a business." And so when my son went off to Kindergarten for half a day, I went off to work. In fact I had to rush back home to greet him because he only had half a day of school. So I never had some of the problems that I could see my friends had. I had my set of problems because I had

hang-ups because of my past, you know. But, like for instance, you know, taking care of the children, I was always very concerned that they should not catch cold and when they were sick I felt sick and things like that. I'm sure that my American counterparts didn't feel that to the same degree as I did. The anxiety over children, particularly. But on the other hand, they had other anxieties which I didn't have, so I felt I'm not doing too badly, okay, so that's how I felt about it.

Q: You said earlier, in another interview, that you didn't tell your children, so?

A: No, I thought that and I think probably I made a mistake, because I didn't speak about it, they knew I was foreign, yeah I was French, but then, when our kids were in school, there were several kids in classes that my daughter had, who had French parents, so that wasn't an oddity, that much of an oddity for her and I didn't feel I wanted to burden them. First of all, I felt uncomfortable myself talking about it and secondly I was very concerned not to overburden the children. So I didn't talk about it and it's only when our daughter was going to religious school, she came back, want to stop it? She came back one day and apparently they had been discussing the Holocaust. You know there was a period where the Holocaust wasn't discussed to the same degree that it is being discussed now. There is an awareness now which I don't think existed at the time when I came to New York. And she came home from religious school and she asked me am I a Holocaust survivor and I said, "yes." And she was so upset. "Why didn't you ever tell me anything about it, why didn't you say anything about it?" And I realized that I had made a mistake, she was truly upset. And from then on she just kept on digging and asking questions and this and that and I realized that I had to do an about face and face the past and come to terms with it myself, but particularly for the sake of my children.

Q: How old were you at that point?

A: Well, let's see, Laura was born when I was 25 and at that point she must have been 11. About 36, 37.

Q: How did you, in your own way, come to terms with it?

A: I started reading about it, because I started, I started to, trying to put some chronological order into my memories. And that's when I started talking to Jim, but mostly to female friends, I had always very close female friends. I had a couple in New York who were very close to me. And so when I was ready to talk, they were listening, you know and they were always ready to listen, so I would discuss certain matters. And with Jim, too and try to put some chronological order into my memories. At that point, Jim became very helpful because he started getting me books and I would tell him recollections and then he would find books and he would

say, "Your recollections are correct." Like I would have recollections about what happened in the forest after we escaped from concentration camp and he found a book, I don't remember what it is, we have a library of them by now. And sure enough, it described almost the way I had described to him what it was like. Those bands, you know, of deserters and Jewish people hiding and children and this and that and it was very accurate, so I knew that my memory wasn't playing tricks. That's the way I was trying to, you know, to deal with the, and I was able to sort of make some order out of what had happened, by talking about it and then reading up and confirming that my memories were actually accurate.

Q: Did you ever join, were there survivor groups, did you ever, after that experience in New York, did you meet up with anyone?

A: No. As a matter of fact I have a very good friend who lives in New Jersey, who is also a survivor. She had a somewhat different path than mine, in that she was with her mother and her brother all through it, and then emigrated to Venezuela. When they left Europe, they went to Venezuela, so she is sort of Latin American in her outlook because she went to school there and then she came to the United States and she called me once that there was a group of hidden children that was meeting and I should join them and I wasn't ready. I just absolutely refused. She went to this meeting, they had written, they wrote a book, somebody at Yale, I think a woman at Yale, who does a lot of research in that area, put together a book of the recollections of the hidden children and my friend was part of it and she sent me the book. You know, I read her part, I couldn't read the others. I just didn't feel I wanted to go back and dwell on it. I just couldn't read the others. And so I understood that I really wasn't ready to join that group and to share in great detail and just dwell that much. That's not my, my nature. My nature is to look ahead and I can't look, I only looked back as far as I needed to to put some order into it and to sort of present it to my children. But I don't think I want to dwell any more on that than that.

Q: When you say dwell, is it some of the pain and the experience of it that scares you to go back? Describe sort of what's going on in your head.

A: Well, of course there's pain. There's pain, there's fear, you know, there's an enormous amount of fear and you start thinking of how, what a terrible place the world is and it's very hard to get up in the morning. In fact I had that experience when the Holocaust Museum opened and my husband Jim thought that it would be a good idea if we went together with our children. By then both our children were married, so there were six of us going over there. I think for my kids it was a good experience. For me, I came back and it did something. For a week I couldn't function. I couldn't get up in the morning. And I didn't really know why, except I kept on crying and I was having myself a depression, which I am not prone to

usually, I try, you know, whenever there are things that used to bubble up to the surface, I would always, either call a friend, or do something constructive or read a good book and get myself away from it. But going through the Holocaust Museum put me into a depression where I had difficulty pulling myself out of. So what really scares me about dwelling too much on the past is that it does create a bitterness. [end of side one of tape one]

Q: So, where were we? Okay, you were saying why you didn't want to dwell on it.

A: Yeah, I think it's depressing to dwell on it, it's very depressing to me, okay? So I would rather not dwell on it, I would rather look at the life I'm leading now and to my future, really. So I guess I'm finished with that thought.

Q: How did you pull yourself out of it at that time?

A: I think I got the help from friends. I have, I have the most incredible circle of friends and they were calling all the time and they were checking up on me and they were suggesting things we should be doing and they were bringing me books and I started reading again and I started getting involved in life. You know, life is irresistible, it's, if you start getting involved in it, it just carries you along and that's what you need to do and that's really what I did to pull myself out of it.

Q: All right, let's go back for a moment, you were talking about the business. We had gotten to the point where I believe you were going to sell it?

A: Yes, _____ sell it.

Q: Okay, so let's start up at that point and then the following years after that.

A: Right, okay. So we decided to sell the business mainly because my husband, my husband's health at that point was a little shaky and he, it was, he was really suffering from extreme exhaustion, so we decided to sell the business, but it's not so easy to sell a business like that and it took about a year to complete the sale. And then we were staying on for awhile because it was part of our contract, so we stayed on for awhile, but then we, Jim just wanted no part of it any more, he wanted to get out of it, so we renegotiated out, we went to Amsterdam to renegotiate his contract and we left the business in very good shape, you know, with very good people are there running it and it's still in excellent, it's a very good business that they bought themselves. And then we had about a year to decide, you know, to clean up all the paperwork from the sale and the distribution of, to all the employees and all of that and then we decided to do a little bit of traveling and I think just about that time, our son went off to college, so the nest was really empty and he teases us, funny because for my 60th birthday, he gave us a whole speech, you know, they gave me a party and he made a speech and he said when he went off to

college, he had the impression that this is the moment we were waiting for, really, because our bags must have been packed, because the minute he went off to college, off we went. And we did a lot of traveling, we did. I'm trying to remember, I know we made a trip to Japan, but that was still for business, this was, we did one last piece of business for the, for the company which we sold and we had some contracts with Japanese publishers and we had to go to Japan, so we did that, which was very interesting. And we went to Europe, we traveled with friends, with our friends from Connecticut, you know, whom Jim has known since high school. We went to Italy with them, we took a trip to the south of France with them. We had other friends we were traveling with. We went to, we went to Alaska, we went to Australia and New Zealand. We really did quite a bit of traveling and I love to travel. And we enjoy it. We usually go with friends, one or two couples. We went to Spain just recently, we went to eastern Europe last May. So we have done quite a bit of traveling, but the first year we really did a lot of traveling, in the United States, you know, going to the west coast, doing just more, Canada, more local things. And then we decided to open a different kind of publishing house because Jim's ambition was always to be a publisher of books, not of specialized material like we had just sold, but of trade books. So we started Adler and Adler publishers. And we ran that company for a couple of years and we published some 46 or 48 books. And that was entirely different ball game. It was very interesting because I started doing editing, which I had never done before and I really liked it. But after awhile, you know, we noticed that the book business, the climate had changed, it was very difficult to sell books and particularly the kind of books we liked, you know, literary books, serious books, they weren't selling easily, it was very difficult to market them. So we decided to phase it out. But by then I had become involved in community work. I became associated with the Arena Stage, I don't know if you are familiar with the Arena Stage Theater. I got on the board of the Arena Stage and I was very active there. We, both Jim and I joined Jewish organizations, like American Jewish Committee and we became very active, in fact Jim is now President, just became President of the Washington chapter of AJC. And I got on the board of the Capital Children's Museum, I became very friendly with the director there, Ann Lewin(ph) and for awhile I was quite active there, although I'm not active now, even though they still keep my name on the board, I hardly go to meetings any more and I really sort of became very much involved in community affairs of that sort, you know, particularly in the arts. I'm also on the board of the opera, so you know, I go to the opera a lot, I go to the theater a lot and as a consequence of being on those boards, particularly the Arena Stage, we made a lot of friends who are similarly inclined, who love the theater, you know, so there's a whole group of us who love the theater and who play tennis and we play tennis and travel and we travel. We just went with two of the couple to, to London. So we, we really have become more involved in the community. We still have an office and some of the

books are still being sold, but I don't need to go in there because my area was more acquiring books, dealing with agents and editing and we are not acquiring new books, so it's just a matter of running the office and make sure that some of the books that are still selling are being reprinted and sold. So my husband goes into the office, but I do not. And we're very much involved in the community, the Jewish community and such. So that's really what our lives are like right now. (pause). All right, we have two children, yeah I think we should, I want to talk a little bit about the children now, we have two children, we have a daughter Laura, who is 35 years old and we have a son Eric, who is 31 years old. Our daughter lives in this area and she is married and she has two children. I have a six year old granddaughter and a almost two year old grandson and they live in this area and I see them often, so, you know, I also, this is something I really enjoy, seeing my grandchildren. I think probably my past has affected my children, but it is very hard for me to evaluate in what way. When I look at our son, who was married, is divorced now, who came out of, from college, he went to Swathmore(ph) and started teaching because he got married like three weeks after he got out of college and he needed a job so he started teaching and who has just changed his life. He decided a year ago to go back to school, so he is now at Wharton and he is going in for a business degree. In fact, this weekend, we were in, in Philadelphia visiting with him because he had asked us to come and sit in on a day of his classes, which is extremely interesting, it's some school, Wharton, it really is. Very high-powered and the people, the young people, they are very bright, very quick. It's really, it's satisfying to see so many intelligent and quick-witted people who are going to be, you know, running our business world. I think it's sort of satisfying. He seems, I don't think anybody could tell that he is a survivor, that he is the child of a survivor of the Holocaust. I don't think he was affected by it. He has his problems like everybody else has their problems and he has his areas of tensions, I'm sure, but I would say that, touching wood, Eric functions as an extremely well-adjusted and happy individual. Our daughter I think, bore more of the brunt of it. Maybe it's because she's more sensitive and she digs around in the past more. She's very interested in what do you call it, in family trees and things like that and I could not provide her _____ knowledge. I could not provide her with a family background, of course. I think it bothered her always, okay? But she married somebody from the midwest, who has a very long lineage, which can be documented and goes all the way back to Scotland, he's a Scotch man and so she's perfectly happy and she digs around in his family trees and that keeps her happy. With her I think that she, she bore more the brunt of it because, first of all because she was older and secondly because she takes things harder than our son does and I think she's convinced that my having been a Holocaust survivor, in spite of the fact that she didn't know about it for the first 10 years of her life, had a big effect on her because I was too protective, I worried too much about, you know, that she shouldn't catch cold, that

she should eat the right things and things like that. But then I point out there is plenty of American mothers who do the same thing, so I don't know whether she's right or not and I think it's futile to even spend too much energy discussing it. If that's what she wants to believe, that's okay, but Laura hey, there's nothing I can do about it. My past is my past, you know. You're just going to have to accept it the way I'm accepting it. I think she has more difficulty accepting my past than I do. However, maybe with age, that will fade also, okay? I think one of the things that bothers her the most is that she is fearful and she is scared, but if she had to be in my shoes, she would not have survived. And no amount of my telling her, "Laura, nobody knows what they can do when they have to do it and nobody can, with certainty predict that if I do this, this or this, I will survive. It's a lottery and you have to take it the way it comes." I don't think she quite buys it and she feels ill equipped to have survived the same things that I survived, which, you know, no matter what I tell her about it, that I don't know how I did it either and if you had to do it, you probably could do it too and nobody knows in advance. It doesn't matter how much I reinforce that, she has her ideas that she is not quite up to snuff to survive in something like that and finally my answer is, well I hope you never have to and that's it, you know, because there's nothing else I can do about it. So I think she has been affected by it in that, in that way. I don't know what it's called, _____. I think maybe she should join a group of children of Holocaust survivors. In fact, I have mentioned it once, but I don't know whether she will or not. Right now she's much too busy, she has two children, she just finished her Master's degree in counseling and she's going to do art therapy. Right now she has, she works two and a half days a week with disturbed teenagers, where she does art therapy and she has two small children. I don't think she can take, take on anything more. And she's, also she joined, even though she is married to a Quaker, a non-Jew, she joined the temple, the local temple where they are members and she's very active in the temple, so I think she has plenty to do right now and I'm not even suggesting any more that she should do anything else. As a result, we have joined their temple too, which is in northern Virginia, because we felt that, since our son was out of town right now anyhow, we might just as well spend the holidays and go to temple where our daughter is. In fact, she's much more observant than I ever was. Every Friday she lights candles with the children and she says the prayer over wine and bread. At least once a month they take the kids to what they call Tutshabat(ph), you know, services for the whole family. She goes to all the functions at the temple and she has joined a group, I forgot what it's called, they are young people who are studying Judaism and how, what Jews now can do and expect of Judaism. And she committed herself, she went to several seminars. You have to commit yourself, I think it's an arm of UJA who is doing that and it's, she feels very Jewish and she feels very proud to be a Jew, because there's so much intellectual accomplishments amongst the Jews. Our son is non-practicing,

however he surprised me greatly, he got married, when he got married, he married also a non-Jew, but the, a rabbi married them and she accepted to raise the children Jewish. In fact she committed herself voluntarily. But that's immaterial at this point because she's divorce, even though we still continue to see my former little daughter-in-law because I mean, she was part of the family, you know. So we still are in touch with her. He's not, but we are. He is now at Wharton and he is very much career bound now, to make his way, what he's doing, but he surprised us, he called on Yom Kippur to say he was fasting. So, you know, I guess he's not a practicing Jew, but he's a Jew and I think he knows he's a Jew and I think he will continue the tradition. So that pleases me. Anything else?

Q: What kind of role did Judaism play with them growing up and with you and your family?

A: They went to, well when we lived in New York they went to, my daughter went to religious school, my son was too young. She went to religious school, she's a very quick study and she's very bright, so she was learning Hebrew and she was learning all the songs. And she still knows them. Then, when we moved here, we joined a congregation, which was Bethesda Jewish Congregation, which was a very strange congregation and not too successful for us, because the kids hated religious school so much, it was so poorly organized and so poorly done, that they absolutely refused to be bar mitzvahed. And we decided not to force the issue. Now my daughter is, has voluntarily come back to it and I'm hoping that my son will do the same thing. When he was getting married and he married a non-Jew, I said, "Just don't forget where I come from, that's all I'm asking of you." And he said, "Mom, I promise I won't." And I think that's good enough for me, so.

Q: What about you personally and how your ideas changed about Judaism, after?

A: Yes, yeah, well I must say, I was a very reluctant Jew, if you go back in my history, the way the Jews grabbed me away from Poland, I was a very reluctant Jew, but I have slowly come back to it. I've never denied it, but I never practiced it. I think I'm somewhat more Jewish oriented now, I realize that we are a small minority who has accomplished enormous things in spite of all the difficulties. I think the climate is changing also and that Jews are going to be more, treated with more respect, at least I hope. We are very much identified with Jewish causes in the city and we do belong to a temple, where we feel that, we don't, we go there because Laura wants to be more practicing and we go for the holidays and we take the children there, you know, for Sukote(ph) and _____ and things like that. So I think, plus the fact, oh there was something else happened. I went, a friend asked me to go to bible class with them, given by a woman in her home, Naomi Rosenblatt, about whom you might have read about because she just came out with a book, *Wrestling with Angels*? Yeah. Well I took some bible classes and I

think that sort of also helped me along a little bit. It sort of portrays the Jews as a mixed lot, you know, it doesn't try to gloss over the imperfections and I decided that they are people, like everybody else and you have to sort of identify yourself with them. So it has helped me to sort of get back into the fold also, the bible classes.

Q: Okay, I just want to go back for a moment and talk a little bit more about some of the difficulties in making the transition to the States.

A: Well the first difficulty I had to grapple with was language, when I came to the United States, you know, how to learn the language quickly, because even when you speak a language, for instance, you don't think of stupid little things like, we would go out in a group together and they would say, tell jokes and I wouldn't understand the joke, okay? So you sort of feel out of it, you feel like the outsider and I must say that, even in the United States, which has greeted me with such warmth and accepted me, you know, people accepted me everywhere, I very often do feel like the outsider. Like they reminisce, with a great deal of nostalgia about the good old days of certain songs, or the big bands and I'm looking like, you must be kidding, what are you talking about, you know, I can't even figure out what they are talking about. Oh, I remember when we were in, living in New York and a group of us, eight of us, went to see Judy Garland, was singing at one of the, the big, the big theaters and we went to see her and I thought she was awful, she was drunk, she couldn't sing and everybody was clapping and standing up and giving her. It's the nostalgia of the past which I am not sharing with anybody, even with people who are very close to me, like my husband, I am not sharing the nostalgia of the past. I know I am an outsider whenever they talk about school days or songs or music or the musical theater, I'm the outsider. But that's one thing I have to accept, I mean it's not so bad, actually, to have to accept that. So that's one area where I felt out of it, plus the fact I had to learn the language very quickly. There are other ways, you know, which, there are times when I feel, when I read about what's going on in Bosnia for instance, I feel such, I have such a desperate feeling that, why are people doing that to other people? You know, I still am trying to understand the cruelty that men are capable of. It's, I think it's affecting me more than it's affecting other people. I have reached the point where I can't, I simply cannot, couldn't read about what was going on in Bosnia, or about what was going on in other countries in Africa and places like that. I've, it, I took it too personally, you know. Probably much more personally than Americans by and large would take it because I lived through something like that. It's still incomprehensible to me and I cannot understand that it's still going on, that people are still doing things like that. So that's an area where it's giving me a great deal of difficulty. I sort of, I protect myself. I don't read about it, I don't want to know the details, I'm staying away from it. It's cowardly, but it, that's the only way I can work it. There are ways also that, you know, there are times when I have a lot of self doubts, you know, I haven't, I'm

not always, I'm pretty well assured and I am very self reliant, but there are times when I feel I'm in situations where I feel I haven't been equipped right for them. For the longest time, although that's less and less, I had the most tremendous gaps in my learning and knowledge, you know, like history, I didn't learn about it, I didn't start until I was 11 years old to learn how to read and write, so consequently I have enormous gaps of knowledge in places which most people feel very confident and very comfortable in and I'm not, you know. So then I have to pedal back and say, "Oh, I have got to inform myself on this." So I am always playing catch up. No matter what I'm doing, I'm playing catch up, okay? But at this point I'm quite comfortable because I have noticed that other friends of mine, who have had a pretty normal life, playing catch up in many ways too. So, but it took awhile for me to feel that I'm not the only one who has to play catch up. There is no such a person, who has an enormous amount of knowledge in every area and they can feel confident in every area, you know. Most people have gaps in areas. So that's another one. When I'm feeling disturbed, when I'm feeling upset or things like that, I can very well go through very disturbed nights where I'm dreaming and most of the time I'm dreaming that my life is in danger, which I don't think most people who have had a normal life, do dream about that. My life is in danger and I'm running for my life, you know. It's a very uncomfortable feeling to have, but I have to deal with that. It's not uncommon for me to wake up in a sweat because somebody has been chasing me and has been shooting at me. I have to get over it.

Q: Have you had, because I remember dreams played such an important role in your survival in a way, have you had even dreams about people from the past at all?

A: All along my life, yeah, I do dream about people from the past, people in France I have known, occasionally a person will surface who I think is either my father or my mother, but it's not very coherent and it's not very clear, but I do, yes, I definitely do dream about people in the past.

Q: Another thing that strikes me is, and you sort of touched on it earlier about how difficult it was for you to, your husband had to convince you to actually buy a house?

A: Yes.

Q: How do you look at even, home and how was that transition, it seems that it would have been a difficult one. Maybe you can talk about that a little bit more.

A: Yeah, I'm not very much attached to material objects, you know, it's, it's sort of, it's almost like they are on loan to me, you know. So I have a car now. It took me a long time to get, acquire a car, have a car, but it's only an object and it's on loan to

me, somehow. My homes have always been like that, you know, they are on loan to me, they are not part of me. I know that many of my friends, their homes are so, or their possessions are so important to them, you know, it's a great comfort to them. To me it's not really that much of a comfort, possessions. Yes, diamonds, because I can pack them in and run. So you know, a diamond is to me a prized possession because it's something I can take with me and it will feed me for awhile. Not because it's a diamond, but because it's going to feed me for awhile. Other things don't really count. My son always teased me, he cooks, he likes to cook, my son and he is the one who always had to go out with my husband and buy all the kitchen gadgets, because I never had the kitchen gadgets. I cooked, but I always make do with what I had, I never needed a million gadgets like most cooks I know need, you know. They provided me with the gadgets. Otherwise they knew I wasn't going to go out and buy the gadgets. So, it's sort of that and also when we had children, you know it's funny to mention it because I don't know whether people think of that. I had a hard time having more than two children, because I only have two hands and if I needed to run, I was going to grab a child with each hand and run. So for me, more than two children was out of the question. How could I have run with three children? That wasn't going to be feasible. So that's why we have two children. I happen to like children a lot, it's just that, that thing, that fixed idea that if I had to run, I only have two hands and two children I can manage, but more than that I can't. So that's another, you know, there are little things like that which you don't think of. I used to drive my kids crazy if they had a rash, I was always there with the powder, you know, the Ammen's powder. I just drove them crazy with that, because to me having a rash was dangerous, because if you had a rash, you got yourself shot, because it meant you had, you had contact, contracted some disease and they weren't going to fool around, to have the whole barracks infected, so they were going to shoot you. So to me a rash is an ugly thing, life threatening, absolutely life threatening, so that's another. You know, you have those things that are very, come out in small ways, you know, very unexpected ways really, that they come out.

Q: Do you have to sort of catch yourself doing this?

A: Yes, oh absolutely, yeah and in the end I made a joke of it, you know, that's the only thing you can do about it, make a joke of it really, so. Also I think it has affected my friendships. I'm only, I will not be friendly with somebody on whom I cannot have confidence and count on. I have to be able to rely on somebody. If I have somebody who I notice is not reliable, they do not, they are not amongst my best friends. You know, they are acquaintances, but I will never make a good friend of somebody who is not a very reliable person. Most of my friends are extremely reliable, so.

Q: Tell me some other ways you think the Holocaust sort of played into your life.

A: I'm very self-reliant. I think for the longest time it drove Jim crazy that I would never take anybody's word for something, you know I would listen and then I would usually try to make up my own mind and it's very difficult for me to follow somebody else's advice unless I have really given it some thought and decided that it was very good advice, that it made sense and that I have internalized it. I'm not a follower, I can't follow, because following would have meant death to me, I had to make up my own mind whether I was going to go on the right or the left, because the right might be death and the left might be life. So it can be difficult for a spouse, you know, that you have to make up your own mind about everything. I think I have somewhat softened it, you know, because if person, if people have proven themselves to have very good judgment and to give me very good advice, I'm more likely to take that advice now. But when I was younger, nope, I wouldn't take anybody's advice, I wouldn't take anybody's word for anything. I had to really make sure for myself that where I stepped was safe. And it can be unnerving for a person who has lead a normal life to come across somebody like that, it was very unnerving for my husband.

Q: How did it affect your marriage, because you said that you didn't tell Jim initially about it, so if you were to act like that, I was wondering how he would figure out that that was where it was coming from?

A: Well, he knew.

End of Tape 1

Tape 2

Q: Okay, let's start again with how the, your experience affected your marriage, your relationship with Jim.

A: I don't know whether my experience, well it probably did in one way and that is, having been a survivor, I realized that surviving meant helping each other, okay? You didn't survive unless you got help and consequently I probably was of much more help to him than an American wife would have been. Jim had his problems getting adjusted to work and working for other people, he never could work well for other people and I was always a partner to him in that respect because first of all, I understood very quickly what was bothering him and I was able to, he was able to talk things over with me. He never made a move in his career without talking it over with me and without getting my help. I think that Holocaust survivors, at least my impression is, have an enormous amount of empathy for others and for their problems. Maybe I'm generalizing too much, maybe I'm just speaking, I have an enormous amount of empathy for other people and their problems and certainly for a spouse's problems. So, consequently I think I was more helpful to him than I think an American spouse would have been. So in that respect, he got the benefit of my having been a Holocaust survivor. The same time, he probably got some of the drawbacks, like I was much more cautious. But I wasn't cautious to the point where I could, I would call him back, because as a matter of fact when he went into business for himself, I remember sitting with friends and a friend saying, "How could you let him do that? I would never let Les go into business for himself, it's too threatening." I could do it, because I knew how important it was to him, you see and I knew that it was important for him to do work that was satisfying and where he was happy. So I could, you know I could help him. In fact I help him very much when he went into business for himself. In other ways, I probably had more patience than most normal people, quote, normal people would have.

Q: What about the self-reliant part you were talking about before?

A: Yeah. Well that annoyed him very often, that I wasn't more dependent on him, you know. Our generation, women were much more dependent on men and men liked that. I think Jim missed it to a certain extent, that I was so completely self-reliant and didn't depend on him. I had to learn to soften it a little bit, you know.

Q: When you say self-reliant and not dependent on him, do you mean emotionally, or?

A: In many ways, different ways. Emotionally, opening doors for myself or doing things for myself, you know and emotionally too, you know, not being, not being that reliant on him. Feeling I have to make my own way, I have to, you know, I

have to stand on my own two feet, I can't, in a way, probably without him knowing it, that was good for him, because it allowed, it liberated him to do his own thing. But I think there were times where he was annoyed because I was so independent. And I softened it and he got used to it. So I think what it sounds like is like a normal marriage, doesn't it?

Q: Yes.

A: I don't think there was anything abnormal about it.

Q: Yeah. How long have you been married?

A: 40 years. It will be 40 years this June. That's a long time, yeah, that's a very long time. I don't know. Well, another positive fallout from my past is that I'm very observant, because I had to learn, my life depended on it and that stood us in very good stead when we went into business together and in other ways. I could read people's reactions very quickly and many a time we would go into negotiations and I would be sitting there and men were wondering, "What is he doing with his little wife there?" You know and I would listen very carefully and then I would play back to him what happened and tell him that we had to do this or that because this is what I observed. I don't think he would have observed that and as a matter of fact, he said so, he never would have observed it. It was sort of uncomfortable, here I was, a whole room full of men and me, you know and sometime everybody was looking, I am supposed to get up and get coffee only I'm not getting up to get coffee you know, I'm sitting there listening. But after awhile it became normal for us to operate as a team like that and even the Japanese got used to it, they didn't know what to make of us when we got there, you know, who goes first, me or him? When we have to march into the president's office, who goes first, Jim or me? They were completely confused. I think it brought more advantages than disadvantages. I'm sure there were disadvantages, I'm sure that I was much less spontaneous than normally brought up people would be, but on the other hand, I brought all the advantages.

Q: What would you observe when you were sitting there? Give us some examples.

A: I would observe people and what, how they reacted, their facial expressions and how they reacted and I read people pretty well. My survival depended on it, to read people well. So I can, I can make a pretty shrewd guess, usually, about what they wanted out of a deal or what they weren't going to give up and, you know and be helpful in that way.

Q: Was your observations usually correct?

A: Yes. Yeah, he learned how to rely on them completely because they were usually pretty correct. My readings were pretty correct, yeah.

Q: It sounded like you have this, it's almost I guess a gift, in a way, of seeing things, or sort of perception that's very sharp.

A: Right.

Q: How else did that work into your life?

A: Maybe being more understanding, you know, understanding more when somebody was having difficulties delivering on times, you know and doing things like our employees, I was, rather than firing them, I was more apt to moving them around from job to job to see if we could find a spot for them, you know what I mean? I did a lot of that and that was usually on my advice, you know, let's not fire them, they're not working well, but let's try to see if we can fit them in somewhere else. So that's another way it would work.

Q: What about your children?

A: Well they claim that I was a very strict mother. And at the beginning Laura would say, "That's because you're French," and I said, "You're right, that's fine." You know, it didn't matter, I would be very strict, she had to be home by a certain time, she didn't like it. We had to eat our meals as a family, you know, they wanted to, to eat on the run and run out and we'd, why did we have to eat dinner together, you have to eat dinner together, because that's when we are sitting down and talking together. So, and the other thing is that we never went off on too many vacations with our children, without our children, you know, friends of ours would go off and leave the kids, you know, either with a grandparent, we didn't have a grandparent to leave them with, or with a maid and I never did that, I never had a full time maid, you know, I only had help, but I didn't have a full time maid taking care of children, I was always there and consequently our children always came on vacation with us. We had to travel without them on business and that I had to and I had no choice, but if it was for pleasure or vacation, they always came with us. As a matter of fact Eric and Laura came to Europe when he was seven years old and she was 11, because I went to Europe. And we made many trips together, to England, to Italy, to France. By the time they were teenagers, they had already traveled and they were always traveling with us. As a consequence, our kids spent a lot of time with us. I think that's probably why. I know that my friend complain they don't want to go with them anywhere. Our kids are the ones who suggested, we have made it now a family tradition that for Memorial Day we all go away together, with all the children. We used to all go away at Christmas time, between Christmas and New Year when Eric was still in college and Laura was already married, until Laura had

a child. We always went away for a week to Vermont, together. We spent a lot of time with the family. Birthdays are always a big celebration, you know, it's like a three, it's like a Polish wedding. From the time they were very little, they had a party where they invited all their friends and they played games, they had one day when they wanted to go to the favorite restaurant for dinner, just the family and one day where I had to make their favorite dish at home. So it's was always three celebrations for each birthday. Our daughter complained that when she went off to and I was ____ too, when she went off to college, nobody made a big deal about the birthday and she felt very let down, you know. So I, so they were, I was sitting there, getting reproaches that we made too much of a big deal about birthdays and so when they went off to college, suddenly the rest of the world didn't sit up and take notice of it. I said, "Well, you will forgive me, I hope, you know, that I made a big deal about it." Jim didn't have a very happy childhood, he can't ever remember a birthday party, his parents haven't given him, so consequently his birthday is always celebrated with a great deal of fanfare. So we have those big celebrations, the family. We are a small family, but we always have lots of celebrations. So that's a way of, of _____. Another way that I can notice now with my grandchildren is, and that's not too good, it's almost like I see in my little granddaughter, me as a child and I am so protective of her that I am driving her mother crazy at times. So I had to take a step back and say, "Cool it." Okay? I am very protective of her. I will notice much faster than her mother when she is not well. You know, when she has a cold brewing or something and I will say, "Laura, I think she's coming down with something." You know, because I am so, I'm like a hawk over her. It's not good. So I am sort of trying to step back and not, my daughter's much more laid back. She had a cold, she has a cold, she will go to school anyhow, you know. I would never do that, but I have to step back and say well, that's her way of running things, okay? So.

Q: One thing I wanted to ask you about is you were born in Germany, where do you consider yourself, you say the kids said, "Well, you're from France, " so talk about that, how that affected you.

A: Well, I told everybody I was from France because it would have been too complicated an explanation and telling my life story to everybody who asked me where I was from. It was easiest to say I came from France because I spent quite a few years there and I went to school there, so consequently, and I liked France, I really liked it, so it was very easy for me to say, I grew up in France, but I was born in Germany and that's usually what I tell people and it's pretty accurate. You know, because I don't have, I cannot tell them all the detours I made, it's just too many and it would tell that, you know, when you start with one ... so how come you were there and how come you were there. It would be very difficult for me to explain that

without telling my story to everybody and I don't like to do it. I wanted to make a point, what was the point about?

Q: Considering that you're not from anywhere, you feel?

A: I don't, I feel like I'm a visitor everywhere, I'm not American, however I have lived in this country longer than in any other country. I've lived in this country for 40 years. I'm not a typical American, but I'm not a typical anything. I consider myself a little bit like a visitor. Maybe a permanent visitor, but I'm a visitor none the less because I didn't grow up here and I don't have all the costumes of this country. I felt the same way in France, even more so because I was still learning French, I wasn't an adult and I was much more self-conscious about it. Here, in the United States, there are so many more foreigners and so many more strangers, I mean the whole United States is sort of an amalgamation of strangers, I feel more comfortable. In France, if I lived in France now, I probably would find my own level in the city, I probably would find people with a variety of backgrounds and I would fit myself in there too, but I don't feel like France is my home country, Germany definitely not. Any of the other countries I went through, like Poland, Ukraine and Czechoslovakia, not at all, you know, they are foreign countries to me and I think the United States is where I'm feeling the most comfortable, really.

Q: Just lastly, is there anything that you have in the States, that you consider, almost something that, as a keepsake, or being in a country where, you know, it really was foreign when you first arrived, was there anything that you held onto for memory's sake?

A: Well I certainly hold onto a lot of memories, I have lots of memories. I have books in French, which were given to me as gifts by friends when I was in France. I got a first rate education in France and that stays with me. It has made me into a book lover, forever. I am a very big reader, I read a lot of books and I belong to two different book clubs, where we meet and discuss books that we read. I can't imagine a world without books, so I mean, where ever I go, I have my friends following me. It's a very comforting feeling to have and I, if I'm through reading and I don't have enough books on my night table, I have a very uncomfortable feeling like, a little bit like a junkie who hasn't gotten their fix. I always have two or three books sitting there that I'm going to be reading, so that when I'm finished with one, I can go onto another. I would say that books are my pacifier and my security blanket. But that's not strictly, it's not representative of any one country. It's just that I feel like anywhere I am, if they're are books to be had and read, I'm comfortable, I have my security blanket there, so.

Q: Okay, just one last question, what do you consider your identity to be now?

A: I think I consider myself a citizen of the world. I do like the United States, I feel very comfortable here now, I like my life here, but I also liked France and I, I feel like I probably could live in any country if I had to. It would take me a little longer to learn the language now that I'm older, but I probably even would learn the language if I had to live in another country. But I would say that my strongest bond is to the United States because my children are so typically American. Both my children are absolutely, typically American and so are my grandchildren. I think I ought to tell you a funny little story about, about my little granddaughter. My son-in-law is of Scots, Scotch origin and his name is Linley MacGrew(ph), so my grandchildren are called MacGrew(ph). Now, they go to religious school and Amy has to always explain, "My name is MacGrew, but I'm Jewish" and then she elaborates on it, "My mommy's Jewish, my brother's Jewish, I'm Jewish, but my father is not Jewish." That's how she explains it, so that's a pretty, that's a pretty good fix to have on life, I think. She has the right fix on life, so.

Conclusion of interview.