United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer
May 28, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer, conducted by Sandy Tolen on July 28, 1994 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Lexington, Massachusetts and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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.

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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection, this is an interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer, conducted by Sandy Tolen, on May 28th, 1999, in Lexington, Mass-Massachusetts. This is a follow up interview to a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum vido-videotaped interview, conducted with L-Liane Reif-Lehrer, on -- in 1989.

Answer: It was early 1990.

Q: Or early 1990. We'll provide that date shortly, matter of fact -- the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. Okay, so, now we start and we know who we're sitting with. So, I guess there's -- there's some things probably, that have occurred to you since then, that you might want to -- to explore, and I want to invite you to take the opportunity, during the context of what we're talking about, or the chronology, or if there's things that just come up along the way that you want to discuss, we can do that.

A: Mm-hm. Okay.

Q: And I first of all want to thank you for taking the time to sit and talk. And I know that -- that some of these memories are painful, and -- and I respect your journey, and appreciate you sitting and talking with me.

A: Thank you.

Q: I guess I wanted to first ask if you could maybe take us back and -- and to the extent that you can return us to a child's memory, and through a child's eyes, and in a child's heart, remember the feelings that you had when you were leaving Limoge an-and traveling through Spain. As I recall from the interview that you did, that you were on a train and, remember at all what you were thinking during that time, what was going through your mind? I know that you were very young, so a lot of it was probably a blur now, but remember what was going on in your mind and your heart? What were you thinking about, what were you concerned about?

A: I don't really remember an awful lot. I -- I think I often felt -- I guess you could call it a sense of confusion, by things that were going on, for example, as I mentioned in the -- in the video interview 10 years ago, it was strange things that happened. For example, I was told never to lie, and then all of a sudden, I'm told to lie to the German soldiers, and -- and make believe that I can't understand German, or speak German, when that was my obvious, fluent, first language. I -- I think I remember being, I don't know whether disturbed is exactly the right word, but for example, the -- the crowded, awful conditions on that train. I mean, I remember that quite clearly, so many people crowded into a such a -- a little space, and -- and crowded in, not the way we had been crowded in our living quarter, even when we were living, you know, 30 females in this -- in this little room, but crowded in a chaotic way. All these people, with these -- all these packages and I seem to remember it was night time and I guess it -- I guess maybe it was a little scary at times.

And so I -- I remember a feeling of apprehension often, but other than that, I don't -- you know, I remember -- my memories of that time are very much -- I was trying to explain this to people, they're like still photographs that somebody just snapped, along the path of my life. As opposed to my brother, who's much older, and who really sort of remembers them like a videotape. I mean, you know, this happened, and then this happened, and then this happened. And for me, it's a bunch of stills that --

Q: Go ahead.

A: -- that capture either very significant times -- significant to me, as a little kid, because there was some traumatic thing happening, or some trivial thing happening that captured my imagination. So I don't remember -- as a matter of fact, throughout my life, I've tried to retrace that journey and just -- there -- there were only two places left to go last year, and so, actually in October, my husband and I went on a bicycle trip to -- to Portugal, because that was the next to the last place, of the places that I had been, that I had not revisited. And as -- as I said 10 years ago in the interview, I -- I always think when I do one of these things, that maybe I'll come across something that will sort of stir something in my brain, enough to make me remember what happened here. And so, as we were walking through the streets of Lisbon, I mean, we built about -- I think it was about four days into staying in Lisbon, before the bicycle trip began, just because I wanted to explore, and see if I could remember anything, but absolutely nothing struck a bell, that I could tell, in Lisbon. And we -- I -- we were apparently there for about two weeks. So there's one -- there's one more place. We -- We did stop very briefly in two cities in

Spain, and I -- I'd still like to go to those places, one of them is Madrid. But I -- I think I've kind of run through the gamut of things that are going to jog my -- my brain, and -- and now, especially because I'm getting older and -- and at least short term memory is -- is getting worse, I think -- well, you know, I mean, the -- the ta -- unless -- unless I get Alzheimer's and -- and, you know, and suddenly things pop out of what I call my little black box, I think whatever I've remembered, is what I'm going to remember, and -- and nothing else.

Q: When you talk about snapshots, I mean, are -- are there particular -- I guess it comes to mind this sort of images frozen in time, in a sense, in -- in your memory. Are there particularly memorable images like that, from that journey that -- that -- that you recall? I mean, that -- that perhaps you -- you didn't talk about it er -- in the earlier interview?

A: You mean from the journey through Spain into Portugal?

Q: Mm.

A: Only that scene of all that chaos on the train. Other than that, I don't remember anything. I mean, I have -- I have an image which is not mine, that my brother has told many times, of -- of switching trains at the -- at the Spanish - Portuguese border, and going from this incredibly messy, chaotic situation, and in -- and having been really quite hungry for the last year and a half, coming into this very nice train, with this -- my bro -- when my brother tells the story, his eyes just light up about the, you know, the sudden smell of fresh rolls and -- but -- but that's not my own memory, I mean, I've just heard him tell that so often that I almost feel as though I -- I remember it, but I -- I don't, really.

I do remember, actually, when we got on the ship in -- in Lisbon, to come to the United States. I remember tables set for meals in -- in the dining room, and -- and I think -- I think I remember having dinner the first night, or some meal the first night, and then the rest of the time, we were horrendously seasick and we'd -- I don't think we essentially ate anything else for the rest of the journey, as far as I can remember. I just -- I remember -- I remember feeling awful, and barfing and -- but that's all I remember, until -- until we actually got to the U.S., and then I remember that -- that awful time of having this medical check, which I -- which I mentioned in the -- in the video.

Q: Just -- Yeah, everybody sitting there with thermometers in their mouth.

A: Right, right, right. Thermometers that I had never seen the likes of before, and feeling -- I remember feeling a sort of halfway between being frightened and being puzzled about, you know, why were they doing this and were they going to make us go back?

Q: D-Do you -- Do you think that you had a sense at that time, or do you remember an emotion at that time, about why you were doing this, why you were going? Do you -- Was it -- Was it conscious for a little girl that -- you were what, four and a half at the time?

A: Well, I was seven by the time we got here.

Q: Oh, oh, course. Okay.

A: I don't think I really understood what was happening, but I knew there was a reason to be afraid. I sort of knew that there were people who were chasing us and wanted to do bad things, and I knew that -- I sort of had a sense that if we could come here, that things

were going to be better or okay or -- or something. That this was sort of a goal, of getting away from this bad scene. And so, that day when we were having these medical checkups, I don't know how I knew this, I mean, maybe my mother had said some things, or maybe I heard other passengers, but I n -- I think I was aware that if there was something wrong with you, that you could be sent back. But other than that, I don't remember anything else.

Q: So when you -- well then, you've -- you've told this a little bit, so I won't ask you to dwell on it, but what -- what are some of your most vivid memories, early memories, once you got off the boat and -- and you stayed with the Klinghoffers, right, your -- your -- your cousins? What are the things that -- that stick out most from those early days, whether it's staying with them, or other kinds of adjustments that you had to make during that -- during the time which -- which would have been what, in '41 now we're talking about.

A: We got here on November 10th, 1941. I guess in a lot of ways, I mean, I had learned by then to be very malleable. I mean, you know, I got thrown -- I mean, I remem -- for example, I'm a really fantastic sleeper. I ca -- I mean when I -- 99 percent of the time, when I go to sleep, I'm asleep before my head hits the pillow, practically. And, until the children were born, there would be nothing, other than the telephone, that could wake me up, and I'm still a really fantastically good sleeper, and sometimes people ask about that, and I say, well, I think that had to do, first of all because when I was little, and I had a -- a governess in Vienna, apparently she let me cry myself to sleep, so I re -- I must have

learned that there was no recourse when you had to go to sleep, than to sleep. But I think the other reason is that, over those next few years, I mean, I slept in so many bizarre situations, I mean like, sleeping one night on this scale in the railroad station. And I just kind of learned that, you know, when it's time to sleep, you just, regardless of what happens, you sleep. And I remember, I had a one hour commute to go to Barnard College, cause we lived in -- in Brooklyn, and I -- I think I actually sometimes could fall asleep standing up in the subway, holding on to the strap. And now, I mean, just the last few days, I've actually been posing -- our son is an artist and I've been posing for him, and I -- I find that that's really hard work. But I find that sometimes I'm standing there, and I actually have dozed off standing up, while I'm, you know, clamped into a particular position.

Q: Mom, it's time to cha -- Mom.

A: Right. So, I think I just learned to be very malleable, and so when I got to graduate school and I met the guy who's now my husband, and I went on some camping trips for the first time, I -- I mean, I had never experienced that and so we -- a group of us went and we just had these zero pound sleeping bags and rolled them out on a rock and so -- all right, so the group said, "All right, we're going -- going to sleep now." So I just laid down on this rock and fell asleep. And my husband, who was supposed to be the experienced camper, you know, every three minutes -- he was lying next to me and waking me up and, "Sh, what's that?" You know, "What's that noise?" Or -- Or, "Boy this rock is hard," or something like -- and it -- I mean, those things just really -- when we

-- during the Kennedy elections, we didn't have a television, and I was at a friend's house and I think this is an apocryphal story, but he claims that I fell asleep while we were watching television and that he accidentally stepped on me and I didn't wake up. So -- So I think I just have this -- I mean, I'm not -- there are a lot of ways in which I'm not flexible, but in terms of physical surround, I think because of what happened, I'm -- I'm very flexible. I mean, my husband needs a certain kind of a bed before he can fall asleep, you know, and a certain surround. And other people I've been with, have to kind of do certain things, and get themselves ready for sleeping and so on. And I just -- that's just not requirement for me, you know, whatever is there, I don't -- I don't have -- I'm a picky eater in one way, but I don't mind not eating and so -- so I'm -- I've -- I think because of those years, I'm just very malleable in terms of, you know, those physical things and -- and -- and needs. I think I've strayed now, from what you asked me.

Q: No, but I -- Actually that's -- it's interesting, the whole notion of malleability in some parts of your life, but not others.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: I mean, and -- and -- and you -- you were saying, if I'm understanding you right, that that's a part of what yo -- how you learned to adapt to circumstances when you were very young, right?

A: Yes, yes. So -- So anyway, okay, now I've regained the thread of what you asked, so okay, so I got to my aunt's house and my Aunt Lena ha-had one of her kids move out of this -- what I remember being a really tiny little room, and my mother and my brother and

I got to live in there for about three months. And so, you know that was all right, I mean, I'd done that kind of thing before and as I'm -- as I said on the video interview, I mean, people thought that we would just kind of gobble up anything that was offered to us to eat, and I -- I didn't. I mean, a lot of things that people presented to me were awful, and I mean, one of the things that -- that I came to realize in that time is that adults do really bizarre things to children, you know. I mean -- And I'm -- I'm aware of this still now, as an adult, and I think this very much colored the way we raised our children. But, for example, I -- they would put me on a swing, they would take me to the park and put me on a swing, and I would say, "Please don't do that." But they would insist and they would put me on the swing and start swinging me, and I would barf. And I knew I was going to barf, cause I knew that I couldn't -- I -- I was just so subject to motion of any kind. But they would just insist. And then my -- my Aunt Lena's brother owned what was called a luncheonette in New York, and so when I visited him, which was not terribly often, but -- but more so in the early days, he thought he was doing me this big favor, and he would present me with, you know, a big sundae, with lots of whipped cream. Well, here's a little kid, age seven, who has had almost nothing to eat for a year and a half, and he would insist that I eat this. Well, you know, putting whipped cream, which is like a lot of fat, into a little kid's system, who hasn't eaten anything for a year and a half, just doesn't work out very well. And adults don't listen. I mean, you try to say, "Excuse me, but I -- I really would not like to eat this." Total, you know, ignoring o-of that. I've --

Q: And what were the consequences of that?

A: I used to feel really sick after a sundae, or even in -- even later, my -- after -- I mean, many years later, my cousin Dorothy, who was the youngest daughter of my Aunt Lena, married a doctor and they had kids, and I would sometimes baby-sit for them, or I would just go and visit, and I would often eat dinner there. And I've never been much of a meat eater, and I'm getting worse as the years go by, but first of all, ma -- when my mother made meat, she salted it and then she always cooked it extremely well done, so it was always very brown looking. And I would eat that, and I guess I sort of enjoyed some of those dishes at the time. But at my cousin's house, she would make this rare steak, you know, like a big, thick Filet Mignon kind of thing, and it looked as though it was still alive. And I would say, "I'd rather not eat that." And -- I mean, they just wouldn't take no for an answer, and my cousin, th-the doctor -- the husband, would say, "You are going to eat that," you know, and I would sit there, at her house, having dinner, with this tears streaming down my eyes, trying to force this bloody mess down my throat. I mean, I don't know -- you know, they were trying to be nice, but I think -- again, I just think people don't listen to what kids have to say, and so -- so there were some traumas like that, that -- that happened. But anyway, at -- at my Aunt Lena's, you know, life was okay. I -- She was not very insistent on that I eat things that I didn't like, and so we just kind of stayed there and I ate. I don't -- I have no recollection of how I kept myself busy during the day, during those three months, cause I wasn't in school or anything. I remember being sort of -- very watchful of my cousin Dorothy. She was -- That was the youngest daughter, you know, who later married this doctor. She was very pretty and very -- She

wore nice clothes and I remember she had this really attractive -- as a matter of fact, I have a -- a picture of her, I think, in this hat with beaver trim, you know, big, broad -- and I kind of watched her a lot, and I think I really liked her. She was sort of my favorite cousin, in the beginning. And then -- So we -- we kind of stayed there and my mother went around, trying to figure out what to do, and then we finally found this apartment in Brooklyn and I think -- I think the rent was like 46 dollars a month at the beginning. So we moved to Brooklyn, and that was kind of far away from where my aunt lived, in the lower east side of Manhattan, but it was only two blocks away from another relative, so that cousin, who lived in Brooklyn, whose name is Hilda Towderer, and who just had her 80th birthday, she -- I just got a letter from her about a week ago, I th -- I'm pretty sure now that it was to her parent's home, and she, of course was living there, she was a kid, that we went the day my father died. And that's where my mother and father were supposed to meet again. So, I have occasional contact with her and in recent years, we've actually corresponded, you know, several times a year. So anyway, so -- so we moved and she already had a little boy, who unfortunately died of, I think, lymphoma, about, I don't know, 10 or 15 years ago, and then she had a set of twins. She had another child many years later, but I -- I never have even seen that other child. But anyway, so we had this other sort of relative, and -- and we set up in this apartment, on the fourth floor of 1092 President Street in Brooklyn, wh-which I think stands out in my mind, because I don't -- I don't remember anything green on that block. There was an empty lot, there might have been a couple of trees, but if they were, they were small and very few -- I

mean, it was really a kind of stark thing, and there was an armory across the street, and so the armory was like a solid brick wall that went for most of the block. We used to use that to play ball against. And then at the end of the block, there was a little synagogue. But it was a very stark block and it was -- it was probably largely Jewish, but it was -- it was quite mixed, also. I mean, you know, there was an Irish family and a this family and a that family and -- and there was Forbes, the black super and -- and there were -- there were two children with birth defects. It was very -- It was kind of a very mixed bag. And now I really start to remember things much more cohesively, so -- so a lot of things happened on this block, you know, right from the beginning. First of all, my mother started working in a factory, which was a terrible mistake, but sh -- and she worked there until she retired, and that was horrible for her. And my brother and I went to school. But after a fairly short time, I don't remember exactly -- it must have been like maybe 1944, so it's about three years after we came, my brother got drafted into the army. That was a terrible, terrible event for me and for my mother. I mean, you know, we just got out of all this mess and now my brother is going and we didn't know what was going to happen and I-I mean that was just horrible, but -- so in the meantime, I started school when we moved in there, and at first that was kind of awful, because I couldn't speak English and the kids were always whispering around me and --

Q: What did you feel like, they were teasing you, or they -- were they taunting you, or --

A: No, they were just talking about me, I think.

Q: Who is this girl, sort of?

A: Yeah, you know, and what does she -- how come she doesn't say anything, and you know, whatever. But --

Q: Did you feel uncomfortable?

A: Very uncomfortable.

Q: In what way? I mean, in -- obviously, one can imagine why, but --

A: Well, I felt, first of all, I felt really different, I felt really left out. It's like sitting in a room and ee -- there's a -- there's a famous painting called "The Scream" --

Q: Der Shrie, yeah.

A: Yeah, and I think it's sort of that feeling, you know, you sort of want to cover yourself over and -- and disappear, or -- there's just a really uncomfortable situation for a kid. Now, I have felt that often as an adult, but as an adult, it doesn't strike you that way. Give you just a -- a trivial example; somehow, in our society, you know, you -- you learn certain ridiculous things about what should be and what shouldn't be, and I've never really paid much attention to that, but still, I mean I had never like, gone out to dinner by myself. You know, your -- you either don't go out to dinner, I guess, or you -- you know, which is ridiculous, cause lo -- lots of people go out to dinner by themselves, now especially. But -- But I just had never done that, and so 15 years ago, or 13 years ago, rather, when I made my career change, and I started doing a lot of traveling, in what I call one night stands in not so cheap hotels, so you know, you -- you get to this place, and you register at the hotel, you go down and have dinner, you finish doing your homework, you go to sleep, the next day you do your work, and you leave. And so I was always eating

dinner by myself, or almost always. And at first, I found that extremely uncomfortable, like everybody is looking at me, you know, what is this woman doing, you know, eating by herself? And I would take a book or the newspaper, or -- or something, and try to read while I was eating. And of course, after a certain number of years, that whole situation turned around. I mean, now, sometimes if I -- if the host -- the person who is hosting me says, you know, "Would you like to come to dinner?" That's nice and -- and I often enjoy that, but lots of times I feel as though, you know, it's really a lot more fun eating dinner by myself and being able to do what I want and leave when I want and -- and not have to make polite conversation with somebody who may not be that interesting and so on. But, as a child, I think it's hard to come to that second station. You know, you just sort of feel you're alone, everybody's looking at you. And I think that's what I felt a lot, in school. Well, I learned English very quickly. I think -- Within about three months, I think I was speaking quite fluently.

Q: That's amazing.

A: So -- Well, it was, you know, a third language. And I think when you're a kid, it's really easy, you know?

Q: Yeah. And plus, you know, it was so necessary.

A: It was so necessary. And then I did something that my brother tried to keep me from doing, but I did it anyway, and of course, I've regretted it ever since, and that is that I really tried very hard not to speak either German or French. Now, I had to speak German to my mother, because she took a long time to -- to learn English, and actually for years

and years and years, I always -- she always wrote to me in German and I -- I think after awhile I started -- I -- well, I never learned how to really write German, so I think I answered in English, but -- so my brother would say, “Don’t -- You know, practice the French, practice the German, don’t forget it.” And I said, “No, I don’t -- you know, I don’t want to -- I want to just forget all that.” And that was unfortunate. But anyway, that’s --

Q: D-Do you not speak German now?

A: Well, I do, but like a five year old. I mean, I can manage when I get there. We -- We were just in Switzerland a few weeks ago on a business trip and I mean, all the sort of daily necessities, I’m -- I’m fine, but I can’t discuss a book or something, you know, I have --

Q: Mm. Mm-hm.

A: So -- And French is -- I mean, that’s an interesting thing in itself, the -- when our kids were taking -- I think our daughter took German in school and she’d call down and say, “Ma, how do you say --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: -- Memorial Museum interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer. This is tape number one, side B. Okay, and you were talking about French.

A: So French, which I -- as I say I really learned to speak quite fluently and I went to school there, and then I took it again for, I don’t know, a f -- a few years in high school.

But when I have to speak French, first of all, it takes me longer to get into it, and secondly, it's definitely coming out of my head, not -- not some gut reaction, and it's harder. So there's -- there's some difference there, between when I learned those languages. But anyway, so I learned how to speak English, and made some little friends, you know, friends in quotes, because I don't -- I mean that's -- one of the things I've always been troubled by during my life is, what is the definition of real friend? I -- I mean, I find that a really -- that's a really -- I mean, my husband is a real friend, but I have a hard time trying to think about other people. I mean, I -- I guess I don't have a lot of real friends, in my definition. I have a lot of acquaintances, and some of them are better acquaintances than others. But God, I've probably discussed the topic of what -- what is friendship, ad nauseum.

Q: What -- What -- What is -- What is your definition of friendship and how has it been formed, do you think, by your experience?

A: I don't know. I think -- I think -- My husband always says that I'm a real romantic, and a real idealist at heart, and so I think a real friendship is maybe like the legend of Damon and Pythias -- our son is named Damon -- where somebody will do ver -- almost anything for the other person, and where, maybe even more important, and on a day to day basis, where the person thinks of you almost as much as they thing of themselves, and -- [phone ringing]

Q: Where the person thinks of you as much as -- as -- as of themselves.

A: And where the person is almost totally selfless, with respect to -- to the friend. Where anything can be discussed, nothing is off limits. Anything that's discussed, is discussed in a reasonable, rational way, to be talked out and talked through and it doesn't engender any real anger or permanent scarring, or anything like that. And I don't -- I mean, I don't -- I sometimes wonder whether that sort of relationship really exists to any extent in the world. I -- I'm -- I'm not -- I'm not sure that it does, but I -- I think that -- I feel that relationship with my husband, I feel that relationship with my children, and I feel that relationship, but in a funny way, with my brother. I th -- My brother and I have an emotionally very close relationship, but I think in our -- in our heads, in the -- in the intellectual parts of our heads, we live in somewhat different worlds. That's a whole other story, I think, about what happened to us, and about his being older and really being much more affected by everything that happened, but I mean, like I can -- well, we both like to tell jokes, I mean we -- my brother and I can sit down and tell jokes for a whole evening, but I -- he's a much more serious person. He's a -- He has a much narrower area in which he operates. I think I'm much -- He's -- He's very tolerant, in the sense that, you know, he's not prejudiced against anything or anybody or anything like that, but he's very intolerant about what he's willing to do. He doesn't like to waste his time, whereas I th -- I think -- I mean, I'm -- I'm pretty serious in many ways also, but I'm much more happy go lucky in -- in a way, and I -- I mean, like yesterday I got a letter from somebody who wanted to know if I could help them find a job, and I -- I mean, this person is like way outside of my -- any area that I conceivably have any contact with, and you know, so

I called him and he wanted to chat and so we chatted for a-an -- and also, the-there was an article Globe about me, la -- the week before last, and he wanted to discuss that, so I -- you know, I spent 20 minutes with him. I -- I'm not sure, because I don't see my brother on a day to day basis, but I don't think my brother would have the patience or the inclination to do that. But I -- I'm not sure. He -- He's just -- He's much more tied up in his work and what he feels he needs to do, and he does not tend to do frivolous things, whereas I do a lot of frivolous things, even though most of the time, I'm -- you know, I -- I live a fairly serious life, but --

Q: You -- Do you think it -- I mean, it just occurred to me that perhaps this could have something to do with -- or maybe not, but -- but perha -- I was just wondering if it might have something to do with the fact that since he's older, his experience of the -- the -- the brutal meaning of what happened to the family, helps create this -- this sort of difference in the personalities that you are describing?

A: Oh a -- Oh, absolutely, but -- but I think, although I don't know this, I only know this from -- from hearsay, but my mother always told me that my brother was a very serious child, even when he was two years old. You know, that other kids would want to sort of play, and he would want to have my mother read him the street signs and explain to him how that -- why certain words are spelled in a certain way, and -- now, I don't know what came first, but I -- I do wonder about this, but they started him on violin lessons, I think when he was three years old, and that didn't work out, so they stopped him at the suggestion of the teacher, and then they started again, I think when he was about five

maybe, or six. And that definitely took and he -- h-he would tell you that he's an amateur violinist, which he is, but I think he -- and I'm not a musician, so I shouldn't judge, but he really plays, you know, quite well. I mean, I don't know that he could go out and give a concert, but he -- he does play chamber music with other people and so on. So -- And -- And I -- And that's actually one of the things that I remember with great pleasure, but -- but also something else. When we lived in this apartment that we moved into in New York, my brother would practice violin, often for many, many hours, and I was not allowed into the room. But sometimes, as a special treat, he would let me come in while he was playing. And I remember I would sit on his bed and I would just watch him, in a -- in absolute silence, and I remember sometimes I would just -- you know, little tears would come, because it -- when he plays the violin, he looks as though he's transported into some other world, and I find that very moving.

Q: Do you think -- Do you imagine what other world that is?

A: I don't know. I think -- I think I think of it as some very special wonderful place, that he can't really live in as a real person, except when he's playing. But anyway, so -- so getting way back to -- to what was it like, so we -- so we moved into this place and -- and I learned English, and I was going to school, and I was a -- I was a very good student. Now, why was I a very good student? I think there were several reasons. One was, maybe -- maybe there was just something comforting about -- about the logic of school, and the things that you learned in school, and -- I mean, I always did my homework, but I did more than my homework. Like when we learned vocabulary, or later, when I was, you

know, when I started taking French, which was in high school. I mean, in addition to doing my homework, I -- I would write words three times each, you know, or if -- and part of that was also my brother. I mean my brother -- my brother was very much of a mentor, and so when -- whenever I needed any help or anything, he was there until he -- he left, a-and then -- and he also -- I think he also used me as a kind of guinea pig, because I mean, he was much older, so you know, when he was already in high school and college, I was -- I was still a little kid.

Q: Is he what, seven, eight years older?

A: Seven and a half years older.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And I loved when he taught me things, so I mean, some of the things I remember from those 1092 President Street years, very often on a Sunday morning, I would open my eyes and my brother would be standing over my bed with an algebra book. And as soon as my -- I opened my eyes, he would hop into bed and -- with a pad and paper and this algebra book and we would sit there for maybe an hour or more and he would get me to do algebra word problems. And so I didn't know -- and this was very good for me -- I didn't know that algebra was something that na -- that a lot of people didn't like to do. For me, doing algebra word problems was like doing the Sunday crossword puzzle. I mean, I thought that was, you know, great. But he -- he -- when he learned something new, he would come home and -- and often try to teach it to me, and I really enjoyed that most of the time, and I -- I mean, I learned an en-enormous amount. I mean, for example,

he would -- like if my mother needed a new plug put on a lamp, he would do that and then he would teach me how to do that, so --

Q: It sounds like he was really, either consciously, or just naturally playing the -- the role of the man of the family.

A: Well, that's what people say, and I don't know, maybe that's true, but I don't think I ever consciously or -- thought or him as a father, I mean, or even as a father figure. He was very serious and he was very strict with me, but -- but he was not like any parent that I ever met. [phone ringing]

Q: So you were talking about -- oh you're -- do you recall what you were saying?

A: Yes. So, my brother -- I mean like, if he learned something exciting, he would come home -- I -- I mean I remember, for example, a subway ride into town with him, and he taught me all about what he had just learned about genetics, you know, and crossing white Japanese Four O'Clock flowers with red ones, and you know, how many red, white and pink ones you get, and so on. And then I often used that for my own purposes. For example, whatever grade I was in, everybody had to give a little five minute or 10 minutes seminar or something. So I got up there and -- and decided, oh this sounds really exciting, I'm going to talk about genetics. And I think I was like in third grade or something, and I don't know, kids are funny and -- and so I got up there and I said, "Well, when you mate a Japanese, you know red Japanese Four O'Clock," and so on, and the whole class started tittering, and -- and I think I was -- I was sort of embarrassed, because you know, with my brother, and I spent a lot of time with his friends at times,

you know, you talk about, you know, the flowers mate with each other and so on and so forth, but here, in this third gla -- grade P.S. 241 -- my brother always said that P.S. stood for poor suckers, you know everybody starts tittering when you say this, and so, I mean very early, I -- there was this dichotomy that happened in my mind about this world that my brother lived in, compared to this ridiculous world that I was living in. The other thing that happened to me in that school was that in the one year I went to school in Limoge -- in the European system, I learned, except for American history, I learned everything that I learned, in the American school, to the end of fourth grade. So, if I weren't such a dedicated pupil somehow, and always interested [phone ringing]

Q: [inaudible]

A: So -- So I was -- I was kind of a goody-goody and I wa -- I always got to be the teacher's pet, and I did all those right things and so I somehow got -- managed to keep interested in school, even though I already knew most of this stuff. And then a funny thing happened at some point. My brother came home one day and he said, "Today I'm going to teach you about probability." Now he -- I think he was maybe already in college at that point. And I said, "Oh Fred, I -- I'm s -- I'm -- I'm really ti -- I really don't want to hear about probability now." And he said, "Well, all right, then I won't love you any more." And -- And I said, "All right, never mind, just teach me about probability." And so we had this long lecture about probability, which actually was a lot of fun. It's just that I probably -- I don't know, I wanted to go out and play or -- or do something else. So, now -- I mean, he didn't do that very often, but -- but it was --

Q: But it's a powerful --

A: It was a very powerful ploy.

Q: Does he remember that?

A: I don't think so. He doesn't remember a lot of -- I -- one of the things that I discovered is that when you're young and impressionable, you remember things that older people do to you, but they don't remember. You know, I mean like, if an adult says blah, blah, blah and it hurts you, or -- or pleases you, you remember it, but to them it was just something they said.

Q: Right. Is your memory that -- I mean, is it an upsetting memory in a way? I mean that's -- that's quite a power --

A: You mean --

Q: -- w-wa --

A: -- what he said?

Q: Yeah.

A: No, not terribly, actually. It's just like haw, all right, you know? I-It -- It was not upsetting. I'll tell you an upsetting memory from an adult to a child. Not terribly -- Well, first of all, when we first moved into 1092 President Street, in this Brooklyn apartment, life was still quite difficult, as it was for -- for a long time, but it -- it kept getting a little better. My mother earned very little and she -- I mean she -- she was a real Jewish mother, you know, everything went to us and the last dregs went to her. And so we le -- so she went off to work and for the first couple of years, I was supposed to report in to --

to some neighbor, but there was another neighbor who was sort of a busybody. She actually had a kid with Down's Syndrome, who was kept hidden in a dark room in her apartment, and -- and one day the older sister actually took us in to see this kid, but I mean sh -- but the mother, I don -- I don't know, the mother just -- you know, she might have been a perfectly pleasant woman, but she -- she did two things in -- in the -- those first five years we were there, that were really bothersome. Well, first of all, when I moved on this block, the kids were singing this funny ditty that went something like, "Da-da da-da dum, Hitler is a jerk, Mussolini is a meanie and the Japs are worse." And I thought that was like really kind of an awful thing to -- to be singing. But she asked me one day, "Do you hate the Germans?" And I sa -- I mentioned this on the interview, I -- I said, "No, I don't hate the Germans." And she said, "Well, then," -- and I said, you know, "Some Germans are good and some Germans are bad." And she said, "Well, why don't you go back to where you came from then?" And then, in April of 1945, when President Roosevelt died, the whole block was, you know, I mean shocked in the way that I, as an adult many, many years later, when I was already, you know, a [indecipherable], the whole block was in shock, and people were crying and, you know, but I was a little kid, and I knew something unpleasant had happened, but I wasn't walking around crying or anything. I mean, I didn't -- this -- this figure didn't really mean a lot to me. And this woman came out and said, "How come you're not crying? President Roosevelt just died." And I -- I -- I don't think I even answered, because I didn't know what she was trying to tell me. And she told me again, she said, "Why don't you go back to where you came

from?" So, you know, I mean, people were kind of very insensitive. Anyway, I -- you know, I --

Q: Well, let me ask you a little bit about that. I mean, what -- Do you recall your -- your feelings and emotions? Were -- Were you shocked, were you horrified, were you scared? Did you think that maybe --

A: You mean by her statement?

Q: By her. I mean, did -- did you feel like maybe more people would be telling you this and that -- did you actually fear this, or --

A: No, I don't think I feared it, I just -- I think I just sort of felt that this was a really unpleasant lady, or maybe I didn't even feel that, maybe I just felt this was a really unpleasant thing for her to say.

Q: Did you have any -- make any attempt to tell her how impossible that would be?

A: No, I don't think I said anything, as a matter of fact, because from my perspective, there was no answer. I mean, you know, what am I supposed to do, turn on the tears or -- you know, I -- I -- I think what she said to me just didn't make any sense.

Q: So, the old America, love it or leave it bumper sticker, you know?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Pre -- Pre that, obviously.

A: Yeah, and th -- I -- There were a lot of funny things that happened to me there. I don't -- I think -- I don't -- See, I don't remember exactly h-how old I was at each of these things, but I sort of made little friendships with people, and there was a little girl called

Joanie Cummings, who lived in the next house, and her mother was divorced, which was pretty unusual at that ti -- there were a few divorced people on the block, actually, but it was still kind of unusual and I remember f -- we would talk a lot, I mean she w -- she came from -- I mean, I came from a family that really treasured, or -- or was intent on education, and she came from the exact opposite. You know, her mother worked, I don't know where. She had an older sister who went out with boys and -- and you know, kind of -- I don't know, did frivolous things, and this kid, Joanie Cummings, she was amazing. She played hooky from school more days than anybody I had ever met and she always -- she would say, "Well, I can't go to school today, because it's an Irish holiday and my great-aunt on my mother's fifth side is Irish, so in respect to her, I can't go to school today." And for every day she had some -- some ridiculous story. But she was kind of -- she was nice and -- and pleasant and it was very informal, they had some kitten in the house, the house always smelled absolutely awful. But she -- she told me one day, "I think I'm going to go play with this other girl," and I can almost remember her name, but she lived about a block away, she was blonde and they were both Protestant, and she said, "We have more to -- in common, because we're both Protestant." And -- And I remember sort of feeling a little hurt, because we had spent so much time together. And then sort of shrugging my shoulders and thinking, "Well, you know, I don't know." She was also -- In our house, I don't know, I think it was my brother -- maybe also my mother, but things were sort of a little more formal. For example, when my brother was young, when he came home, and if he didn't use his key and he rang the bell, and I answered the door, he

would -- he would do this kind of a European bow to me at the door, you know, of -- not a bow, I don't know what you call it, you know, just sort of courtesy bending at the waist and -- and he did that to my mother and -- and his -- I mean, his European male friends, when they visited each other, they -- they -- you know, it -- that was kind of formal and you came and you didn't sit down unle -- until somebody said, "Would you please sit down?" You know, and so on. And I remember Joanie Cummings one day saying to me, "You know, I don't know, when you -- when I come to your house, everything is so formal," she said, "when somebody comes to my house, I tell them to pull up a comfy and squat." And I've never forgotten that phrase, because I thought, "Oh, y-yeah, you know, what's -- what's different about -- about us?" And then the other thing that I -- that I remember from those days is, my brother had taken English lessons in Vienna, and -- so he kind of had a head start, but he learned English, you know, fluently, quite quickly after we got here. And -- And he spoke quite correctly and I -- I never realized it til not too long ago, that he even had an accent, it's a very slight accent, I think, but-- but when I knocked on the door, and he -- you know, in New York, everybody that we knew said, "Who's there?" I think maybe I still do that. Do I still do that? No, cause we have peepholes, but I still, s-sometimes maybe I do that, and I had learned from the other kids to say, "It's me," cause that's what all the other kids said. My brother wouldn't let me in if I said, "It's me." I had to say, "It is I," which is correct English grammar. And then -- So I learned to say, "It is I," but then I discovered that when I went to a friend's house

and I said, “It is I,” they looked at me in a really funny way, and so I learned to become bilingual.

Q: Bilingual in English.

A: Yes, bilingual in English, and so when my brother was on the other side of the door, or some educated adult, I would say, “It is I,” but when I was with my little friends, I learned to say, “It’s me.” And the funny thing was, and -- and I should have remembered that, and I -- I didn’t recognize it, and I still find it a little difficult, but our daughter, who is now a graduate student in anthropology, somewhere along the way, learned to speak this English that I found it difficult to listen to. Like, Meg and me are going to the movies. But even as a very little kid, sh -- and also sh -- she learned it from her little friends, to use a lot of bad language. But, at a -- it -- this is interesting in terms of kids, at a very, very early age, just when she was getting into that stage, when my brother came to visit, she never said things like, Meg and me, and she never used any swear words. And so somehow, even though nothing was said, that I can recall, she picked up on this and now -- I mean, she writes very well, and she’s very well spoken, and she is now 29 years old and she speaks very well, and if she were talking to you, she would never say, “Meg and me are going to the movies.” But when she’s with her friends, who are all now pretty well-educated people, she still says, “Meg and me are going to the movies.” But in conversation with anybody else, she would never use that. So that’s --

Q: Well -- Well, you know, I was wondering, those -- those couple of examples that -- from -- from when you were a kid, I mean, about difference, whether it’s language, or --

or these -- this girl saying, you know, that we're Protestant. I mean, they're both examples of difference, and one might be more, sort of steeped in -- in the difference of a European background, and one steeped in a religious difference of being Jewish -- being Jewish, so I'm just wondering how much you -- I mean it -- living in New York, probably you'd perceive it less than in other places. Did you -- Did you have a sense of -- of a climate of anti-Semitism at all, or -- or were --

A: No.

Q: -- these were just --

A: I -- I -- I must say that per -- in my own personal life, since coming to the U.S., I have never personally experienced any anti-Semitism that I can remember. When I got to Berkeley and went out hunting for an apartment, that was 1956 -- I used to get quite brown in the summer, and I -- when I went looking for an apartment, I went with a woman from New Zealand and a Chinese woman, we wanted to share an apartment, and I found out afterwards, that we didn't get this apartment and we happened to know somebody who lived in the building, and that person came and told us that the landlady said she didn't mind the English girl, but she didn't want the Indian or the Chinese. The Indian was me. So -- And -- And I -- When I lived in New York, I often -- you know, in later years, when more and more Hispanics moved in, I often was mistaken for being Hispanic, so I mean, I just, you know, I -- I -- I have not personally experienced any anti-Semitism, but -- but other prejudices, I mean, for example, on my block, my brother and I -- and there was one other -- there was one other kid that I played with who did later go to

college and become a teacher, but my brother and I and one other boy were the only three people who went to graduate school, and so there definitely was -- well, my mother also -- my mother, I think, in a funny way en -- I hate to say encouraged this, cause I don't think she encouraged it, she just -- I think my mother was very proud or something about -- about being from a, you know, quotes, good family and -- and you know, being for that time, educated. I mean, my mother -- my mother finished gimnasium, which was unusual in her generation for a female, and that's kind of the equivalent of finishing junior college, I guess, in the U.S. She was very proud of that and -- that she could always read and that she read good books and that she listened to music and -- and so on and so forth. So there certainly -- I mean, I certainly grew up with an air of her having a sense that we were -- I hate to use the word better, but that -- but that there was something special about us, compared to oth -- the -- everybody else on the --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer. This is tape number two, side A. Okay.

A: My brother also -- I mean, my brother was -- was very, very interested in education and -- and things of the head. And so -- I mean, he taught me a lot of things and he also -- he would, you know, he would test me, but not in -- in an unpleasant way, it was -- it was kind of more of a game, you know. Music would -- We always listened to WQXR in New York, which was the classical music station, and, you know, "Who wrote that?" You know, and reading -- about reading good books, and he did not allow me -- this -- my -- my one really bad thing that I did in the growing up years, my brother did not allow me to read comic books. And the only re -- the only bad thing I ever did is, I had six classic comics hidden under my bed at one point.

Q: That you insisted on being a real girl?

A: I wa -- that was --

Q: You know, a normal girl, you know?

A: -- that was my one rebellious thing, right. And to this day, you know, I can't really read comics. I find them just really annoying. But --

Q: Wa -- So -- So he was really demanding excellence of you, it sounds like. He -- He wanted to -- He wanted you to be better and better, an-and achieve, it sounds as though that's his motivation.

A: He -- He -- He did, and he also, I mean, I think I owe, in many ways, where I am educationally or professionally or whatever, to him. First of all, there was -- there was -- I don't ever remember having to make decisions, like decisions that I've seen my children and other kids make about, you know, am I going to college, which college? What am I going to do afterwards, etcetera. And I -- I certainly had to decide on which college, but there -- I don't remember ever questioning that I would go to graduate school. I mean, it was never discussed, it was just somehow there. And my brother, I mean actually, in this family, even -- even my husband, we -- we have a -- a -- an incredible surfeit of teaching genes. I mean, we are -- there is just the desire to always be teaching. I mean my -- my husband's always teaching, my brother's always teaching, I'm always teaching. And I remember, you know, when I started taking chemistry, I remember my brother coming home and teaching me, you know, how do you do -- how do you make a diagram of water in a beaker? And I -- I -- I even remember that he had a blue -- a -- a sort of aqua blue pencil that he was drawing these lines in with. You know, how do you -- you know, what's a triangle, how do you bisect an angle? Learning the multiplication tables, I mean f -- oh, I know, then -- okay, then my brother went off -- my brother went to -- started at City College. Then he got -- oh here's an interesting story, he got a Pulitzer scholarship. Didn't tell my mother about it, didn't tell me about it, either. My mother read about it in the newspaper.

Q: Why? Why wouldn't he say?

A: Because he was a very private person, and he still is. He does not -- He doesn't -- I mean, like if I got a Pulitzer scholarship, I would probably be out telling all my friends. You know, I wouldn't advertise it in the newspaper, but I would tell all my friends. My -- First of all, my brother doesn't talk about things until they have happened, because, as he says, they may not happen. And then, he does not advertise. So -- So anyway, so then he got this Pulitzer scholarship, and so he transferred to Columbia University. And after one year is when he got drafted. So he got drafted into the army, and he went to -- I don't know, Fort something or other, in Florida. My brother is probably the most un-athletic person I have ever met. So he had to got to basic training, and he was miserable and he fainted out in the sun, and you know, and then he tells this funny story about the day they were supposed to have grenade training, he ended up in the infirmary with a -- a fever and didn't get out until after grenade training was over, or something. Okay, so he got finished with basic training, they sent him to Yale to study Japanese. So, he was at Yale University for nine months, learning Japanese, which was totally useless, but he liked that better than having to do some other thing, that didn't involve his brain. And then he got sent -- he was going to get sent overseas and he got shipped out to Seattle and then the war ended. And -- But he had only been in the army now for, I don't know, a little over a year and he was supposed to be in for 18 months at least, or -- I -- you know, I don't know what the rules were, but -- so he was -- I think he was private first class or something. He got shipped to Texas, and they put him into MP school, military police school. Well, that was definitely not my brother's cup of tea, but I remember when he

came home, I was on the floor constantly, cause he -- he had learned all these maneuvers about how to throw people over his shoulder, and so on, and he practiced them on me. Okay, so that -- So that was the end of that. Then he went back to Columbia for one year, and managed to somehow make up classes and he -- he really was a self studier and so -- I mean, he tells funny stories. I've interviewed him, you know, like you're interviewing me, and he -- he tells the story about, you know, he had to take this course, and he really didn't want to take the course and a friend of his said, "Oh, you don't have to take this course, just go and read this book and pass the exam." So he did and he passed it, and -- and he -- he was very bright and -- okay, so then he got out of Columbia and then he left to go to Harvard, as a graduate student in physics. So -- I was going to tell you a story and now it's eluded me.

Q: Well we can -- We can get back to it if you want.

A: Okay, all right.

Q: I -- I -- Ba -- Wa -- Once you're not trying to remember it, maybe it'll pop -- it'll be -- pop in.

A: Yeah. No, I was trying to -- It was straight -- something about --

Q: His --

A: His --

Q: I think we were talking about his seriousness.

A: Yes, and something that he -- oh, oh, okay, all right, so he went up to Harvard and I was here, and I -- I guess by that time I was starting high school, and -- and two funny

things happened. One is, I got this teacher at one point, this math teacher who had a terrible reputation for being really mean, and -- and I was always the teacher's pet and everybody -- all the teachers were always nice to me, cause I always did my homework and I studied and I always did the right thing, and -- you know, and there was a teacher even, Miss Massamine, I had, I think, in seventh grade or something, and she was really kind of a disgusting character. She always wore black dresses and if you were really good, you got to dust the dandruff off her shoulders. And that -- that totally, you know -- but anyway -- but I -- but I --

Q: What an incredible privilege that wa --

A: -- was going --

Q: -- must have been.

A: I know. But anyway, so -- so Miss Carter was going to be the teacher for algebra or something, and everybody told me Miss Carter was really mean, and I -- so I was panicked, I wrote to my brother and I said, "You know, I've been put into this class with this mean teacher." Got this letter back from my brother, said, "I had Miss Carter," sh -- he said, "do your work and mind your own business, she's fine." And -- So that's what happened, I did my homework and minded my own business and she was fine. I mean she was -- she was really kind of an ogre, but she never did anything bad to me. But I used to sit there, I mean, when she yelled at other kids, I'd be, you know, I mean I -- that was really -- okay, then I started also taking French in high school, and the first French quiz, I got a 98. So I was pretty pleased with myself, cause the other kids, you know, I

mean, by and large, the kids in that s-school -- I mean, there were some very bright kids, but most of them were, you know, they didn't really care. So I wrote to my brother with great pride, I got a 98 on my first French quiz. I get a very stern letter back from my brother. "You obviously didn't study. Language is an exact science, and if you had studied, you obviously would have gotten a hundred." So I went back to the drawing boards and I studied, and the next quiz I got a hundred. So -- But, so he was very -- he was very stern, in that sense, but he was also -- but he was also very nice and he was a lot of fun. You know, we used to play games together and -- I mean, when he was still home and we were younger, we used to have -- we used to duel with rolled up New York Times magazines and there was something funny that happened in the house, an-and the stupid thing was, it never occurred to me to protest, but we had an apartment that had two bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen. My brother got his own bedroom, I slept in the master bedroom with my mother, in what used to be my father's bed, and I studied in the kitchen, or some -- later on -- in later years, in the living room. When my brother left for Harvard, his room remained and now, as I think back on it, it sort of was like a shrine or something. I mean, I didn't -- I didn't go in there, I didn't do my homework in there, I didn't -- you know, I --

Q: Why do you think that was?

A: I don't know, but in recent years I've written to my brother and I've said, "You know, why didn't I use your room? Why didn't I move into your room?" And my brother says, "I don't know. Why didn't you just do it?" You know, he's -- it had nothing to do with

him, maybe it was something to do with my mother, but that room was kept empty for the, you know, one week at holidays when he would come home.

Q: I've decide -- I don't want to overanalyze or over-pursue this point, but I -- I'm just thinking, how much of the presence of your father was he -- do you think he was representing, especially in that sort of shrine that you're describing?

A: You know, people ask -- I don't think, I don't think -- I mean, my br -- my father had his own shrine, there was a photograph of my father on my mother's night-table and that was like the shrine, and -- and the shrine was in my mother's head, but it was not in my brother's room. I mean, I don't know what it was, but I mean, in -- you know, it -- and it never occurred to me for all these years, until about -- it must have been about five or seven years ago, that I suddenly thought, "Why didn't somebody suggest that I take over my brother's room when he left for college?" And I, you know, I don't know the answer, but --

Q: Well let me ask -- let me -- maybe we could just pick up on -- on what -- I just am curious that -- you talked about there was a shrine, your mother had a shrine for your father and wh-wh-what -- what presence of your father did you feel? I mean, did you feel a -- a terrible -- something that was terribly missing, did you -- were you conscious of it? Did you feel like, oh, I don't have a father, when you were growing up? Or -- How did you feel about that?

Q: I don't -- I don't remember -- I mean, I remember staring at my father's picture, but I don't remember, through all those growing up years, really thinking very much about it.

It was only very much later that I became curious in a number of things. One was, did my father really commit suicide? Everybody sort of assumed that, but maybe that's not what happened. And my brother says, "Well, it probably did happen," but -- but anyway, but I still have that question in my mind.

Q: Like somebody might have thrown him over the stairwell?

A: Yeah.

Q: Given the climate of --

A: Right.

Q: -- of the time?

A: Exactly, but --

Q: I mean, that was how long after -- it was --

A: It was actually before Kristallnacht --

Q: -- it was just before Kristallnacht, yeah, yeah.

A: -- right, but it was after the August when he was forced to s -- close his practice.

Q: It was after the anschluss.

A: It was after the anschluss.

Q: Yeah.

A: The other thing is I -- I've -- I just, not too many years ago, said to my brother, "If my father loved me as much as they say he did, why didn't he leave me a note if he was going to commit suicide? Why didn't he sort of introduce himself and explain why he was doing this?" And my brother pointed out, quite correctly, that when people are very

depressed, and they're about to commit suicide, they don't necessarily act in a rational way.

Q: Yeah. But that -- Does that -- Is it a -- Is it a -- Is it a -- What kind of mystery is that for you, does it -- does it dig at you, or is it a -- sort of a curiosity? I mean, how much do you -- how deeply, I guess I'm asking, do you wish to be able to somehow find the answer to that?

A: Subconsciously, I can't answer. Consciously, not terribly, but it -- I think maybe it's getting ever so slightly more as I get older. For example, my cousin, this woman Hilda Towderer, wrote a letter to me a week ago, and at the end of the letter, she wrote a couple of things about, "I remember you as a little girl at our house," and so on, and I thought, "Oh, why haven't I ever tapped her for information before?" So when I answered that letter a couple of days ago, you know, I wrote like 10 questions at the end, about, you know, what was my father like, what was the relationship between my father and my mother, etcetera, etcetera. I mean, I just -- you know, I was at the compu -- I mean, you have to understand that I live my life, really very much in the present, and I'm always in a hurry, because I'm trying to do more things, always, than there is time to do. And now, for the first time in my adult life, because our son has been ill since the end of October, I haven't worked full time. I mean, I'm trying to work, take care of him. You know, my husband and I are taking turns doing this. You know, we travel -- he doesn't travel a lot, but he travels, and -- and I travel a fair amount, and so we live a life which is generally very hectic, I think. But not hectic the way -- I mean, I have a lot of -- I spent most of my

career as a faculty member at Boston Biomedical and then The Eye Research Institute, and always with an appointment at Harvard Medical School, and so I don't -- I'm not like your average Harvard tenured professor, whose life is very limited to getting ahead, doing [indecipherable], you know, [indecipherable] you know, and not -- not doing anything else. My husband and I try to do all those things, but we also both have a lot of a -- outside interests. For example, we like to ballroom dance. My husband used to like to do photography, he does very little of that now, but -- but we have other things that we're interested in doing. So, I'm -- We're -- We are not ever hectic to the point of excluding those things. In fact, I mean I wouldn't tell my colleagues this, but I usually call at the beginning of the season, when the ballroom dance schedule comes out and I put that on my calendar first. And then if somebody calls and says, you know, "Can you come to Chicago and do a workshop?" I say, "Well, no, I'm sorry. I'm -- I've already got a date that day," you know.

Q: Well that's priorities. I mean, you --

A: So --

Q: -- you make decisions of -- like that as --

A: Right, and I --

Q: Most people don't do that these days.

A: -- I don't -- I don't know why, but I have a -- I think since my son got sick, and -- we have not gone to any of the really big dances this year, since he got sick, but --

Q: Bless you.

A: And now -- thanks -- now I find that -- I mean, since he got sick, my priorities have changed again, because now, if I miss a dance, it doesn't even, you know, it doesn't -- but a year ago, I mean, I would like, bend over backwards not to miss a dance. Why am I so passionate about ballroom dancing? I don't know. I mean I -- that's -- you know, I mean people ask me and I jokingly say, "Well, it's my Viennese blood." Well, that's a lot of bullshit. I -- You me -- I mean, I don't really have any Viennese blood. My parents were born in Poland, they moved to Vienna. Why do I have that? I don't know. I think my parents did dance. Oh, and then, you know, the other thing is, when we came here, the only thing I had, which I still have, is a wind-up phonograph, that my parents had. And we brought, from Vienna, I don't know, maybe two dozen 78 rpm records, mostly popular songs of the day. So, my brother said I couldn't listen to any of this music, and the only -- there were only two or three records he let me listen to, they were Strauss waltzes, because -- not that my brother is enamored of Strauss waltzes, but that was the closest thing to classical music that was in that collection. So, I remember when I was a kid, when I was alone, and after I'd finished my homework -- I mean, I did go out to play with the kids, but I really also spent a fair amount of time by myself. I'd put this phonograph on and I would either -- we had a carpet in the living room, an oriental carpet that had sort of a design, you know, with a -- with a sort of pattern around the edge and I would march in time to the music around this thing. Sometimes my brother would -- my brother doesn't dance, but he would -- he would do a gavotte with me. A gavotte, which is a -- sort of a 1600's dance. And --

Q: A little more like a march, sort of, or --

A: No.

Q: No?

A: A very formal court dance --

Q: Ah, uh-huh.

A: -- sort of thing, and -- and then I started taking Arthur Murray footprint books out of the library. Oh, you know, another thing that happened -- see, I spent a lot of time with my brother when he was still home, and we lived about a 15 minute very fast walk from the Grand Army Plaza Library in Brooklyn, which was a wonderful library. And my brother spent a lot of time in the library, and he would take me along, but officially, I was still too young to go into the adult section. I don't think libraries do this any more, but -- but in those days there was a children's library and you couldn't go into the adult section unless you were a certain age. So, first of all, my brother walked very, very fast, and so, when I started walking with him, I'd kind of be dragging, you know, down the street. But so, what do you do? I learned how to walk. I am probably the fastest walker of anybody that I know, even now. I mean, I can out-walk practically anybody. And so I learned to walk very fast, and -- and then later in life it kind of turned around, I mean, my brother has some foot problems an-and other, you know, things, so he -- he no longer walks fast and so -- so now, you know, everybody else in the family usually says, "Could you please slow down?" But -- But so we would walk to the library very often and because I was with him, he could take me into the adult section. But he didn't really want to be bothered

with me once we got into the adult section, so he would drop me at the first set of bookshelves in the adult section, which happened to be psychology. And so I would sit on the floor for hours, while he was doing his thing, and I would rummage through the psychology books. And usually, what was on the bottom shelf was about optical illusions, so I learned a lot about optical illusions. So -- So a lot of me was formed by -- not intentionally, ba -- by my brother, but just because I was around him and -- you know, and then, I mean, if his friends came and they were going to the Museum of Modern Art, I mean the first time I ever went to the Museum of Modern Art was because my brother was going with a friend and he took me along.

Q: Did -- I'm just curious, th-the optical illusions that you learned about, did that -- do you see any connection tha -- between that and your later professional development, or just --

A: No, I don't think so, no.

Q: No. So --

A: Well, except -- except that I can never decide, did I get interested in science because science was interesting, or because my brother made science interesting, or because my brother got me interested in science, or another -- I mean, the reality is that I was able to get a fellowship to graduate school, which covered all my expenses, living and school and everything, because in those years, a lot of money was being poured into science. I mean, it is now, but it -- but it was much more so then. Did my brother go into science because he knew that that was a good way to get out of the ghet-ghetto in which we lived,

in Brooklyn, and I just followed? Or was there some other, deeper, more meaningful things that were going on, or was it just because my brother taught me a lot of science and science was fun and I seemed to be good at it and you know, there's nothing that succeeds like success? I mean, who knows? I've had a lot of discussions in recent year -- well, not a lot, but I've had discussions in recent years with my brother about something that I find extremely disturbing and very horrifying. And that is that when I sit down and analyze what happened to me in my life and what happened to my brother, although he's had a much more difficult life, that our lives were probably better in the long run, and more exciting, and more fulfilling because of those things that happened, than they would have been if nothing -- if there had been no war and we stayed in Vienna. That's kind of a horrible thought, that -- that our lives were enhanced at the cost of so much tragedy, to such an enormous number of people. That's a -- That's a very difficult thought to live with.

Q: It's a profound kind of realization, I suppose. It -- Did it sort of just dawn on you at one point, or --

A: You know, until 1974-ish, I really did not think about any of the past. When people tried to talk to me about it, I just said, "Oh, I was too young, that had no effect on me." I was intr -- I had blinders on, I just wanted to get on with my career, I wanted to do my thing, I wanted to get out of that place in Brooklyn. I wanted to get away from those people that I grew up with. I wanted to get to a better place. When I got to Barnard College, that's another interesting story, how did I manage to get to Barnard College, but

when I got to Barnard College, I remember feeling sad. I -- I felt sad that, why couldn't I ha -- you know, there were these all -- I mean, this was by no means the rule in those days, because by and large, women didn't do much in those days, but I met a lot of women at -- the first year at Barnard whose parents were lawyers and whose mothers were lawyers or doctors and you know. I mean, overall, I think most of the mothers were housewives, but -- but my head focused in on why couldn't I have a mother who was a doctor or a lawyer, and I -- that really bothered me, that my mother had not chosen to do something important. Now, my brother was very partial to my father, and he tells me it's because, you know, my father was doing important, good things, my mother was frivolous. She was interested in fashion and you know. And somehow, in recent years, I've tried to tell him, "But look at -- look at how she came through when the chips were down."

Q: That's -- It -- You could see her as a heroic figure in -- in keeping the family together.

A: Yes, well I didn't when she was still around, but I do now. But I think -- I think my brother appreciates everything she gave up and everything that she did, but he certainly does not see her as a heroic figure. He sees her as somebody who was pulled into being heroic by circumstances, but who, having -- if she had been left to her own devices, would have been, you know, dressing up and putting on make-up and -- and having coffee klatches and so on.

Q: But -- But what -- what does -- I mean -- here -- I mean if -- if -- if -- if you're -- think about heroism, I mean, what -- doesn't what count -- wha -- is -- is wh -- when -- when it really comes down to how you respond, in a sense, right?

A: Well --

Q: I mean, she sounds like she really responded.

A: Yes, and I think he really appreciated that, but I don't think he really respected the inner person that she was or would have been if this event hadn't happened. He really respected my father. My father, he says, did good things for people. He was thoughtful, he was, you know, he -- he educated himself. So h-he -- you know, it's funny, my brother got himself so educated and was never interested in small talk or anything like that. So another thing that happened between him and my mother was that it got to a point fairly early, when they really almost couldn't talk to each other, because my brother didn't know small talk and my mother couldn't talk physics or philosophy, or you know, whatever. And he was -- he was nice to her, I mean, he wasn't mean or anything like that, but he just really didn't have anything in common with her. I-It was -- It's funny, it's kind of a scary thing, I mean, i-if you're a parent, you know, who are your children, I mean, and what do they turn out to be and is there any rule that says they have to be like you, or that -- you know. And it always hurts me when I hear these stories, but for example, my -- my Ph.D. thesis advisor has one son and he -- the last time I saw him, which was, I don't know, maybe seven or eight years ago, he said, "Well, I see my son once a year. We go fishing together, alone, for a week." He said, "I don't like the woman

my son married. We have nothing in common, we don't have a lot to, you know, to do with each other. We enjoy our annual fishing trip, and that's it." Well, to me that's very sad, and I mean, my husband and I are very involved with both our kids, I mean, maybe too much involved, but I like to think that we are also not just parents -- I mean, that we are also, I don't know, friends or something, I don't know. But -- But I mean, I think we've also really worked at that and I think maybe, you know, why did I work at that so hard? And I think that was conversations my brother and I had early, about parenting. I mean, I remember one day having a conversation with my brother bef -- I think it was before he went off to college, about -- and my brother said to me, "A child is like a ship. When you finish building it --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning of Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer. This is tape number two, side B. And you were saying?

A: My brother said that a child should be like a ship, and that when you finish building the ship, and you crack the champagne bottle over the bow, or whatever, and you send it out to sea, that you have to be confident that you've done a good job building the ship, and that it will not sink, that it will sail under it's own steam, and that you then can't continually watch out for it and you know, sort of be trying to tell it where to go and what to do.

Q: He said this wa -- before he was a parent? When he was in --

A: He's not a parent, he's never been a parent.

Q: He's never been a parent?

A: And he said that to me, I think it was when he was still in college, because he was still home. And I always remembered that. So, very early on -- first of all, I wasn't going to have any kids either. That -- What I -- I was definitely not going to have any kids.

Q: Why?

A: Well, actually, when I grew up with my brother, I mean, I sort of grew up with the idea that we were never going to get married, we were just going to be these dedicated scientists and we were not going to have a marriage, or children, we would just be these career folks. At some point my brother met a young woman and they ended up getting married, and that was a very , very, very difficult time in my life, because I felt -- I felt as though I had been deceived somehow. I just -- See, I think one of the things that happened, is when my brother was home, we were pretty close and we -- we talked a lot, but the one thing I didn't realize until way later, is that I talked a lot more than he talked. And I didn't realize how private a person he was, and so, as he went through his traumas in life, like the army, and you know, all the things that happen as you're a young person growing up, he didn't share those things with me. He taught me a lot of stuff and so on, but he didn't -- he didn't take the opportunity to teach me about what I call the sort of, real life skills. And so, I think -- I think when he was going to get married, I mean that just ki -- was like something totally out of the blue, and I -- I think I -- I remember

writing that this -- I remember writing very dramatic things at that point. I don't know, maybe I'll find them someday if we ever clean out the house, but I remember feeling that this was like the fall of -- I remember writing something about that I felt like, "The Fall of the House of Usher," that I guess I'd been reading Poe at the time, but -- and I had really morbid thought about, you know, that -- that my brother was sort of deserting the plan, or -- I mean, I -- you know, I -- I don't know.

Q: And deserting you probably, too.

A: Maybe deserting me, I don't know.

Q: I mean, I wonder if -- if -- if just -- I mean, this -- this experience that you shared, this -- this -- this leaving Vienna, and this -- this fleeing for your lives. I mean, maybe -- I'm just wondering if maybe part of it was that he was the only person out there who really knew, like you did, what you had gone through. And who knew even more, because he's older. And that there was something -- that maybe you felt abandoned for that.

A: Yeah. I mean, I really shouldn't have, it's just that he didn't make me sufficiently aware of his inner life and -- or I don't know, maybe it was more than just his inner life, but for example, he had a -- he had a very interesting thing happen, which I only barely mentioned in the in -- in the video interview. When we got to France, and I can't remember which town, I think -- I don't remember which town it was, but anyway, he met this -- this young man, who was probably 20-something, who was a pianist, a professional p-pianist, from Poland. Also Jewish and apparently did not make it through the war. This guy had a room somewhere and so okay, it must have been in Limoge. He

invited my brother to come and stay with him for, I guess a month or so. And so this guy was 21, which in those days was quite an adult age. You know, 21 now is not as adult as I think 21 then. So this guy had fled Poland and was totally on his own, and so he kind of knew a little bit about the ropes, cause he had already been there, I don't know for, you know, weeks or months, whatever it was. And so he took my brother under his wing, and he said, "Okay, so, you know, what would you like to do?" And my brother said, "Well, I'd like to go to school." And so he said, "Well, you know, there's a school on such and such a street, why don't you go down there and register?" And so my brother went down there and -- and he -- he -- when I was interviewing him in recent years, he said, "I was the only kid in the school who was not being registered by parents. I was the only one who was on my own," and -- and he said, "so I got into this class, with this nice guy, who happened to be the headmaster," Monsieur Nabout was his name, N-a-b-o-u-t. And in that class, kids got seated according to their grades. So my brother started in the last seat. And apparently, within like two or three months, my brother was sitting in the first seat, and -- and Monsieur Nabout also took my brother under his wing and sort of, you know, kept him after school, and helped him with his French, and his this and that and so on. So that was a really positive thing, and then this guy one day said, "Well, so, you know, what else would you like to do?" And my brother said, "Well, I play the violin, and I have my violin and -- and I -- I'd like to take some lessons." And so, he said, "Well, you know, on such and such a street, there's this music conservatory," you know, "get yourself over there." And -- And somehow my brother went there and I guess he got

lessons and they must have given him lessons free, or I -- I don't know how, but anyway he, you know. So, this guy, I think was very formative in helping my brother grow up. I mean, my brother had already grown up very quickly, cause he had to do -- he spoke a little French. My mother knew no French and I knew no French. So he was -- I mean, once we got to France, he was in charge of all the official things that had to be done. So that was a really fast growing up. But in addition, there was this other stuff growing up, and that stuff I didn't see, and I don't think my brother really -- I mean, why would he come home and tell this little seven and a half year old younger sister about this stuff that was going on? So I -- I wasn't aware of -- of all that other stuff that went on. And then, of course, in -- when we got here, and when my brother was at Columbia, he got some friends, and I -- I remember like one night, my brother took me with him to the -- I mean, this is -- my brother almost never did this, but he went to this friend's house, and there were a lot of other young men there, and here's this little sister. And they were playing cards, which I don't think my brother did very often, and certainly I'm sure he never did it as a -- you know, as a real adult. But I just sat in the back of this guy's apartment with a -- I think my brother bro-brought a book for me, or something, and I just sat there reading. But I wasn't just reading, I was looking up at all these big guys, you know, and they were joking and playing cards and -- and the thing that my brother did, which I always felt -- I mean, it was -- it was very difficult being alone in that, you know, this little girl sitting there, you know, no friends, just watching these big guys having a good time. But in a funny way, I didn't really ever feel lonely, because you know, I'd kind of

sneak glances up at the boys and sort of every fifth glance or 10th glance, whatever it was, my brother would look up and wink at me with this wonderful smile. So that I always had a feeling that I wasn't really alone, you know, and that he -- he hadn't just forgotten about me. So, and -- and then -- I mean, he would close himself in his room in our apartment at 1092 President and he would be doing his homework, or practicing his violin and I would be at -- first of all, if I wanted to come in, I had to knock. But -- And he didn't like me to knock too often, cause I would disturb his concentration. So I would be sitting in the kitchen, doing my homework, but every -- I don't know what it was, once an hour, or whatever, he would come out and he would just come up behind me and stroke my hair, I had rather long hair. I mean, not very long, but you know, sort of up to the middle of my back, and stroke my hair and ask me how I was doing, look down to see -- make sure I was doing something serious. So, I was always aware of his presence. And you know, it's funny, people say that when you grow up with parents who argue, that it's very troublesome, and I only had one parent, but I had this brother. And, as I mentioned on the videotape, very often my brother would say one thing and my mother would say a different thing. But it never troubled me, because I had somehow, at some very early stage, made up my mind that my mother was very emotional and that what she said came out of, sort of an emotional rationale, whereas what my brother said made a lot more sense and came out of the gray matter center. And so, I was rarely troubled by this, because it was totally obvious that -- that almost all the time, it was better to do what my brother said.

Q: So what was you relationship then like with -- with your -- with your mother? How -- How -- How -- I mean, apart from -- from that even, I mean what -- what -- how did you -- how do you look back on it now, and -- and what -- what do you recall about it that stands out now?

A: Well, I talked about this on the -- on the video interview, but my sense of my mother has changed in the last 10 years. First of all, I had a very good relationship -- a pretty good relationship with my mother for most of my growing up years, because first of all, my mother went to the factory every day and I was left alone. So I had a lot of responsibility and my mother trusted me. And also, my mother did not indulge in certain things. For example, not terribly long after I came on -- I must have been like in first grade, there was all this buzz around the block with the kids, about where do babies come from, you know. And my mother -- I don't think my mother really knew a lot about where babies come from. My mother told me what she thought was the truth, babies come out of your stomach. Well, babies do not come out of your stomach, they come out of your uterus, but anyway, I mean, you know, she didn't have the anatomy quite right, but -- but it -- or maybe that was just, you know, the way people talked about things in those days, but -- but she -- you know, I asked one day, "Where do babies come from?" And she just sat down and told me, you know, about the birds and the bees and the flowers, and -- in a -- as straightforward a manner as she knew. So, I went out on the street to play with my -- the little kids and ultimately this conversation arose about where do babies come from and this one kid told me that babies are brought by the stork. And I

looked at this kid and I said, “Babies are not brought by the stork.” And I repeated this whole lesson that my mother had sai -- you know. So, some of the parents were very distressed with either me or my mother, or both.

Q: How old were you then?

A: Maybe about eight or nine. That -- That I was going around spilling the beans about where babies really came from, when they were telling their kids these unbelievably ridiculous stories. So I really appreciated that my mother was honest with me, as far as she, you know, she could be, and -- and I could talk to her about things, and she talked to me about things and we -- we kind of -- we did all right together. You know, she -- When I had to memorize poems, you know, sh -- even though she was exhausted after coming home from work, and then doing all the housework, cause my brother and I did appallingly little, my brother less than I, but she would sit in bed and listen to me recite, you know, Gunga Din or something, ti -- until I had it memorized, and -- and I would test her. She had a book about how to learn English and I would test her about, you know, this is cherry pie, and all these funny things. So she -- she was nice with me about, you know, helping me study and so far as she could, and -- and so on. The first friction between my mother and me, happened when I was about 11, and the other -- there was another little girl that -- on my floor in the apartment house who was a year older. She turned 12, and she started dating, and my mother got very nervous. My mother -- Well, I -- I don’t know. My mother had an argument throughout the rest of our lives, which in retrospect is the most stupid, ridiculous argument, especially by 1990 standards, but in

college, the last year of college, I was friends, pals, with another woman in the chemistr -- who was a chemistry major, and we're still friends, I mean, wa -- we still talk to each other, and I got her a job, as a matter of fact, where I used to work. This woman went off to Tanglewood with the guy who she subsequently married. And my mother was absolutely horrified that -- that this woman went off to Tanglewood and stayed overnight in some barn -- I -- they slept in some barn. And I was very naïve. I was -- I was very naïve, em-emotionally. So -- So this argument came up. My mother said, "Hm," you know, "what kind of a girl is this, going off to, you know, stay in a barn overnight with this guy?" And I said, "Ma, I'm sure nothing happened." Now, in retrospect, when I look back, I think why the hell was I so sure that nothing happened, and who the hell cares? But, I think the reason I was so sure that nothing happened was, I remember this young woman once coming to me in the chemistry lab and telling me -- we were discussing -- tampons had just come out. We were discussing whether it was all right to use tampons or not. And this woman said to me, "Well, I can't use tampons because what if my hymen broke and you know, what would this guy say, if we get married and I'm not a virgin?" And, so I think that's what made me so sure that probably nothing happened. So anyway, so this conversation, about did something happen or did not something happen in the barn, my mother discussed until my mother got Alzheimer's disease. I mean, it would come up once every year or two and my mother would say, "That was disgusting that she spent the night in the barn." And -- And I would say, "Mother, nothing happened in the barn." You know, I mean, it was just, you know, just so --

Q: Continue to --

A: My mother was extremely proud of the fact that no man, other than my father, had ever touched her. When my mother was 80 and we had moved her up here and she went to a -- a -- I don't know, senior citizen club meetings in Brookline, one day, it was raining very hard, and we came to pick her up to take her out to dinner or something, and she had walked back, and she just casually mentioned, she said there was this guy who had offered her a ride home, and I said, "Well," you know, "why didn't you take the ride? It was raining." She said -- I mean, she just lifted her shoulders in that, you know, in that special, proud, European woman sort of way. I mean, y-you just don't see American women doing things like -- and she said, "Who do you think I am? Would I get into a car with a strange man?" And here she was, 80, you know? And -- But I mean -- But I grew up that way. I mean, I -- Even when I -- I never dated in college. I think I -- I actually did, maybe on three occasions, go someplace with a guy. And they were -- they were generally very -- I mean, do you want to hear about this?

Q: Sure.

A: They were very strange events. I mean, I think the first time was, my father went to medical school with a woman, who was the mother of two sons, and I always say that I was friends with Bob Silber since four years before I was born, because our parents were friends. And so -- so those two parents were doctors. That g -- That guy just died. That guy died in November, Bob Silber, he was a hematologist. But anyway, I mean I -- you know, I've known him forever, and so we were always friends and he would -- he -- he

was older, I mean, he was four years older than I was, and he would take me places like Lewison Stadium, to the concerts and -- and things. And so one day he said, “I have -- I have this friend, and he’s -- he’s going to this,” -- I don’t know, was some dance where you had to dress up. “I want you to go with him.” You know, “Nothing will happen, everything’s going to be all right, I want you to go.” So against great protest, I went and I went and I bought a -- sort of a dress that I actually remember. And it was a very -- I had a really unpleasant evening. I mean this -- I -- This guy didn’t know how to dance, I had never danced with anybody else before. I danced a lot by myself, but I hadn’t ever danced with anybody, except my mother and my brother before. I was just really uncomfortable in this situation. This guy didn’t know how to carry on a conversation. I was -- So okay, so the next time, I think I -- well, then I went to work at Brookhaven. There was a special program and you could apply for it and I -- I got in to go to Brookhaven for two summers and work at Brookhaven National Lab. And I met a guy there, who actually is also a doctor now, down I think, maybe in Florida, whose name was Norman Bauman, and he and I would talk a lot and he -- I mean, I think I actually -- I might have actually even kissed him or something. I don’t know, but he -- he talked to me a lot about why was I so, you know afraid of getting close to s -- to some guy ra -- so we had a lot of interesting conversations, and -- and I felt sort of friendly with him for awhile. But I think -- I think -- And I always had a fond spot in my heart for him, but I think it was more -- not so much because of things that he talked to me about -- you know the -- that sort of dating game, but more because everybody I knew, practically, hated their mothers, and you know, sort

of -- maybe it's still a popular thing to hate your mother, but Norman Bauman said, "I really respect my parents and I really like my mother." And he -- And I mean this -- that seemed very trivial in retrospect, but he said, "One of the things I really like about my mother is that she never comes down to see me or my father without looking nice. She always combs her hair, she always has a nice bathrobe on. She always is respectful i-in that way." And I thought, "Wow, this guy is really different from anybody I've ever met." So that was my -- that was sort of like a first awakening. And then, in my senior year -- the first year in college, I met a woman with whom I'm still friends, although we've had our ups and downs, but we're still friends. And we got to be like best friends and we were best friends for four years. I mean, we spent practically all our spare time together. And -- But there was a -- there was a really big upheaval. Her mother was constantly saying things like, "Barbara, you can't marry Liane, what are you spending so much time with Liane?" And I thought that was really like a horrible thing to say. You know, I mean, she was always wanting her daughter to go out on dates. And so her daughter did go out to tea dances, and you know, all these things that happened at the college. I n -- I never went to any of those. I mean I -- you know, and I used to -- I used to -- when I heard about the tea dances, I used to call them the slave market. Maybe other people called it that, also, you know, was the guys stood on one side, the women stood on the other side and I really hated that, I would never go to anything like that [indecipherable]. And -- But anyway, the last year in college, she met this guy and I don't know how it happened, but she went and had coffee with him and I was supposed to meet

her and so I met him. And she called me up and she said, “He would like to go out with you,” you know. “Would you consider going out with him?” And I said, “Well, I -- No, I don’t think so.” And she kind of talked me into it. So -- So I went to the movies with this guy, tall, thin guy. You must be laughing at all of this. This -- This guy -- So we went to the movies and then he took me home, which was, I think the first time I’d ever been taken home. I mean I -- I used to come home alone in New York from the subway, you know, at two o’clock in the morning, never bothered me. My mother was always worried, but -- so he took me home and we got to my apartment door, and I was ready to say goodnight and he said, “Could I come in for a little while?” Well, I didn’t really want him to come in, but I felt it was very impolite, so I -- I let him come in and so he sat down on the couch in the living room, and I sat down on a chair on the other side of the room. And n -- the bedroom adjoined the living room with a -- glass doors, which might have had some curtains on them, and they were not closed, and my mother was sleeping in this -- in this next room. And he said, “Well, why don’t you come here and sit next to me and get a little cozy?” And I said, “I don’t want to come and sit there and get a little cozy.” And then he came and sat down next to me, where I was sitting.

Q: On the other side of the couch.

A: Right. And do you -- you won’t believe -- do you know what I did? I went and woke my mother up to come and get this guy out of the house.

Q: He must have been horrified. The poor guy.

A: And I -- I met him on campus afterwards, and he said hello and I st -- do you know what I said to -- I said, “You are an animal.” I said, “You behaved appallingly the other night and I don’t ever want to see you again.” So, I mean, looking now at you know, the current generations and so on, it’s -- I mean, this is really funny, but -- but in those days, I mean, you know, my mother was so puritanical. And -- But it wasn’t just my mother, it’s just that she was more so, but I remembered this -- th -- my good friend Barbara, th-the one who got me into this date, I remember one time -- I don’t know -- I bought a package of sanitary napkins or something, and you know, in those days it wasn’t displayed, and so they would wrap it up in a br -- unmarked brown paper bag for you. And so we were in the subway, and Barbara said, “What’s in the bag?” And I said in a whisper, I said, “It’s sanitary napkins.” And she got so angry with me because she thought I said that too loudly. So, I mean, you know, you have to -- you have to understand what I’m telling you in the context of those times. So, anyway -- So then, I think there was a very major change that came. I really revered people who were very educated and who did important things in their field. So, there were a couple of things. I took physics from a guy named Al Predell, was the physics teacher’s name, and everybody had a crush on this guy, probably except me, and -- but I kind of liked him, also. And he had a car and I was dying to learn how to drive. I mean, I just, mm, that was like uppermost in my mind. And this guy actually let me drive. I -- I got a learner’s permit or whatever, and this guy -- you know, I don’t remember exactly, I -- I think my chemistry teacher, a woman, who just died at age 100, Dr. Stecker, for my graduation bought me driving lesson -- three driving

lessons, or something like that. And this guy Al Predell, let me take a couple of little short rides in his car, within the parking area. But he was an avid tennis player, and he played tennis with a professor who was at -- probably at Columbia at the time, whose name was Jack Steinberger, who's now in Switzerland if he's still alive, which I have no reason to believe that he isn't. Jack Steinberger won a Nobel Prize many years later, but Jack Steinberger had come, I think from Germany, and had a reputation for being a very brilliant nuclear physicist. So, I would sit on the tennis courts at Barnard sometimes, watching Al Predell play tennis with Jack Steinberger. And then the second year, I was at Brookhaven, Jack Steinberger would occasionally turn up to use, I don't know the Cosmotron or something. And -- And I was a real Jack Steinberger watcher, because I -- I -- you know, I had been told this is a great man. And one night Jack Steinberger asked me if I wanted to go for a ride, and I went for a ride with him and he started to make some advances. You know, I mean, he was old enough to be my father -- well, I don't know, maybe not quite. And I got very angry with him and I said, "I'm s --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This -- Okay, this is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer. This is tape number three, side A.

A: So -- So I gave Jack Steinberger this talking to, about you know, "You're supposed to be a brilliant physicist, how could you act this way?" You know, and I'm only telling you about this because I think that moment was a major turning point in my life, because Jack Steinberger looked at me in the eye, and he said, "You know, just because I'm a clever physicist, doesn't have anything whatsoever to do with the rest of my personality, and why are you trying to cubby-hole me like this?" And he gave me this long -- I mean, it was almost like an oration, about that I was doing something that didn't make sense. I was trying to f -- to -- just because he did this one thing that I admired, I was trying to pan onto that, all sorts of attributes about who he was. So anyway, he gave me this speech, turned around, drove me back to my dorm and -- and that was -- that was that. And I -- Jack Steinberger appeared once, many years later, when I was with my husband in Cambridge, at a little snack bar, and I -- politely we -- we chatted. And then we never had any contact until he won the Nobel Prize, and when he won the Nobel Prize, I knew wa -- I somehow periodically knew where he was. I wrote him a letter of congratulations and also -- and there was a little bit of correspondence back and forth, in which I -- I sort of partly apologized for, you know, being a really naïve kid, or -- or something. But -- But I have to tell you that inside my inner self -- Jack Steinberger, after -- at some point, married some woman he had known for four days and had either one or two kids, and

then got divorced. And -- And that doesn't -- you know, to this day, I mean, even though my brother is in his third marriage, and -- and lots of peop -- I mean 90 percent of -- everybody seems to be divorced, remarried, you know, married five times, and so on and so forth. When I think about Jack Steinberger, I have some very positive feelings about -- about this very brilliant man who played tennis, but underneath that, there's a guy who -- you know, who did something that was irresponsible. I mean, what [indecipherable] you get married after four days? I mean, what kind of stupid thing is that? But -- And -- But I think -- But I think I have Jack Steinberger to thank, in a way, for -- for the fact that I got married, because he -- he did s -- he snapped something in my way of thinking, that allowed me to view things differently from the way I had ever viewed them before.

Q: Okay. Let me just -- I want to -- I want to continue the -- the chronology, but before I forget I want to go back to a couple things. Just -- More -- More back in your childhood, I -- I wanted to ask you about whether your -- you or your mother, or your -- your brother, in the years that you first arrived, in '41 through '45, especially, wa-was there an attempt to k -- sort of keep up on what was happening, either through just reading the papers, or -- or through some -- some other, you know, word of mouth or correspondence? Did y -- Were you aware of what was going on there, and was your family?

A: Yeah. Well, first of all, my mother was an avid newspaper reader, so when we first came, she used to read th -- a German paper called The Alfbo, which may still exist. And then she -- then she -- when she could read English, she would read that plus the daily -- I think The Post, she used to read and sometimes The New York Times. I --

Q: Was it A-A-Alfbo it was called?

A: Alfbo.

Q: And was that a German --

A: A German --

Q: -- controlled?

A: No, no, no, it's a German --

Q: [indecipherable] this was a German language --

A: -- no, it's published here, but a German language newspaper.

Q: Uh-huh. Mm-hm.

A: So she was very interested in keeping up with the news. She also was very a -- I mean, all sh -- you know, we left everybody behind in -- in Europe. I mean, her parents and -- were in Poland. Her sister and her sister's husband and children, her brother and -- you know, and all my father's relatives were -- were there, except for these two -- My Aunt Lena Klinghoffer and -- and my -- my father's brother, my Uncle Jack, and -- who spelled his name with an extra f, R-e-i-f-f, for some bizarre reason. So she was always trying to make contact, and she -- she sent Care packages to certain people. You know that place called Care, and they send packages? I don't remember who, but she often -- when she could afford it, later on, she would send Care packages to certain people. I'm trying to find out what happened to different people, th -- I think there was -- you know that -- telephoning was not easy, the way it is now, and we didn't -- when we first moved into our apartment in Brooklyn, we didn't have a telephone for a long time, and then it

was, you know, it was very special, having this telephone and -- but you didn't telephone lightly. I mean, you know, where you had, I don't know, 20 telephone calls a month in -- in whatever the minimum charge was, but -- so she did try very hard. I was -- I think I was fairly unattached from that whole thing, but -- but what happened is, as the years went by in New York, different people would appear. Like this -- this guy I told I you was friends with since four years before I was born, I mean s -- at some time, and I don't remember exactly when, his family, who had gone to Santa Domingo, appeared in New York. And so, all of a sudden, there was this new old friendship that picked up and so they would come to visit us, we would go to visit them. Doctor Kleinfeld, the -- the lawyer, we went to visit his family quite often. I mentioned that in the other interview, he was the one who helped us pack the van. And then he died, I don't remember of what, and -- but his -- his second wife, who is the one we -- we knew, lived in New York, we visited her a long time. I pretty much lost track. They -- They had three children. One, the oldest one was from a first marriage, he went to Israel and I -- I think I once corresponded with him. The daughter I once corresponded with, but I've lost track of her. The son is a math professor, where? Maybe in Iowa, or something, and I -- I have occasionally corresponded with him, but the -- the s -- that son married a woman that my brother kind of liked also, and -- and I don't mean romantically -- well, maybe even romantically, but anyway, that woman, who still goes by the name of Ruth Kleinfeld, a -- i -- now lives in Hawaii, she's a professor -- retired professor of biology, and we have suddenly started e-mailing back and forth a -- a fair amount. Sh -- But she and Irwin

Kleinfeld got divorced after quite a lot of years. They didn't have any children. Irwin Kleinfeld remarried, she remarried, her husband's now very sick. So -- So these people would keep, you know, cropping up from -- from the old country.

Q: Did -- Were you aware of a -- wh -- th -- I mean, a-as a child, I -- I -- I know that there was this -- this envelope that arrived one day, and I want to ask you about that, but before that happened --

A: The blue letter, yeah.

Q: The blue letter. Before that arrived, were you aware that -- did you have any sense, or did your mother or brother have any sense of -- of this --

A: Oh, I think my brother had a very real sense. Whenever I discuss, for example, the trip on the San Louis with my brother, he always says he doesn't -- he could not understand, even though he was so young, he could not understand why, on the voyage going to the U.S., before the boat was turned around, why were all these people dancing and doing all these jovial things, when they had just left their families behind, knowing they probably would never see them again, they had lost family members. And he said, "And all of a sudden, they're on this ship, making like it's a party." And he just -- I mean, you know, by the way --

Q: A-A-And he knew -- he knew that at the time?

A: Yes, he --

Q: Tell me what you're showing us there.

A: This is an article that came out in the May 20th Boston Globe. It's funny when I -- when I read it first, I thought it said voyage through the years and I looked again and it says voyage through the tears. And so, I was one of the three people interviewed for this article. This picture -- This large picture in this article, i-in -- this is in the Living section of the Boston Globe --

Q: May 20th.

A: I actually fe -- yeah, May 20th, 1999. I actually found this picture at the 1989 reunion in Florida. There was -- I think it was a couple named the Aaron's, A-A-r-o-n, and you know, people brought things to the reunion, and this couple brought this photo album, and I couldn't believe what I saw, but I opened their photo album and there was this picture and here this -- this is me and this is my brother.

Q: Hm, he was very well dressed there, for a -- let's see, in 1939, he would have been what -- he must --

A: At 12.

Q: 12 years old, okay.

A: Now, notice them -- th-th-the most characteristic thing is, you see there are two pens in his pocket? There are always at least two pens and pencils in my brother's pockets, so --

Q: To this day.

A: To this day, always. So -- A-And this, this is the guy who -- who I think started the -- the reunion thing going, and this is a picture of Liesel Loeb, whose father was the head of the passenger committee on the San Louis.

Q: Well, you know I -- I wanted to ask you about this whole -- I mean, your brother had this sense at the time, that this was inappropriate that they were dancing.

A: Look at the looks on -- look at that look.

Q: It's just like disgusted.

A: Look -- Look at every other child here. Every other child here, except for maybe this little baby and this little baby. Every other child here is smiling, right, or -- or you know, or something, my brother looks like a -- a grandfather. [phone ringing]

Q: So you're saying again, everybody looks like they're smiling, except for -- except for your brother.

A: Right. And he w -- he was just this very serious kid. So --

Q: And yet, he's responding to the reality of the situation more than some of the other people on the ship.

A: Absolutely. I mean --

Q: But -- And so he -- Did he -- I mean, to what degree did he or any of you know what was going on?

A: I think my brother was extremely aware. I don't think I was terribly aware, I just knew that bad things were happening, but I don't think -- I don't think I -- you know, I don't think I sort of was into formulating thoughts like, how come I don't have grandparents, or

-- I mean, maybe I thought that, cause there were grandparents in the house, but I -- it didn't -- I don't think it really sank in. Th-The first -- The loss of my father, that sank in, because I heard about that all the time, you know, once a year my mother lit candles. My mother wore black for years and years and years. She often reminisced about my father. One of the things that I'm hoping to find one day is, unti -- I -- I really -- I -- in -- in a lot of ways, I ten -- I guess I grew up like a boy, and so there was sort of a no-no. You weren't supposed to cry. I -- And my mother would start talking about these things and she would -- she would dissolve in tears and I -- I couldn't cope with seeing her that way and I couldn't -- I just couldn't deal with that whole scene and so I would -- I would always turn her off, which was really terrible, I mean in retrospect. And now I'm -- I'm sorry, and actually, one day, long after I was married and had kids, my mother was up here and she started talking about -- and I -- I was trying to stop her and ma -- and my husband --

Q: She started talking about what?

A: The past. You know, what happened, my father, etcetera. I -- And I just could never cope with that, so -- so I just -- I think I just kind of walked out of the room or something, and -- and my husband took a tape recorder and said okay -- we -- we both called her -- well, my husband called her grandma, I think, after the kids were born. And he took a tape recorder and he had her record a whole tape about her feelings, an -- and I cannot fi -- that tape has got to be somewhere in this house, and I cannot find it. Because, of course, now I'm dying to know what were her thoughts and I am extremely angry with myself for

not asking her all sorts of questions that I want to know about, and -- but I just could not emotionally cope with listening to her, not -- not only because the information was hurtful, but because I think I could not cope with watching her dissolve in tears. And guess what? At some stage -- and I don't know when it started to happen, I started dissolving in tears, ev -- you know, for certain things and I -- I can't even define, but when people talk about certain things -- certain kinds of things that happen, or talk about certain things related to my mother or my father, or -- I -- I just involuntarily start crying -- or sometimes if the kids say something. And that is so horrible, because I remember what it -- an awful feeling it was when my mother cried. So I'm always apologizing to the kids, you know, I'm sorry, this is totally involuntary.

Q: But --

A: I don't mean to be doing this.

Q: A-And so it -- wa -- it's partly just -- what you learned was that you don't do this. Do yo -- Do you -- Do you know why that you felt that that was inappropriate? That -- That, you know, you don't -- y-y-y -- you got to be tough, you got to move on, you know, given what you had gone through, was it --

A: Well, I s -- I certainly knew that you had to be tough and you had to move on. I mean, I think that was a -- I think that was a lesson I learned pretty early. But why I couldn't listen to her, you know, spilling out what was hurting her and so on, I think it's because it just made me feel so awful to see her cry and to see her be in that kind of pain. And I -- And I did a very non-adult thing, I mean I -- the adult thing would have been to just sit

and listen and say something helpful, and -- and my -- my -- my thing was to disappear. I wanted to just get the hell out of there.

Q: And -- And what sort of things now d -- like you saying sometimes you'll just dissolve into tears yourself when it's triggered by something. What -- What -- Is it specific memories of this time, or other things that are traumatic in the world? What -- What kinds of things?

A: Probably all of the above. I mean, like I've been very good this morning, but -- but you could say something, or I could say something and all of a sudden, I just decompensate, as I call it. Sometimes it -- just in recent weeks, listening when I -- you know, I can listen and I can be very stern and all there to the news every night about Yugoslavia, but sometimes, when I hear or see a picture of the refugees mar-marching down the road, and an old lady in a wheelbarrow or something, I just -- you know, tears come to my eyes and I just --

Q: Taps real deep, huh?

A: Yes. As a matter of fact, as I was saying to somebody the other day, I think this Kosovo thing has probably come closer to getting to the real inside of me than anything that's happened in the intervening times. I mean, every time there is anything about war, or violence or anything like that, that absolutely turns my stomach. I mean, I -- I know this is a stupid, naïve thing to say, but I ha -- I, to this day, I do not understand how people can call themselves civilized and -- and -- and fight wars. I mean, it's -- th -- the concept seems so ridiculous that, you know, you shoot me and I'll shoot at you and

whoever gets the most guys down, gets to do what they want. And in the meantime -- you know, I wrote a po -- I -- I like to write poetry sometimes, I haven't done it for a long time, but I used to do it more. I wrote a poem after the Yom Kippur War, in which I tried to express that when you have a child, you know, the nine months of gestation is not a big deal, but it's the next 21 years, when you essentially devote the most incredibly -- I mean, if you're a reasonable parent at least, the most incredible amount of emotional energy, to try to make this fledgling fly. It is -- It's -- I mean, it's just an -- it's the hardest thing that I've ever, ever done in my life. And the thought that somebody can say, "Well, hey so today we're going to have a war, and I'll shoot a few of your kids, and you'll shoot a few of my kids, and then they'll be gone." That is so obscene a thought to me, that I -- I mean, I literally, I don't even have words to express what I feel about that. Do you have children, by the way?

Q: No.

A: No. I don't know.

Q: I have lots of nieces and nephews and I can identify with what you're saying, to some degree.

A: I mean, I just, you know, it just -- for somebody, I mean, or even, you know, even a spouse or a parent or something, but I think it's worst with a child, but to -- to actually s -- you know, a -- a lot of funny things have happened in my life. About, I don't know, maybe 13 years ago, I-I -- I generally, for the last 15 or so years, I've -- go out -- go out running in the morning, and I used to have a route along the highway, and --

Q: It's so pretty here, by the way.

A: Yeah, it is, yeah.

Q: Just a beautiful piece of land.

A: I went out and I was running on Pleasant Street, which is a fairly well traveled street, and that morning, I saw a cat that looked virtually exactly like this black cat, which is our daughter's cat, and it had even that same little kink at the end of the tail, and it had been run over. I saw that cat, and I started to -- I mean, it was more than weeping, it was almost screaming and I came running home here, and I was -- I think my daughter was actually here, and I -- I just came up and I sat on the bed next to my husband and I -- I was just literally falling apart, I was just weeping and weeping and weeping, uncontrollably. And then the cat, our cat, came back into the house. So my husband and I -- so I calmed down, my husband and I went and buried this other cat, but something happened to me that day, and I don't know what it was, but I've always thought to myself that no matter how horrible -- and I -- this may not be true, but -- but the thought in my head is that -- that I would never, ever be that upset again, no matter what happened. That -- That I would -- That I would just never, ever crack up like that again.

Q: What -- What -- Wha -- Where did that reach? What -- How did it reach you like that? I mean, what was it pulling it back onto you?

A: I don't know, I don't know. You know, if I had my life to live over again and if I could afford it this time, which I couldn't have the last time around, I think it would be really interesting t-to go -- have psychotherapy, a-and see if they could, you know, drag

anything out of me. But again, I mean, that was -- you know, that was just some real change, I mean, like the thing that happened with Jack Steinberger, which allowed me to get on with -- I don't -- you know, some other level of living. But -- But when the cat -- When I found that dead cat that day, I -- I just -- I mean, I went berserk in a way that I don't think I've ever gone berserk before. And -- And something just snapped and I -- and since then -- I mean, you know, people that I know have died and bad things have happened and -- but I -- I don't think I have ever again been at that incredible whatever it was. And I -- I have a funny feeling that I never will be again. I -- I mean that -- that I -- that something happened to me that day.

Q: But it wasn't just about a cat, it seems.

A: Well, I -- I ca -- It couldn't have been just about the cat, because you know, I re -- we had a wonderful, wonderful Siberian Husky dog, for about 12 years, and I just absolutely adored that dog and that dog -- one night my husband -- well, he was -- she was very arthritic and one day my husband took her out for a walk and he let her off the leash, which he almost never did, and she walked away and never came back. And my son and I sat and cried together, and -- you know, but it wasn't -- it wasn't that same thing. And when my mother died, that was s -- that was horrible, but -- but it wasn't that same -- whatever thing happened to me the day I found that dead cat.

Q: Yeah. You know, as you're talking about this, wh -- you know, where you started talking about looking at this picture, and you're talking about the war that's going on now in -- in Yugoslavia and Serbia and Kosovo and -- and we're looking at the picture of

these children, you're talking about war and children. And I was thinking, you know, when I was preparing for the interview and thinking about talking to you, you know, one question came to my mind, and -- and I wonder if it -- it forms your memory of this time, or even maybe your views, subsequently, of the world is, you know, being on the San Louis and -- and not having a place to get off, I mean, it's such a horrible and almost like mythological story, you know. And I was wondering, you know, in your mind, in your heart, li -- did you have a sense or do you have sense now of what -- what kind of world is it, that doesn't let people get off that ship?

A: I don't -- I don't know that I thought about it at the time, but -- and my brother certainly thought a lot about it, but I think about it a lot now, because -- and especially with the Kosovo situation. I mean, I often wonder about -- you know, I -- what kind -- this is really a funny world, you know, we have borders. And I've -- I've -- I've been asked to lecture about five times now in the former Soviet Union, and this last trip, which was the first week of May, I -- I didn't feel this so much this time, but the other trips, I certainly felt -- actually, I was very apprehensive before this trip, I was very apprehensive before this trip, but then once I left, i-it was -- it was okay, but the other trips, I don't know, more funny things happened, and you see police people with machine guns. You know, I mean, you see that sometimes in -- in western Europe also, but I -- I really don't do well with that, at all.

Q: Checkpoints you mentioned.

A: Yes, or guns. I really do not like guns.

Q: What is it -- What does it do? Make you nervous, does it make you angry?

A: It makes me ner -- It makes me nervous and it also makes me angry. Guns can hurt people. An-And we were just having this discussion the other night, guns can hurt people in a very impersonal way. Oh, I -- It was my son who was saying that, that, you know, if you -- I -- they were talking about gun control and I said, "Oh well, you know, big deal. So they take away the guns, they'll do it some other way." And my son said, "Well, you know, it's a little hard when you have to kind of actually go up and physically grab somebody," he said. "With a gun, it's very impersonal, you can stay far away, you can get a lot of people at once," and so on. I -- The idea of -- of people hurting other people, even emotionally, but -- but certainly physically, is extremely abhorsen to me. I mean, it -- We have come such a long way, you know. I look around me, we send somebody to the moon, we have televisions, we have CD's, now we have mini CD's, you know, we keep making progress. We do all these wonderful things. And then we turn around and kill each other. Does that make sense? I mean, there's something bizarrely inappropriate about -- about that. And I guess -- I mean, people sometimes challenge me on -- on -- on that, but I guess -- I don't know, I guess I value brain power a lot, and I don't want to see anybody killed or -- or hurt or anything, but -- but I have some funny feelings inside when somebody really worthwhile gets killed, and then there are all these people around who are costing society money, and causing troub --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning of Tape Three, Side B

Q: Okay, this is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer. This is tape number three, side B.

A: If somebody -- some ridiculous person goes out and kills off some wonderful person, who's making fantastic contributions to society, etcetera, that -- I mean, I'm very democratic, but that makes me even more angry, because you know, like -- all right, if you don't want to do anything constructive and you want to go to some island and send all people who want to be on drugs, and not do anything constructive, and you want to go there and you want to fight each other all the time, you know, go, be my guest, do it. Kill yourselves off, you know, do whatever you want. But just don't bother the people who are trying to be constructive and who are using their brain power to make the world a better place to live in. I mean it -- it -- you know, if you take -- an-and of course, in a war -- in a war situation, what do you do? You take the -- the cream of your population, you take the people who are, you know, 20 to 30. In the sciences, those -- that's the -- that's the place where, for example, in physics, that's the time when people make their contributions. So you take this -- this group of people at the absolute apex of their time to contribute and to -- to do wonderful things and you -- you pop them off? I mean, i-it's -- it's not a good thing for me to talk about because I -- you know, I mean, there's another part of me that says yeah, you know, I mean, people are -- I mean, why do I expect people to be different from all the other animals? You know, you -- you watch channel two, or you watch the Nature channel and you know, this animal eats that next animal down, that's a little smaller and a little slower and so on and so forth. And after all, we're

just evolved from those. So why am I surprised, you know? But then I said, but you know, but tions and ligers, and -- ta -- lions and tigers don't invent, you know, Cosmotrons and airplanes and spaceships and so on and so forth. So -- So we are a little different. Well, if we are a little different, why don't we act as though we are a little bit more civilized than those other species? But we don't. You know, people get into bar room brawls, and -- and they get drunk and they waste their lives and they --

Q: I think -- you know, picking up on this a little bit, to just ask you just -- I mean, I guess I-I'm wondering whether the Saint Louis experience is something that you feel has shaped you, that -- that sort of not being able to come to port. I mean, is that something that you've carried with you as a -- as a world view, in a sense? In -- In a -- In a sense of having only a certain number of, you know, in a sense of trust, perhaps?

A: Well, first of all, that's -- yeah, I'm not a very trusting person. I'm -- I guess, in some ways, I'm a very suspicious person. I mean, in some ways, I'm very trusting, but on the whole, I'm not very trusting. I think the San Louis business had a very major effect on me, but not -- not in a direct, obvious way, but -- I mean, first of all, I sit here now, at my present age of almost 65, and look back on it and think, you know, yeah, I mean, you know, this is a ca -- this is supposed to be a country, give me your tired, your poor, and here were 900 people who -- I mean, anybody who had any ounce of brain in their head would have known what the probable fate of these people were if they got sent back to Europe. You know -- So I keep asking myself, I mean, what would it have hurt anybody to let these people in? And most people had visas to the U.S. anyway. They -- It was just

-- I mean, ours was like six months from coming due. But then, on the other hand, I -- you know, my rational self takes over and I say, “Well, maybe they can’t do that, because, you know, what if everybody in the whole wide world wanted to move to the U.S.? That wouldn’t work, so what do you do? And I don’t know the answer and I’m a very non-political animal. But I think the more important thing that shaped me, for better or worse, is that we did have to go back and we did go through this experience in France, and coming here, and I think those events, very, very much shaped a lot of my views. And my brother always says, you know, we are stronger because we survived all those things, than we would have been if none of this had happened.

Q: I-In what way do you think that they sh -- those later events shaped your views? I mean, we’ve been talking about a lot of that, but I mean, di -- does something really stand out in terms of -- of how that shaped your world view?

A: I think -- Well, I think I owe my brother something for this, but also, I think it taught me that, you know, people are people and they, unfortunately, speak different languages, which makes life interesting, but -- but more bellicose. Because when you don’t speak the same language, you can’t even explain to the other person, usually, you know, how you’re feeling about something. So -- But I got to meet people in -- you know, a lot of different cities, a lot of different places. I got bounced around and I learned that, you know, wherever I went, there were some people who were wonderful, and there were some people who were kind of just there, and there were some people who were slightly on the disgusting side. And I think the most important thing that I learned was to -- I

mean sh -- of course I generalize often, you know, in conversation, but I don't really generalize in my -- in my own head. I don't -- And when I do, I -- every time, I will pull myself back. If I say, "Oh my God, those CPA's are so, you know, something or other, because I -- I give a lecture to a group of CPA's once a year and they seem so boring. And so I'll say -- I'll -- I mean a thought like that may cross my mind and then -- and then I always pull myself back and say, you know, not all CPA's are that way and -- and -- and everybody's different and you really have to meet each person and get to know that person, and not make a judgment, and -- and I'm not really making a judgment, I mean it's just kind of a comment that -- so I think -- I think -- I think that whole scenario taught me to be resilient in a lot of ways, taught me to -- to be, I hope, fairly open-minded. Taught me to be reasonably liberal. I just learned a lot. I guess mostly taught me to be resilient. Taught me to be able to shift on a dime, often. You know, taught me to do what needs to be done and -- and try to get on with things as best as possible.

Q: Y-You know you -- You mentioned before, just the -- the irony, the deep irony of -- of the life that you've lived and -- and -- and how -- how it was in -- in -- in an ironic sense, almost made possible by these terribly traumatic events.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And you've also written as -- in reading some -- some of what you've written, about the -- I can't remember how you put it, I guess, just to -- to be alive, by chance.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: How much is -- does -- do you carry that with you? I mean, just this -- this fa -- kind of like fate or -- or happenstance?

A: Oh, that I carry a lot of. As a matter of fact, that's an -- that's an almost horrible, haunting thing. First of all, I am extremely aware that not only I, but we're all alive by chance, and I'm not talking about the chance of having been conceived and born, but I'm talking about that every day, all sorts of horrible things happen, that -- that very abruptly end people's lives, and all you have to do is to happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. You know, if you're standing outside and you get hit by lightning in the wrong way, that's -- that's the end. That is always just one millimeter away from the top of my head. I fought against my mother being worried all the time, but I think I'm a very good mother, except -- or have been a very good mother, except for one thing, and that is that I've always worked full time and I've always been able to cope with this, but it actually sort of gets harder. I mean, I could be sitting at my desk at work and be writing a paper about you know, the induction of glutamine synthetase and all of a sudden, some horrible scenario will flash through my head. All -- This has happened to me all through my adult life. F-For just -- you know, for a nanosecond.

Q: Like what? Can you talk about that?

A: I -- I know what the -- what the pictures are, and I can almost not mention them, but something awful happening to one of our kids, or something happening to my husband, or something happening to my brother. And -- And this sort of chill or shiver comes across my body, and then -- but I'm a reasonably controlled person, and so all my life,

something like that happens and I -- I have the ability to push it out immediately, and say, "I'm not going to think about that." But, it gets -- it gets harder. I mean, I -- and so -- I mean, I try na -- I have tried not to -- to -- to do this thing to my children.

Q: To do what thing?

A: This thing that my mother did about, you know -- I was very good about this, you know, call me. Call me when you get there, call me, call me, let me know, you know, etce -- two years after we finished graduate school, my husband and I took a -- took a year off and took a trip around the world. I wrote my mother every day. Now, she didn't get those things every day, unfortunately, you know, she'd get nothing for a week and, you know -- and now when I think back on it, I think, "Oh my God, what did I do to her? How could I have done that to her?" To -- To leave her worrying all the time, cause she must -- she was undoubtedly worried all the time, and -- but I -- I didn't understand in those days, what is she worrying about, you know? As a matter of fact, she would always be worried when I came home alone at night after dark and I thought, "What the hell is she worrying about?" You know, "It's fine. I'm just walking from the subway," you know, and -- it wasn't real -- it wasn't until I was in college and I had an unpleasant incident with a guy following me, when I was in college, that really got me scared, that I realized for the first time, why my mother was worried. But, I try not to worry about my children, and I have a lot -- I always have a lot of work to do and that's a very good thing for me, because I get very involved in my work. But, there's that voice that comes in. I mean, for example, I try not to make the kids call me, okay, very often. But now our

son's been -- been sick and now I'm sort of more worried, so now I say, well just for this period, it's all right for me to ask him to call. That was him calling to tell me that he had arrived where he was going. Our daughter right now is in Israel, and I ha -- I must say I've been very good for her being in Israel, for these few weeks, partly because I'm so worried about our son that it's kind of a diversion for me. But then, a few days go by and if I haven't heard from her, there are all these things that start. It's almost like a cash register tape. What if s-such and such happened? You know, maybe this happened, maybe that happened. And I just -- I mean, I just have to live with that, and I try as -- as hard as I can, to not -- to not make them aware of that any more than is necessary, to not make that a burden to them, the way it was a burden to me, that my mother always worried about me. But you know, our daughter -- bo-both of our kids are -- are -- are very with it. And -- And our -- our daughter is a very clever young lady. And so one day she said something about this, and I said, "Well, you know, I have tried very hard to not, you know, do to you what my mother did to me." And she looked at me and she said, "Ma, who do you think you're kidding?" She said, "You don't have to say anything and we know exactly what you're thinking. We know exactly when you're worried, you don't have to say one word." And -- And you know, and they've been very good about it. I mean, I try very hard, when things are normal, I try to bite my tongue and I try very hard, when they were living at home, to not say call me, you know, or something. So sometimes I've made an agreement, if you're not going to be home by one, would you give me a call? So that's my exterior and that's the way I want it to be for the kids. But

behind the scenes, hoo. First of all, I'm a very punctual person, in the Germanic way, you know. And my brother, wuh, my brother and this other German kid, when they were both at Columbia college, would meet each other on Saturdays at noon. This guy would pace the street downstairs and at exactly noon, Meridian time, our bell would ring. And if I told my brother I was meeting him at 12:06, and I was one minute late, he would look at me very sternly and say, "You're late." So -- So I grew up with that, okay? So, you come on time. If -- And this has happened many times, and my broth -- my husband is wonderful with this, because he generally does not -- it takes a lot to start him worrying. So, one of our kids goes out, they say they'll be home at about one. So I'm fine, more or less, until one. At 1:05, something starts happening in my body, that I can't describe to you. By 1:10 it's getting worse and by 1:15, I'm in bad shape.

Q: In -- In what way? How are you in bad shape?

A: I don't know. It's as though there are seven million ants crawling inside of me, or I -- I mean, I can't -- I can't even describe it, and then I start saying to my husband, "Do you think we should call?" And my husband says, "No, they'll -- they're fine." And then I -- you know, so I wait another 15 minutes and then this thing has --

Q: Your stomach's churning, and --

A: Su -- At the very end stages, my stomach starts churning, it's just -- it's like a total body discomfort. And then -- And I get more and more anxious and -- and then my husband starts listing all the reasons why they're late. And the funny thing is, I'm a very good learner, except for this, because 99 percent of the time, when they get home, my

husband has hit on one of the reasons why they're late. And it's always some very legitimate thing. But I start to no longer -- after -- actually, our kids are very good and they rarely are more than half an hour late without calling. They really are wonderful. So it's very rare that I get to this extreme stage, but I listen to his -- to my husband's rationale, and then it gets worse and worse and then it sort of star -- I start to de-focus from that. I can all of a sudden no longer focus on all those rational explanations. And one of the really horrible, horrible things that -- that I did to myself once, which has never gone away is, there was a program on television and I -- I watched it -- I don't know why I watched it, I just -- I don't know, I was tired or something, and it was -- it was apparently a true story. It was about a woman with a professional husband, I think maybe her husband was a doctor or something and the kid goes to buy something at a -- maybe in an electronics store and the mother gets worried. It was on PBS, I think. The mother gets worried and she says to the father, "I'm worried about this -- my son." And the father says, "Don't worry, he'll be home soon," you know. And the mother gets just -- it was -- it was an almost exact depiction of what I feel, and finally the mother says, "I'm going to see where he is." And the mother goes and she follows his tracks and -- and figures out where he is and she walks into this electronics store, which -- and there are some really bad criminals who have come in, and tied everybody on the floor, and they've actually -- and the mother actually gets killed, but the son survives and the -- these -- these criminals have tied everybody up and they -- I don't know, they robbed the store or something, but they -- they pour lye down everybody's throat that they've tied

up. And that mo -- that program has never left me, because every time now that I -- you know, this must have been 10 years ago, that I have this conversation with my husband, and he says everything's all right, immediately this -- this movie pops into my head. And at the end of that movie, you see the son, who is sort of damaged, but he's kind of all right, with his father, talking about that this is a real story, and this is what happened. And I -- I just replay that scene. Oh yeah, there's the father saying everything's fine, and the mother, in her gut, knew that something was wrong and -- and so that now gets replayed in my head, on top of all the normal stuff that gets replayed. So I -- And then -- And then the last stages, if they're not home and it's now 45 minutes, or an hour, which as I say, happens very rarely, sometimes I will just crack up and weep. You know, and my husband will sit there and he'll comfort me and then the phone rings and -- and all of a sudden, I come to absolute attention and you can hear nothing -- I make sure you can hear nothing of that in my voice, and kid says, "Sorry Mom, I got involved in this, you know, I'm -- I'm just leaving for home." And I s -- "Fine, did you have a good time? Great. Thanks for calling me, I really appreciate it." And I hang up, you know, and then I can finish kind of curing myself from the episode that has just transpired.

Q: Wow. That's a -- That's a -- That's powerful stuff.

A: It is powerful stuff, but I don't want you -- I want you to know that I live a reasonably normal life despite that, and I'm a very productive person and things like this don't happen all that often. And as I say, I have been -- I mean, now my daughter's in Israel, and guess what? She's in Israel, she's in Israel. All these horrible things happen in Israel.

You know, bombs go -- get thrown into buses and you know, and I [indecipherable]. And my friends tell me, well, you know, actually, if you look at the statistics, Israel is safer than New York City, and you know -- and I try to tell myself and you know, and so on. But when she calls, it's like this miraculously happy event. And she's -- she's been very good. You know, she -- she has called ev -- once a week. This week she sent me an e-mail after sh -- three days after she called, and -- you know, but now she's gone down to Ailot and I hope sometime this weekend, I'll get a call. Damon's going out to drive to -- to Amherst. If I go and drive, I mean, I think nothing of it. And both of our kids are good drivers, but there's always that niggling -- you know, and I think this is because I had this father, and one day he never came back again. And I think there's something deep down inside of me that is forever scared of that ever happening again. My husband goes off on his bicycle to work. He's had -- you know, he's bicycled safely for, I don't know, 10 years now, but he has had two somewhat not pleasant accidents, but not, you know, not horrible, horrible. Now, I tell him, "Look, you're a grown-up and I can't do anything bad to you as a grown-up. So you got to call me the minute you get to work." And he's very good about that, I mean, the minute he gets to work, he calls. And that was, at first, very short phone call. "Hello, I'm here." "Okay, bye." And then, at night -- at night, it's dark, there are lights, there are cars, can they see him? It's harder. Last night he came home 15 minutes later than he said he would, which is pretty -- not very usual. So, he said he'd be home at 7:30. So at 7:32, I looked at the clock and by that time Damon had come back from Amherst, and -- so at least -- so I wasn't alone. When I'm alone, my imagination is

a lot worse than when there's somebody else there. But, I'm still watching the clock, so 7:35, I shouldn't say anything. 7:40 -- "I wonder where dad is," out loud. Damon -- I don't know whether Damon even noticed that I said that or not. 7:41, I'm up at the bedroom window, looking out to see if there's any sign of him. "Liane, Damon's here, you can't stay up here and watch at the window, because there's no point in worrying him." So I come back down to the kitchen, and at 7:45, I hear the -- the door opening, so -- and it's okay.

Q: And then -- And then it's all fine for you?

A: Then it's all fine. Then it's all fine. But I -- But, you know, except for those few minutes, I go up there, I look -- I look out the window. Maybe sometimes I waste a couple of more minutes, cause I'll run down to the door or something. But I need you to know that 95, or 99 percent of the time, I'm productive and I'm working and I'm -- you know, I'm either making dinner or cleaning up, or doing work work -- you know, professional work or -- but these images invade. It's like a kind of a Star Wars thing, you know it -- it's like the spaceship comes through and goes out the other side, because I force it to go out the other side.

Q: And the images themselves, are -- are they -- can you discuss them at all, or is it just too difficult?

A: It's hard to discuss them, because they're very unpleasant images. They're -- They're of something horrible happening. And I -- I -- I am -- So far, I am very good at making them go away again. So the images that come, if I'm sitting and reading this and s -- and

I get some horrible image coming through my head, it's in and out within, you know, one second. And -- And I -- And I just keep working, so -- so actually, I'm quite a productive person, and I have not let that bother me, except that it bothers me that it happened. You know, it's just -- it's not a pleasant way to live. And I -- I hope that -- you know, our -- I've discussed this with our children, because -- you know, because I've tried to explain to them that sometimes when I start crying, you know, I don't know what it is and it's out of my control and I never did this when I was younger and I hope this will not happen to you and I apologize. And I think it gets diluted out. But anyway, I started telling you before that I wrote this poem after the -- the -- the Yom Kippur War, and I -- I wrote in that poem that -- about how all -- all the energy and all the emotion that you put into bringing up a child, and then somebody can pop that child off in -- in one second, in a war, on a highway, whatever, and I -- and -- and th -- I think most people don't -- don't think about this. And I'll tell you something else that I think about very often. I learned this in first grade, in PS 241. We had to memorize these little sayings. And one of the sayings that I had to memorize was, "A coward dies a thousand times, a brave man only once." I don't think a week goes by that I don't think about that, because I tell myself, you know, normal people don't live this way. Normal people live their lives, they're happy, they do their thing. One day something comes up, it's very bad news, they deal with it and then they go on. And you're a coward, I say to myself, because you deal with all of these things in your imagination, a zillion times a year, you know. So -- So I die a thousand times, instead of just once. You know, but I mean da -- then I start asking

questions, well, you know, why is that? Is it all that, is it other things? And I -- And I think it -- it kind of started with that whole Holocaust business and my father's disappearance. But then, you know, other people do things like -- people are generally not very thoughtful, and so when I came to New York, my mother was working in the factory and then my f -- brother left for school and he would be away all day, even when he was still going to Columbia and living at home. And so one day, I'm sitting alone in the house, I think I was doing homework, and a telegram arrives. Now, that was pretty unusual in those days. Telegram. So I open this telegram and it says, "Mother dead." And I -- I must have been eight years old, maybe nine and I did an emotional flip. Because I don't know that I had ever seen a telegram before, first of all. Maybe -- Maybe I had, but I didn't even --

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States -- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer. This is tape number four, side A.

A: So I got this telegram, and it said, “Mother dead,” and I didn’t even notice that, you know, I don’t -- in these days, they probably don’t do that, but in those days, th-they would tape these little things on, and I didn’t even notice that there was a name on the bo -- you know, two lines down, that somebody had glued on. I mean, I just read those words, mother dead, and I just assumed that it was my mother. And I don’t remember how I resolved this. I might have gone to a neighbor’s house or something, or -- or maybe I just finally noticed the thing, but I -- I mean, I was a basket case for awhile there. And then I -- I guess the other thing which didn’t help was that my mother -- after I was born, my mother had gall bladder problems and in those days gall bladder surgery was not trivial. And then the war came anyway, so she lived for 30 years with this gall bladder. And she would have these attacks and sometimes an ambulance would come. But she would look -- I mean -- and especially after my brother left, and I was alone, you know, I would be absolutely terrified, because here I was, this little girl all by myself and my only -- my -- my only means of survival was this woman. And she would get these horrendous attacks, which our son was just getting, recently. But anyway, that’s a whole other story, but anyway, so -- so I think I -- I lived -- I lived in a kind of -- I mean, again, I wasn’t aware of it all the time, but when it happened, it was so scary. You know, that, oh my God, is this g -- the end of this, and I’m going -- you know, I’m going to end up all by

myself, and wa -- what do I do? You know, what do you -- and I mean, I think a nine year old in 1999, who's watched a lot of television, might be able to say, "Oh, well that's all right, you know, I'll go work as a cashier, or do something." But there was no television and I, from the reading that I did, I had no -- you know, I had no recourse in my head of what -- what do you do if you end up all by yourself as a little girl? So that was another thing that was pretty scary.

Q: You know, y-you -- you mentioned before, and -- and I just -- it reminded me when you talked about the telegram, was just the -- the legacy -- I'm just wondering about the legacy of this blue letter that came, the blue envelope. Is it something that also you think about a lot?

A: I -- I wouldn't say I think about it a lot, but I do think about it from time to time. My mother was sort of in a state of shock when she read this. It was one of those -- I think it was one of those air-o-gram things, you know, and it detailed -- it was horrible, and then my mother read it to me.

Q: What -- What do you remember from that?

A: What I remember is it was written by a cousin of -- of hers, I think. I think it was written by a guy names Moshe -- Moshe what? I don't remember. Moshe -- I don't remember, but anyway, he ultimately moved to Israel. And he detailed what happened to all my mother's relatives, and so my mother was reading this to me, about how her sister had been forced to watch, while they threw her children into an oven, and then they shot her. And my mother's brother had, I think three children. I think my mother's sister

maybe had two children. I think the brother might have had three children, and that they -- there was somebody in the concentration camp where they were, who had typhoid or typhus, one -- one of those two bad diseases, and that a lot of people in the camp were snuggling up to these people, so that they would c-contract the disease and be able to die of a disease, rather than what was obviously going to happen. And -- And so that's how those people met their end. I don't -- I don't remember -- I don't think he detailed, except that my mother's parents were killed, but -- in a concentration camp, but I don't think he knew. I don't remember exactly what happened to them. But he -- you know, he went through this litany of what happened to everybody that she knew. And I -- I do think about that. I mean, I think about that, as I say, not so often, but when I do think about it, I think, you know, "H-How could she have stood that?" I mean, can you imagine? I mean, my brother is now 72, I guess, or -- let's see, I'm going to be 65, so he's 72 and a half, or almost 72 and a half, and well, this is another thing, I mean this is another abnormal thing that I have always lived with, and that is -- I wrote about this in -- in an article I wrote for the -- for Boston Magazine in 1988. When I say good-bye to somebody, that is rarely an easy thing, because there is always this thing -- and I remember when my brother used to visit, cause I -- I really -- I was very, very close to my brother. Whenever I saw him off at the airport, and he'd go through that door, onto the airplane, there's always that thought, is this the last time? You know, and now, I mean, he's getting older, and-- and every time I go away or I do something, I -- although I feel -- I feel more equipped to cope with it now. I mean, I -- now, I-I think, "Oh, I'm 65, you know. I could go any day, my husband

could go any day, and my brother could certainly go any day," and you know, and I -- it's still very scary, but it's not as scary as it was when I was younger. But every time I -- there's always that thought, you know, is this the last time I'm talking to this person? Is this the last time I'm seeing this person? And I'm sure that has -- has got to go back to -- to what happened with my father, you know? I mean, a --

Q: And all -- And all these other relatives, as well, from this letter, I m -- I imagine.

A: Yeah, but I think it was more my father, of -- you know, and so I think, "Well, how could my mother stand?" I mean, I don't know whether she was close to her brothers and sisters, but you know, you -- it was kind of a reasonably close knit family, and -- and so, how could she stand listening? You know, I mean, even when I repeat, and say they held my mother's sister, while they threw her children into an oven. I mean, you know, foof. You know, even just when I repeat that, or think it to myself -- I mean, that is a -- a kind of unfathomable thought. So -- So when I -- I mean I -- you know, it just totally gorks me out when I -- when I think about that letter. And again -- and then I'm also bothered that, why don't I have that letter? Where did that letter go? That letter -- That letter might be somewhere even in this house, although I don't know. You know, when my mother got Alzheimer's, she started throwing out things and writing over things and so on. So I -- I don't know. But where did that letter go? I'd like to see that letter again. And I don't know if I ever will find it. But --

Q: Well, you've also written in -- in some of the stuff that I was reading, different articles in -- in the Boston Globe pieces, ab-about the idea of -- of making up for others. D-Do

you -- Do you feel that -- that you're -- you're living more than one life in a sense? That you're living life for -- for -- for those who -- that -- that you have an extra responsibility, an extra burden? Do -- Do you have that with you?

A: I don't think I think about that every day, but -- but yeah, when I think about it and when I have to write, or when I'm thinking about something about the past. I mean, I do feel that I have to pack a lot into every day. I -- I'm just -- I'm just now starting to even think about, I wonder what it would be like to retire, you know? And -- And I'm just starting to think -- for example, last week I felt a cold coming on, and of course, when I was a kid, you know, if -- if you remember from the -- from the -- the video interview, my mother would say, "Stay home." And my brother would say, "Take two hankies and go to school."

Q: You can dry one out.

A: Right. And so all my life, I have -- I -- it -- colds get less as you get older, thank goodness, but I get really bad colds. I don't feel so bad, but I look awful. My eyes are -- you know, are like buckets and my nose and it gets red and horrible and these -- the wonderful invention of lanolin tissues has helped a lot, but -- but I -- I just, you know, I'm -- my head is just so rrrrr. And a few years ago, one day, I -- I -- I got a cold and I just discovered that if -- if I -- if I keep working, but I'm staying in a prone posi -- in a reclining position, horizontal position, that it's not so bad. And so I spent two whole days working in this chair that we just bought for my back, actually, but where I can be lying down and still be reading and writing at the same time. And then the cold really doesn't

bother me at all, you know. And -- And also -- I mean, usually, all my life, I've worked, you know, most days, most evenings, a lot on weekends. Not that we don't take time off to have -- you know, to do nice things, mind you, but -- but when I'm not doing something specifically, I'm working. And now, in these last six months, with my son, I mean, we've been watching a movie like practically every night. And it's not necessarily a thoughtful movie, because he -- it turns out he has Crohn's disease and so we try to find comedies. And sometimes they're re -- they're ki -- I mean, we try to find good comedies, but sometimes we've been watching things that are kind of stupid, just to kind of keep his mind occupied, and -- and -- and we sit next to him. So we've been working less hard during that time, and I -- I'm just suddenly thinking, you know, I don't -- except on a summer vacation or something, I don't take enough time to smell the flowers. And that's not really true, because I really do. I mean, I -- I'm very aware when those lilies come out, that I've got to go smell those. And I -- I'm -- I'm all -- I'm extremely aware of the passage of time. There's a -- There's a wonderful poem by A. E. Housman, called, "When I was One and Twenty," in which he says, "and since to look at things in bloom, 50 springs are little room, about the woodland I will go, to see the cherry hung with snow." So I'm always aware that, you know, when the snow is freshly fallen, I have to go and look at it and touch it, and -- but I don't spend a lot of time just sitting down and contemplating. Now, I think that's because I'm busy leading a lot of different lives, and trying to accomplish a lot of different things. But sometimes, I also ask myself, maybe I'm rushing around and doing all th-these things that keep me busy, because if I just sat in

a grassy field and allowed myself to just free associate, maybe -- I would spend a little time having some wonderful daydreams, but then maybe some of the nightmares would start creeping in and that maybe wouldn't be -- I -- I don't know, I mean I -- that's just conjectural.

Q: Di -- I was going to ask you whether -- either in daydreams, or -- or in -- or night -- at night, d-do you have flashbacks? Do you have dreams that either have recurred or that -- that are disturbingly resonant of -- of that really traumatic past of yours?

A: I hardly ever dream, and when I do dream, I feel totally unrested in the morning. I mean, I know everybody dreams, but what I'm trying to tell you is, I'm not aware that I dream. When I have dreamt, it's almost always in black and white. I've only ha -- as far as I know, I've only had one Technicolor dream in my life, and it was -- it was a very scary dream, of somebody running after me. My husband tells me that I sometimes seem to be dreaming at night and - -and you know, wince or cry or something, you know. But I'm -- I'm usually unaware of it in the morning. So I don't dream very much, and that's -- I think that's been an incredible blessing, is my fantastically wonderful sleep habits. Because I -- I -- I really get a lot out of my sleep. I don't sleep a lot of hours.

Q: How many hours?

A: I've actually been sleeping more lately, but I think throughout my life, I probably don't often sleep more than six hours. I mean, I tend to go to sleep quite late, and I'm usually up by somewhere between 7:30 and eight. And sometimes if a client gives me something to do, or if I have something to do -- now that's something that's changed

recently. I used to stay up until, you know, like five in the morning, that wa -- not uncommonly, and still get up, but -- and in the last maybe five years or so, my husband has started going to sleep, sort of between midnight and one. And unless I -- I have to do something, I start to get this uncomfortable feeling. I'll be sitting at my computer, and he'll come down and kiss me goodnight, and go up to bed and -- and I used to just say okay, and -- you know, and then -- I -- and then I'd get right back into it, and keep going. And now, there's something that happens, and I -- I actually feel a little irritated at people around me for this, but I start to feel, oh, I'm too old to do this. I -- I -- I better get -- I better go up and go to sleep. And I don't -- I don't think there's really anything that's changed physiologically, but I think it's hearing people constantly say, "What? You go to sleep at two o'clock in the morning? I'm in bed by nine o'clock at night." You know, and I -- I think it's like that -- the -- the economics guy at Harvard, the tall -- Galbraith wrote an article in the newspaper about something he called the still syndrome. He says, you know, part of the reason that you age is that as you get on in life, people keep asking, "Oh, do you still walk? Do you still run?" And if you look at a pretty woman, "Oh, are you still interested?" And he calls that the still syndrome. And I feel a little as though I'm maybe getting victimized a little, by other people telling me that I should no longer be doing what I'm doing, and that maybe it's somehow getting to me, because by and large, I'm usually in bed by one o'clock and -- and I turn off the light by, you know, 1:30 or -- or something. And -- And I don't stay up m-much later than that, unless there's a pressure.

Q: That seems like really late to me, I'm usually in bed by 10 o'clock.

A: No, no, I know, but the thing is that I'm not --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- you know, and I -- I -- I never needed a lot of sleep and I'm generally quite perky. And I think there is something that the society and the people around me are doing to me that's -- that's -- maybe that's a rationalization, I don't know, but --

Q: You know, I wanted to ask you just -- you mentioned in a couple of the articles that you're working on a book. Is that -- Is that still in process? Is that -- I don't mean to use the still word. Is that something that you've finished or is that something that you're still working on, is what I mean.

A: I'm still working on it, but first of all, I don't have a lot of time, and I -- for example, you know, I really thought somehow, that I was going to maybe slow down on my work work life and pay more attention to this, and then this thing came up with our son. And so now, I'm doing even less work work. There are a couple of things that have happened with that project. First of all, I'm very success oriented, and I'm -- I didn't try very hard, but I made a couple of stabs some years ago, at finding a publisher, and I didn't find a publisher, and that got me to put the project on the back burner. I know myself well enough to know that if I got a publisher tomorrow, I'd be in there working til five o'clock in the morning. I mean, I -- I -- I know that. So that was one thing that happened. The second thing that happened was that I -- maybe my project was overly ambitious to begin with, and about a year before, Simon Shallma, who was a history professor at Harvard,

who moved to Columbia, I had a meeting with him, because h-he -- when he was in high school, he had written an article for the London Times, when he was living in England, about the San Louis, and -- and he gave a talk at our library and I started to talk to him and I asked him if I could meet with him, and I told him about what I was trying to do with my San Louis book. And he made some very interesting suggestions for paring down the project. So then I kind of rethought the project and decided that he was right, that I couldn't do -- I mean, my original project was to try to incorporate stories from -- that I'd collected from 40 people and that's not going to fly. He suggested that I pick five to seven stories and -- and that I put my chapter about the reunion, which I had coming at the end, that I should put it up at the front, and he made a lot of interesting suggestions.

Q: Yeah, they do sound interesting.

A: But then I st -- I was working on my brother's chapter, because -- and I had interviewed my brother, my brother did not want to do -- write his own chapter. So I interviewed him several times, and I wrote a chapter for him, which I sent to him. This is only now like maybe a year ago that I finished that chapter. My brother was very disturbed to find that I had written his chapter in the first person, as though he was writing it. And he said I couldn't -- h-he didn't feel good about that, that I couldn't really do that. So, then I started trying to rethink. So, I'm going to write his chapter third person. And then, somehow, that didn't seem right. And so, my chapter is going to be the longest chapter in the book, cause it's going to contain a lot of stuff that I'm telling you. And then my brother's chapter was going to be the other long chapter, but now I am in

the process of maybe rethinking the whole thing again. I think maybe I'm going to incorporate my brother's interview into a story that I tell.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And that has caused me now to think about maybe this book is not going to be about anybody but us, but then the question arises, what do I do with, for example, there's a chapter of a woman down in New Jersey, who -- which is already finished, signed, sealed and delivered. She wrote it, I edited it, I got permission letter from her to publish it. That's the one bit of complete thing I have. Am I letting those people down? I guess there's a -- I guess I have an overactive conscience and I'm always sort of worried about letting down. And this guy, who organized the reunion, he s -- he stupidly sent me a lot of stuff and didn't -- didn't even register it or anything, and all his original pictures got lost, and -- and he has called upteen times over the years, "Okay, when is your book coming out," and so on and so forth. Okay, so that's one side of the story. So now, I don't know what to do with this and my current thought is maybe -- maybe I'm going to either follow Simon Shellma's idea partly, or maybe this book is going to be just about us, and the rest is going to the Holocaust museum.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: All those two huge boxes I have of notes and pictures and so on. But something else happened in the interim. About in what must have been, I don't know, maybe 1990 or something, we used to go to an island in Maine every summer, for a few weeks. And so on this one summer, we were going to this island, and I thought to myself, maybe we

should do some constructive family project this year. Let's write a fictional story, all together. So, we got up to Maine and I said, "Okay, so you know, we're all going to sit down and we're going to write this story," sort of like that game that you play, you know, you write and -- except that we're going to know, and we're going to -- now this was not an original idea. I got this idea because there was a medical doctor that I heard give a talk, and he wrote a best seller called "The Sisterhood." And he gave a talk at a meeting, and he talked about how he wrote this book, but he wrote it with the help from a lot of his friends. And he told this whole very funny story, which I'm not going to go into, but that's where I got this idea of doing this joint project. Well, my husband was not terribly excited about this project. Our son, who has been drawing since age two and now paints, really wanted to paint, and our daughter likes to go and fetch sea animals out of the sea and then throw them back, when she's in Maine, and she was not at all enthused about this writing project. So, the first day, I was really feeling very sour grapesy on this vacation, about, you know, oh, I had this great idea and we could, you know, we could write this great story and maybe it could even get published, and so we went off to sit on -- a-at the ocean, on the rocks in Monheegan, and my husband was drawing, my son was drawing, Erica was fishing stuff out of the sea and I'm sitting there with a pad and pencil, looking, you know, forlorn and angry or something. And suddenly this idea for a story popped into my head. And I started writing down this story, all by myself. And when we came home from Maine, I was gung-ho involved in this story like I don't think I've been involved in too many things before. And I didn't have a lot of work to do that summer, so

the whole summer, the kids were off doing their own things, my husband left for work in the morning, I was already working out of the house by then. The whole -- almost the whole rest of the summer, I sat in front of my computer from the minute Sam left, until the time he came home, essentially, and I wrote this story, which turned out to be, I don't know, 333 double spaced pages. Totally fictional story, but has bits and pieces of things that happened. It starts out in the Holocaust, and etcetera. And I thought it was kind of a -- a good story. And I -- The thing that -- that I found very bizarre was that while I was sitting at my computer, writing this story, I found myself laughing and crying. And I would stop myself and say, "What are you doing, Liane, you're making all this up, why are you laughing and why are you crying?" And I was just incredibly involved in this story. So, I finished writing this story, and then I thought, well, I should send it o -- I -- I should see if I could get this published, because I thought it was certainly better than -- I -- I sort of thought of it like an hour and a half television script, and I thought, you know, I think this is better than a lot of things I've seen, I ought to be able to get this published. So, first I called Ann Bernaise, who had been a Barnard graduate, and who lives in Cambridge and who's published a lot of books.

Q: I know her, yeah.

A: And she gave me the name of her agent, and I called the agent and the agent said to me, "Is this a literary s -- novel?" And I said, "No, this is not a literary novel, this is just a fun story, a good story." And she said, "Well, I don't deal in things that are not literary novels." So, all right, so that --

Q: Dear me.

A: So that was the end of that. So anyway, then I don't know, I tried a couple of other people, they -- they -- people that I knew. [indecipherable] I -- I didn't feel I was getting a lot of enthusiasm. One day I got a telephone call from a guy who was working at PBS, he wants to come and interview me. Okay, so he came and interviewed me and I said, "You know, I have a favor to ask, but please don't do it unless, you know, th-this is something that -- that would really be of interest." I said, "You know, you work for television, I -- I wrote this story, I think it would make a good hour and a half TV thing, I wonder if you'd be willing to read it?" He said, "Sure, but right now I'm very busy." I tried to call him about six or seven times in the next year and he was always very busy. So I thought, ah he -- you know, he's not really interested. A few years later, one day, I was about to leave, I think for Europe the next day, I get a phone call from this guy. He says, "Okay, I'm getting married in 10 days, my wife is studying for her bar exams, I can read your -- Fedex me your manuscript, I can read it in the next 10 days." So, I was kind of amazed and I -- I Fedexed this thing off to him, and he then -- when -- when I -- when we both got -- when I got back from my trip, and he got back from his honeymoon or something, he spent an hour and a half on the phone with me, telling me what he thought was good and bad about this script. And so I tried to incorporate some of his suggestions into the -- into this manuscript, and I -- I -- I did a fair amount of additional work on it, and then somebody gave me the name of an agent. My memory these days is -- is terrible. Well, it doesn't matter, but anyway, it's a -- it's a -- the mother had gone to Barnard College, the

daughter I once tutored in algebra when she was a kid and we went on vacation together. And this girl has n -- this woman has now written a couple of successful novels, so she gave me the name of her agent. And I sent this off to this agent, and this agent said -- wrote me a letter and said something like, this is a good story idea, but there's too much telling, and not enough showing. And that's a phrase I've heard, you know, a zillion times from people who write. Well, I was busy and I was discouraged and so I just kind of put that thing aside. And then, about three years ago, I finally -- I had been trying to take a course in writing and I took a course -- a 10 week course with some woman in Cambridge, you know one night a week, for three hours or something, in writing -- in memoir writing, and not working on that thing, which was not really a memoir, but a novel, but because I thought it would help me write the San Louis book. And I did learn a lot, but that was only three years ago, and I've just been unbelievably busy since then, and somehow, I -- I know --

End of Tape Four, Side A

Beginning Tape Four, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer. This is tape number four, side B.

A: I know that I need to be working on the San Louis book. And, you know -- And my husband is now getting into the act. Every week he says, "All right, when are you finishing your book?" And I really -- I really want to finish it, not just because I want to finish it, but there's something that tells me it is my obligation to write this thing. I --

That I have a moral, or ethical, or whatever you want to call it, thing, that I must do this. And sometimes I get nervous, cause I say, “Oh my God, the years are passing, you know, you could die tomorrow, and you will not have finished this book, and you will have -- have not fulfilled your obligation.” But, there is something inside of me that wants to see this novel get published, or aired or something. Why? I don’t -- I don’t know why, because I put -- I think it’s just because -- beca -- I put so much of my emotional self into writing that bloody thing, and I think it is sort of a good story. I think it’s a story that young people could learn from, but may not understand, because -- because I write in it a lot about the morays of the 1950’s, you know, and -- and that kind of stuff. And the -- And I -- You know, and I sort of can imagine that some kid who’s 20 years old now, would read this and say, “Huh?” You know, “I-Is this some kind of thing from the middle ages or something?” But it’s not from the middle ages, that’s really the way things were in my world, in 1950. But it’s also -- it’s also kind of funny and -- and -- and -- and whimsical and tragic and you know, an-and -- and I -- I really do think it’s a good story and I think it’s a lot better than a lot of things I hear. But -- So -- So -- So every time I think, “Oh well, you know, tomorrow, if I have a couple of hours, I’ll work on the San Louis book,” then something says, “Oh, maybe you should just try to make this novel better first.” And then I wonder, maybe there’s something I don’t understand about show me versus tell me. I mean, I’ve learned that, I’ve learned it in classes, but maybe there’s something internally that I don’t understand enough about that concept, you know. And then I think, “Well maybe I should get help with this,” but then -- then I don’t like that

idea, because that's -- that's -- that's like finking out, or you know. And I shouldn't say that, because I help people write their grant proposals, that's how I make the major part of my income now, you know, and -- and that's fine, they just don't know how to write it, and I'm teaching them how to do it. But yet, I can't accept that, at least not for this thing.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know where these are going to go. I mean, you know, maybe I'll get hit by a truck tomorrow and then -- and this will get buried with me, or -- or you know, I mean, one of the things that I worry about with my son's art, is it's so hard getting ahead in the world of art, and -- and -- you know, and I think he's really quite good and he has -- in the last few years, three of his paintings have been sold by galleries, for about 10 grand each. [phone ringing] So -- So I don't -- I -- I don't quite know -- I don't quite know how to deal with this, because I really -- I really want to get these -- I want to see these two things published, if it's the last thing that I do. But I can't sto -- you know, some days I've even thought, "Well, you know, I'm si -- I'm going to be 65, maybe I should retire, and maybe I should just work on this other stuff." But how can I retire when I've got a son who's an artist, who really -- you know, the gallery keeps 50 percent, so it sounds great, he sol -- sold a painting for 10 grand. But how much of that does he get? Five. He's done three of -- of those projects in the last three years. So how do you live on that? You can't. I mean, basically, we're supporting him, to a large extent. I mean, he has m -- you know, he does sell a bunch of other things in the meantime, so -- so he's -- he's kind of starting to come into his own, but he's not quite there yet. How can

I stop working, you know, in -- in -- in this situation. I mean, our daughter is essentially now 99 percent financially independent. She -- Sh -- You know, I taught her how to write grant proposals, she got every grant in the -- that was available. She --

Q: What does she do?

A: She's an anthropology graduate student.

Q: Oh, you mentioned that, yeah.

A: And she -- she's doing her field work in Poland now, but she went to Israel to see some people and to do some interviews. So I don't worry as much about her financially, but I still worry a lot about our son, financially and now that he's sick, and Crohn's is a -- a chronic kind of disease, you know, he -- it could never happen again, or he could get it every three months or something. So how can I possibly stop working for income? You know, so -- so ha -- and now, I mean I'm -- I'm ha -- tied up with him half the time, you know, doing things for him. He rented an apartment three months ago, he's been paying the rent, and he can't move in. Now, he's going to have another surgery on July 20th, because -- because they put him on this IV feed, and it caused his gall bladder to -- you know, and why didn't they tell me about that, and rrrrr. But anyway.

Q: Geez.

A: So -- You know, so I don't know. I mean I -- You know, and then -- and then my husband had -- turned out to have prostate cancer, and I think he's all right, but then it -- it rees -- he had his prostate out, it resurfaced and -- and the -- the -- I brought Damon home from England after two surgeries, on November 14th, which was my birthday. On

November 16th, my husband started seven weeks of radiation therapy. And he seems to be all right, but, you know, what does all right mean? I mean, this could pop up again, you know, who knows?

Q: It's --

A: Maybe never, maybe sometimes. You know, how can I take time off to do this other thing, which is sort of frivolous, you know? Am I really a writer? No, I'm not really a writer, I'm really kind of a scientist. So, can I -- You know, and I -- and I don't like doing things that are not successful. I don't do well doing projects that don't succeed. For example, when I was a kid, I was -- I joined botanic garden club, I had my six foot six pot, I went every morning and I hoed and weeded and everything, and I got all these vegetables to take home to my mother. And that was wonderful. Now, do I even want to go out and plant a single bulb? No. Because that's not my thing, that's not going to bring me recognition or success. That's not going to make my children happy, that's not going to -- you know. I -- I'm -- For better or worse, and you can criticize this, but I -- I'm very goal oriented. So, if somebody came and said, "Liane, this is a terrific idea, all it needs is -- is a year of your working on it," I could conceivably drop half of what I'm doing and say, "Oh, wow, okay, this is going to get published. I'm going to make this thing work." But the -- You know, and I sh -- I shouldn't do this, cause I tell people, you know, "If -- If at first you don't succeed, try, try and again." You don't get your grant funded the first time, you have to do it twice, three times, you know. Some people have to write eight before they get one funded. But for -- for -- And I will do that with a grant application,

although I never had to do that. I mean, I always got funded, either the first time, or in one case, maybe the second time. I'm not sure I even had to ever rewrite, maybe once. But -- But you know, I am accustomed to being successful at the things that I'm good at, and I -- you know, s -- you know, this one woman who finally had a book of poetry published, she's a professor at BU, she said she wrote a hundred letters to publishers, before her book of poetry got published by a really good poetry press, University of Pittsburgh. And I -- Okay, yes, I know all about that, you know, but I don't have time to do that, with everything else that's going on. And -- I mean I know that's s -- that sounds like a spoiled brat, but I really -- I -- I want somebody to appear and say, "Okay, this is a -- this is good, we just have to fix this and that," you know, let's -- if I -- you know, and th -- and then with the -- with the San Louis book, there's this other problem, and that is that book, especially if I use Simon Shallma's idea, which I may or may not go back to, people have sent me pictures, documents, wonderful things. Those need to be in that book, and yet the publishing industry tells me, you know it's really in-incredibly expensive to publish a well illustrated book. We're -- We're not going to do that. B-By the way, I want to show you something else. That -- That book is highly illustrated, but the book is a mess. The guy did a miserable job. It's so -- The pictures are poor quality, it's full of typos.

Q: The -- Which book are you talking about?

A: This is a book that was -- that origina -- this is a book that changed my life around. It came out, I think, in 1974, called "Voyage of the Damned," by Thomas Gordon and Max

Morganwitz, about the San Louis. Somewhat fictionalized story. I disco -- I -- One night, my husband and I were looking in the New York Times magazine, and there was a review, I think, of -- of this book, or maybe it was the book review. I went out and bought that book. I was extremely disturbed, and something funny happened. I read that book, and then I immediately forgot a lot of what it said. And I know -- And then I read it again, and the same thing happened, and I -- I kept thinking, the voyage of the damned, the damned, the damned. That's me they're talking about. That was sort of a really horrifying thing, you know, to be referred to that way.

Q: Did you ever think of yourself that way?

A: Well, I never had, until this book came out, you know, and then I thought, "Oh my God, that's me. That title is about me, and all these other people who were on the ship." So, anyway, I ca -- I -- a-at -- at some point, I actually contacted the authors and -- and then many years later, I got contacted by this guy, I don't even remember the name, David -- David something or other. It's on -- on my computer, who decided he was going to re-issue the "Voyage of the Damned," in a highly illustrated form, and he asked me for a lot of photographs, which I sent. So this new book came out, maybe about 1994, or something. Lot of pictures, a lot of pictures and there's a -- he had cameos, two page cameos of different families, and there's one of me and my family, and you know, my father with me in a stroller, and all sorts of pictures. So I -- I want my book, if I -- if I put other people's stories into it, or even if it's just mine, I want it to have all those documents, you know, I have all these documents. I've got a wonderful document

downstairs, that -- that -- that my father got. My father fought, as a young man, in the Austrian war, in World War One, and if he had lived, and come to the United States, he would have fought on the opposite side in World War Two, and that in itself is crazy. You go and you fight people and kill people, and it's purely -- it has nothing to do, often, most of the time, with your philosophy. It has to do with where you happen to be born, or where you happen to be living. Does that make any sense? No. And so I have this document that -- that very picturesque document that my father got, cause he was actually wounded during the first war. And I've got lots of wonderful -- you know, I've got this thing that my father had to sign, saying that he wouldn't practice any more. I've got documents from Poland, I've got my parents marriage license, you know, all these things that should go into this book, but everybody tells me, well the more you want to illustrate it, the less is the chance that you're ever going to get this published. So that's another kind of a downer.

Q: Maybe if -- if you could publish it with an organization that has an interest in -- in seeing the story come out, maybe that's [indecipherable]

A: Well, I've called the Holocaust museum, and there is a guy, whose name I don't remember, that I spoke to, who's in charge of -- because they do publish some books, and he didn't make it sound very promising. But see, I -- I guess -- I mean this is probably not a nice quality that I have, but -- but I'm -- I'm s -- I'm sic -- well, I'm success oriented, so I would be satisfied if the book could just get published, but I would be not happy if I had to do a vanity publishing. You know, a lot of people that I know -- I belong to this

survivor's group, and a lot of those people -- well, not a lot, several of those people have published books. And you know, they print -- I don't know, a hundred copies, it cost them 8,000 dollars, looks like a nice book. People who are ignorant of the publishing industry are not aware that they p-paid to have it published, you know, and just looks as though they wrote this book. That doesn't sit right with me. I don't want to pay to have my book published, because if I pay to have my book published, it could be crap. You know, if I publish a book -- which I have published three books about proposal writing, it's because I did it well, it's a good job. Those books have been well received, well reviewed. You know, it's something of quality. So -- So if I -- if I get my novel published, I don't want to self publish that, I want it to be published and I want it to get a reasonably good write up. You know, not everybody has to love it, but I want it to be something that somebody's willing to do, cause they think it's worth publishing. So -- So anyway, here I am and -- and right now, what am I going to do between now and -- I mean, when -- when does my hus -- when does my son get to move into his own apartment and be on his own again? You know, I mean, in other words, when can I get back to being 100 percent me again, whatever that means. So, whenever that happens, if I'm still around and kicking and haven't gotten Alzheimer's disease yet, that's when I'm going to make the next big move on, I hope, both of these projects, or maybe one will take precedence. I -- I -- I don't know. So I f -- I feel that I owe it to somebody, not just me, who do I owe it to? I don't know, I owe it to my mother, to my father, to all those people who died, that I write the story, that I write what happened. So that's an -- sort of

an obligation. The novel part? That's just an obligation to myself. I don't -- Why, I don't know, maybe just to prove that I can do this other thing, I -- I -- I'm not sure. But -- But anyway, so I have these two sort of big projects to do, and in the meantime, you know, I look around me, like this morn -- I mean, I already warned you what our house looks like, but this morning, I came down and I looked at our house and I thought, "Oh my God, there is no way, even if I could spend full time for three months with my husband, there is no way that we can this place back into order." You know, I mean, here's my son's little -- a tentative, you know, at home studio. There's the little hospital under the table. You know, here's this project that I'm doing for that. You know, it -- it's -- it's like a shambles and -- you know, so here I'm thinking about these big projects, that really require time, and you know, and then a part of me thinks of myself as being non-vulnerable, and the other part of me keeps saying, "You know, Sam's been sick, your son's been sick, you're s -- getting to be 65 years old, what makes you think you might not get sick tomorrow, and you may not be able to finish this project." So it's -- it's kind of a real conundrum about, you know, how is this going to play out, and I -- and you're young enough so that you may know the answer some day, but you know, I -- I just -- I just know that each day I get up and there are a list of things that I have to do, that's a mile long and -- and the -- the two books are kind of sitting on my back like -- like these two kind of weights that keep sort of banging at the back of my skull, but they're not all that high up on the list right now. You know, I have six business trips between now and November, which, if Damon were not ill at the moment, is probably, you know, not an

awful lot, but I -- you know, I have to do some prep work for some of those and so when do I fit this thing in? I don't know.

Q: Well, I wish you luck in -- in having -- in sorting all this out, and figuring out how to do it, you know. I really hope you can.

A: Well, I -- I -- You know, and -- and I'm going to have to bite the bullet one of these days, I mean I -- when I -- when I get around to doing this is to -- or before I get around to doing this is, I've got to find a publisher, because I know that if I find a publisher, that's what going to spur me on. And so that -- that really is the first step and that's not an e -- I mean, that's a really big, time consuming project.

Q: Oh, I mean, I've written four book proposals and I finally have gotten one accepted after a long time. I mean, you just -- just pitching constantly.

A: Right, right.

Q: [indecipherable] I'm just like well, grants can be the same way.

A: Oh absolutely, absolutely.

Q: Just a swing and a miss for so many times.

A: Right, right.

Q: Well, I wanted to ask you a couple more things.

A: Okay.

Q: Just -- Just a few factual things, and then -- then this sort of one concluding thing and then, unless you have anything else. Going back again to -- to when you're a -- a girl, and

-- and had arrived here, were there any -- any groups, any refugee groups or -- or aid groups that you all tapped into? Was that -- Was that part of your early life here?

A: My mother did go to a number of different places where she got some help. Didn't seem to get a lot of guidance, but got some help. I don't -- I don't know very much about that. The only thing that affected me personally was my mother went to some places that -- that got me sent to summer camp for I think, three weeks each -- for -- for each of three summers. I really hated that. I hated that with a passion. I didn't want to go away, I didn't want to leave my mother. And because my mother's English was not very good, the first time, I actually got sent to an all Catholic camp.

Q: How was that?

A: It was just a mistake, I mean, my mother didn't either ask or pick up or I -- I don't -- I mean, I don't know.

Q: Obviously this wasn't a Jewish organization that arranged this.

A: Ob-Obviously not. And so that was -- that was a really weird experience, to the point where -- and -- and you weren't allowed to wear your own clothes. You -- It wasn't exactly a uniform, but you got these colorful, very bad, in bad taste, you know sunsuits or something, to wear. A-And by the way, you know this is -- y-you know, I ha -- I have a lot to say about rearing kids, cause I -- I -- that's a pet peeve, is that people don't do things right with children, and I am very protective of -- of what you do and don't do to children. Wa -- Every Thursday night, at this ridiculous place, they came around with shot -- with a tray of shot glasses full of Milk of Magnesia, and every kid had to drink a

shot glass of Milk of Magnesia. And the other thing was that at night, you had to get tucked in to your bed, and these -- I don't know whether they were maybe nuns who didn't have full habits on, I don't even remember, but the -- whoever was in charge of the camp would come around, and you'd get tucked into bed, and they would pull the blanket, you know, like rrrrr, then tuck it in, so -- and you -- you basically couldn't move around in your bed. And so I was really traumatized at that camp. First of all, one night I -- I happened to wake up and one of the kids was sleepwalking, and there was a whole commotion, but also, at the end of that time -- first of all, when my mother came to pick me up, we walked right by -- by each other and she didn't recognize me and I didn't recognize her. That's pretty bizarre. The other thing was, I cried a lot when I had to go to camp, every time. I really hate -- I d -- I -- you know, I really didn't want to go. The other thing that happened is that for the rest of my life, even now, although now I don't -- I'm not as apt t-to do it as -- as quickly, but for the rest of my life, in my adult life, when I come into a hotel, you know, the beds are always made and they're always tucked in. Or if I go to somebody's house who's a bedmaker, the beds -- first thing I do, I look at a bed, it's made, I'm about to have to get into it, the first thing I do is I go around and pull the sheet out from all the sides, because I cannot stand to be in a bed where the sheets are tucked in. You know, it's like -- it makes me feel as though I'm in prison.

Q: Confined -- Confined, yeah.

A: And that's -- And that's -- I'm sure that comes from that stupid camp. So --

Q: So, well --

A: So anyway, so that's the main help that I think I got, if you want to call it help, was being sent for this summer vacation.

Q: So, well -- A-And -- And how about when you were raised, and -- and for that matter now, I mean, did -- did your experience at all contribute to a religious identity as a Jew? I mean ha-have you been a devout person, are you -- do you feel secular, wh-what's your identification religiously, as opposed to culturally as a Jew?

A: That's a very interesting question, I -- I don't think -- first of all, I don't think I have ever been religious. My brother got Bar Mitzvahed in France and for a very short time, he actually became very religious. I mean, it was a matter of months, and -- and asked my mother to keep a kosher home, and when we got to the United States, he said ah, forget about all that nonsense, you know, just --

Q: So you didn't keep kosher?

A: No.

Q: And you --

A: My mother --

Q: -- did you have a Bas Mitzvah?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: My -- My mother was very traditionally Jewish. I don't think she was -- I don't know, I don't think she was really religious, but she -- you know, like she lit candles, I -- I think she maybe lit candles on Friday night, but I'm not sure she even did that very long. She

would go to the Temple on the high holidays, and she would take me, my brother would never come. I went along f -- I went to -- when I was in early grades, I went to religious instruction on Wednesday afternoons, at the local, little synagogue, across from my house. But I did that because I got out of school an hour early, but I think it wasn't really that, it was the -- that every kid who went got a little bag of Planter's peanuts. And I think -- I hate to say this, but I think I really went because of the Planter's peanuts.

Q: Bald-faced bribery, huh?

A: Yes, bald-faced --

Q: I grew up Catholic, they had -- they had similar schemes for us.

A: S-So -- So, yeah, well, Catholic, that's an -- you know, that's a whole other story. My daughter had a friend who would come over here on Sundays and ask us if her mother called, to not say that she wasn't in church, you know, to -- that she could --

Q: Oh yeah, yeah, that's sounds very familiar.

A: And I -- And I would always say, if you're here, and your mother calls and says where you are, you're here. I -- You know --

Q: Can't do that.

A: And -- And that's one of the things that -- that -- see, my mother was very good about that. I -- I did -- I did omit errors of omission. I knew she was very worried, and so sometimes I didn't tell her about places that I was going, or -- or if I did something that I thought she would think was dangerous, or if I expected to be home at midnight, I would tell her that I'd be home at one am. So I -- So I did fib in that way, but other than that, I

was very honest with my mother, and I think she was very honest with me. And that was a big thing in our fam -- I mean, we told our kids that there was only one major, you know, crime, and that was to not be honest. And that worked out very well, cause even -- I mean, we had a bad time with our daughter's teenage rebellion, but I remember her coming one day and saying, "Ma, I'm going to tell you something, and I know you're not going to like this, but I want you to know I'm going to do this anyway, I'm going to this," she was going to some, I don't know, rock concert or something. I'm -- You know, far away and driving with some kids or whatever. "I'm going, and a -- you can't -- you know, you're not going to stop me, I just want you to know that I'm going." So -- So that was -- that worked out well and -- and I think my mother, in contrast to a lot of other parents, I think my mother listened to what we said, at least most of the time. And I think -- You know, I go to the supermarket and you see a kid in a shopping cart, and the kid's talking to the parent, and what is the mother doing? The mother's, you know, "Yeah, yes Jimmy, uh-huh, uh-huh," you know, and -- and her head's obviously in another place. And I think that's really bad for kids. And even when Damon was like two years old, Sam and I said to him, well -- he asked -- he wanted to do something and Sam and I said, "Well, you may not do this for the following three reasons." And he looked at us and he said, "Yeah, but what about," and he mentioned something and Sam and I looked at each other, and we looked at him and we said, "Well, we hadn't thought of that, that's a good reason. Okay, you can do that." And I -- I think there's been a lot of that, you know, I mean, and I have a -- a little cartoon that I keep on the refrigerator a lot of the time, that

says, “You’ll have to excuse me, I haven’t had a chance to dirty up since my parents cleaned.” And I -- I use that in my workshops, you know, that children are not necessarily -- their perspective is not necessarily wrong. It may be different from yours, but it’s not necessarily wrong, and you ought to listen to what they say. And I think I got that from those crazy, early beginnings of having to be fairly responsible, you know, at a very early age, and that my mother did kind of listen to what we had to say, and --

Q: And do you -- do you all -- does your family now -- is your husband Jewish?

A: Yes.

Q: Is -- D-Do you keep high holidays now? Do you -- Do you consi -- consider yourself devout, I mean, just --

A: When I went to college, I had to -- th-there was a thing that said, you know, religion, and I wrote none. But now I usually write Jewish, it’s just easier, but I -- you know, I don’t think I really -- I didn’t -- I think, because of what happened during the war, I didn’t like af -- being affiliated. It’s not so much that I didn’t like being affiliated with being Jewish. I didn’t like affiliate -- be --

End of Tape Four, Side B

Beginning Tape Five, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer. This is tape number five, side A. You were talking about affiliation.

A: I -- I didn't and I still don't like being affiliated with anything, because that's how people say, you know, I hate the ABC's or -- so, I didn't like being affiliated with anything. When I got my first job after graduate school -- no, no, no. Well, first I'm -- I met my husband and my husband had come from a -- a -- quite a religious background, I mean his father was very religious. And in fact, when we got married, his father came over to me and said, you know, "Would -- Would you consider keeping a kosher home?" And I said, "No. Sorry, I -- I really can't do that." Not only that, but we got married at city hall and -- and his father was after us all the time. We'd get these letters, "You're living in sin," you know. "Wouldn't you consider getting remarried by a rabbi?" And -- And my husband said, "You know, why don't we just do this to get the old man happy?" And I said, "No, I'm not going to do that. That's -- That just totally goes against, you know, everything that I stand for. And finally, his father was still writing and -- and some other friends of mine said, "Ah, you know," So, on our third anniversary we got remarried at Harvard Hillel in Cambridge. And I think we had two friends there and the rabbi said, you know, "Do you Mr. Lehrer, take Mrs. Lehrer to be your lawful wedded wife?" And I never used the name Lehrer, which was funny, cause I always used my maiden name, until my husband had to have some surgery, and that's when I started hyphenating it. And -- And then these two guys threw rice as we walked out of Hillel,

and so -- so we were remarried on our third anniversary, by this rabbi, under a chuppah. You know what that is?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And -- You know, and -- and now I think, well, you know, I don't know. I probably shouldn't have fussed about that so much, but I -- but I -- I f -- I didn't feel good standing under that chuppah, I felt -- I felt like I was going against me, and -- and going through some bizarre action just to please somebody else who was not considering my feelings. And -- And that there was something -- I mean, now I'm older, I go to other people's weddings, you know, it's fun seeing the ritual and -- and so on and so forth, but when you're standing there under it, it just -- it seemed -- it seemed hypocritical. It seemed as though I was participating in some kind of witchcraft. You know, it -- it -- it just -- it just didn't -- I mean, I remember standing under that, and just n-not f-feeling right, you know. But, I mean, you know, now I'm older and I think, well I'm -- I'm really glad that I made this old guy happy, and you know, and so -- so big deal, so I was uncomfortable for 10 minutes, or whatever it was. On the other hand, I think this is the way people's principles get -- get worn down as they age. You know, you -- you -- you stop -- you worry less about your principles and more about, well, you know, so and so really wants me to do that, so okay. I mean th-th-there was another thing, I mean, that -- you know, adults in our society kiss each other, and -- and that -- I -- I was kind of s-struck that that's sort of bizarre, because I -- I sort of grew up with the notion that you kiss somebody cause you really kind of like them a lot. And I kissed my brother and I kissed my mother, maybe I

kissed my dolls, I don't n -- I'm not sure about that. But this -- this woman who went to medical school with my father, used to get very -- it's a word I do -- I don't use the word insult. I mean, I hardly ever use that word, occasionally, but hardly ever. She would get very insulted, cause she would come to the house and she would think that I should kiss her. And -- And I wouldn't kiss her, and my mother would get angry, you know. "What is this, what is it? Why do you -- It's not hurting you. Give Marenka a kiss." You know, she feels so bad that you're not -- well -- and I wouldn't do that, cause I still had principles, you know. I was eight years old or nine, or 10 or whatever. And now -- I mean, now I've just given in. I mean, you go to a meeting, you meet somebody for the first time, and you blow this kiss, you know, you sort of put your cheek next to theirs, and you blow this kiss that goes off into the air someplace. But I mean, that's what everybody does, and I -- I -- I don't really like -- I don't really, particularly enjoy pe -- kissing people that I don't know, and sometimes I don't even necessarily like that much, you know. So you kind of go through life and you make compromises with your principles, cause it just makes life easier than having an argument every time, about why won't you kiss me hello, or you won't kiss me goodbye, or something like that. You know, I don't want to have an argument, so it's just easier t-to -- to do what the society tells you to do. And -- And I mean I think we dress, a lot of the times, not the way we feel like dressing, but the way society dictates. You know, it's just easier.

Q: Well, you know, I wanted to ask you one other thing, and it picks up a little bit on what you were just talking about. In ter -- In -- In -- And I've had -- What?

A: Oh, excuse me, I'm sorry. I -- I didn't really finish answering your question.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: I -- I -- I'm sorry. I -- I think I got off the track. After our children were born, I didn't really want them to get Bat Mitzvahed or Bas Mitzvahed, but somehow -- and my husband is really, totally non-religious. You know, I mean he grew up in that very religious household and then he kind of dropped the whole thing. And by the time I met him in Berkeley -- but in Berkeley he would, you know, he would make a seder at Passover, and we would -- and one time it was in my apartment with my room mates and everybody had a great laugh, because first of all, we were the only Jews at the seder. I mean, we l -- we had lived at International House the year before, and you know, we knew one Indian and one this and one that, and so we were practically the only Jews. And then I-I made -- I made something called cogo, I don't know if you know what that is, it's -- it's egg noodles with raisins and apples and you bake it in the oven and [indecipherable], you know and -- and then -- so I served that and somebody at the seder said, "You know, you're not allowed to eat that on Passover." Well, I mean, I hadn't ever thought about it, noodles, you're not supposed to eat noodles on -- well, I -- I don't know. When -- When I was at my mother's house, I think I did fast on Yom Kippur, because, I don't know, I think maybe she wanted me to. I don't usually do that. My husband didn't for years. Every once in awhile, he suddenly decides he's going to do that. And our daughter went through a stage when she was maybe a little bit -- she started to have a tendency to be a little religious, or maybe not even religious, but just traditional. And I

think -- I think she is maybe a little bit resentful. She -- She says to me, she says, “You know, when I was in first grade, the teacher asked everybody what religion they were, and when she got to me, I said, I don’t know.” And I said, “What do you mean you don’t know?” I said, you know, “Just because we didn’t do a lot of those things,” I said, “surely, you must have known that you” -- she said, “No, I was really confused. I didn’t know,” you know. So -- So anyway, so -- so then, the other part that came into this is -- so in graduate school, I had met my husband the first week, although we didn’t get married for four and a half years, after we finished. And then I -- I -- I came here and I had my first job. And the guy I worked with, who was my immediate, I don’t know, senior person -- with whom I’m still in contact, by the way -- was from quite a traditional Jewish home. And he was actually married to a woman who had escaped Europe, she was from Berlin. And -- Excuse me, I’m going to let this [indecipherable] she’s --

Q: Oh, okay.

A: So, he -- I don’t know how this came up, but you know, at lunchtime we would talk about things and he came -- one day we started talking about religion and I -- I said, “Well, you know, I mean, yeah, I’m of Jewish origin, but,” I said, “I -- you know, that doesn’t matter.” And he looked at me, he said, “What are you talking about, that doesn’t matter?” He said, “That matters a lot.” He said, “Do you think, that as a woman, you would have gone to graduate school, if you weren’t Jewish?” And I said, “Well,” you know, “there are a lot of WASP-y women out there who -- who do big important things.” And he said, “Well, yes, but they’re not a lot and that actually, one of the things that

comes down to you, about being Jewish, is that there is, in the Jewish tradition, as in the Chinese tradition, there is a tradition of education. And you -- you got a lot of that, and that's probably why you're sitting here today and we're talking about chemistry. And, you know, probably, if you were reared in some other religion, unless you happened to come from a particular kind of home, or something, you probably would never have gotten this educated." I'm not sure to what extent that's true, but in just doing a little reading, and in the years that followed that, I guess I sort of became convinced that the likelihood of my getting a Ph.D., as -- especially as a woman, was probably increased because there was this tradition of things passed down through the ages. You got to go to school, you got to do well, you got to get A's, you know, and so on and so forth. And so now, if somebody -- depending on who it is, I'll usually just say, "Well, I'm of Jewish background," or -- or something like that, or occasionally I'll still say, "Well, I'm -- I'm just not a religious person." However, something that feeds back into what we've been talking about all day, is h -- this house has wi -- a lot of windows, and some of the downstairs rooms, you could walk right up to the window and you can read what's on the desk. And my husband laughs about this sometimes, but I -- I would never leave, on a desk in a downstairs room, knowingly, anything that would identify us as being Jewish. Not because I'm ashamed of it, but because it scares me. And I know that there are a lot of people out there, who for whatever bizarre reason, don't like Jews. And as I've gone through life and looked around me, you know, and people keep pointing things out to me, I think, you know, it really is kind of bizarre, because Harvard University, who used to ex

-- which used to exclude Jews on the faculty, is now 30 percent Jewish faculty, apparently. And -- You know, and I -- I look around -- I mean, when I read the newspaper and I read that somebody did something, you know, that's sort of in the educational or inventing or something realm, it's almost always either a Jew, or a high class WASP. I mean, there are obviously exceptions, you know, but -- so I think you know that -- it is funny -- it's funny that there is so much prejudice against the Jews, because actually, more or less, I think they've done good things. And the other thing that somebody pointed out to me many years ago is -- although there's c-certainly been exceptions in recent years, is that there's -- until very recently, there is relatively very little violence in -- in Jewish families. I mean there was a famous case, I don't know, 10 years ago, about some Jewish guy who murdered somebody or beat her up or -- or something, but I -- I think by and large -- and also, I don't -- I think, traditionally, Jews drink a lot of Manischewitz wine, but they don't get drunk. So -- So, you know, why is everybody down on the Jews? I -- I mean, I don't -- I don't know. But -- But I -- I mean, I'm no longer -- but I'm not -- I'm not -- I'm just not a religious person, you know? But I -- I -- I am no longer, sort of, as anxious to get away from that. I mean, I don't particularly like to advertise it, although, in very recent years, I think there have been one or two occasions when somebody has said something that got under my skin, when I have actually, in a very mild sort of way, flaunted it. Not -- Not really, but just sort of, you know, made a point of -- you know, somebody making a crack -- although, it has to be something that's very important to me. I mean, like one night, my husband and I were at

a dance, formal dance, you know, black tie and tails. So we're standing next to this very tall guy, and we sit down at the table, and I had actually danced with him, I kind of came up to his belly button. And he starts going on and on about, "Well, you know, all the troubles in the world are caused by these damn Jews," you know, and -- and Sam's kicking me under the table, and I'm, you know, and Sam was about to say something like, "Well, you know, we're Jewish," or something. And I'm kicking, "Shut up," you know, "he doesn't have to know." And, so Sam didn't say anything. But, you know, I don't know whether I did the right thing or the wrong thing. I mean, could I have educated that person on that day, by saying, "Well, you know, we're Jewish and you just danced with me." But, you know, I mean, this guy was like 70 years old. I didn't think it was worth it.

Q: But still disturbing. Very disturbing.

A: Right. But I mean -- But so -- so basically, sometimes I f -- you know, the al -- I feel the only hope for the world is total uniformity. There can't be different cultures, languages, religions. Everybody has got to be neutral, cause otherwise, somebody's always going to hate somebody else. On the other hand, I realize that that would make the world somehow, a pretty boring place.

Q: What about something with mutual respect for difference, I mean --

A: Yeah, but there isn't -- there --

Q: Well, that's -- yeah, that's --

A: It doesn't happen.

Q: It's not happening.

A: You know? It's not happening. And, I mean, like what's going on in Yugoslavia? They -- They all come from this same tiny, little place on the globe, they're more like each other than -- you know, than any of these nations that are fast friends, and they're fighting each other. It's totally ridiculous. So, I don't -- I mean, I -- I don't -- I don't want to be religious, I don't want to be a ba -- you know, now we go to a seder every year, we get invited to one. I don't -- You know, it's all right, it's fun, good company, etcetera, etcetera. I don't really want to be -- I don't want to be forced to do that. I -- I -- Left to my own devices, I don't think I would do those things. On the other hand, when I think about my way of getting peace in the world, of just wiping out any of these differences, I feel a little sad, and I think, you know, as long as they don't do bad things, I don't mind that some people like getting Bar Mitzvahed and some people do this and some people do that. It's -- It's kind of fun. It -- It's colorful. The things that bother me slightly more are when I -- for example, my cousin Hilda, who -- who lives in upstate New York, she and her husband are -- have always been very religious. They will not eat in our house, except on paper plates, and -- and so on. And -- You know, and when I was a kid, I remember being invited to her house for lunch one day, on a Saturday and I -- I asked her if she had a pickle. First of all, she made me -- I was eating something different from everybody else, so she made me eat it on a wooden board. And then I asked if -- if I could have a sour pickle -- no, she asked me, "Do you want anything else?" And I said, "I'd like to have a pickle." And she said, "Well, go to the refrigerator and -- and get a pickle." And

so I went to her refrigerator and the light didn't go on, which I knew it usually did. And I stupidly didn't think about it, and I said, "You know your -- the light in your refrigerator is burned out." And she said to me, very sarcastically, "It's Shabbat, the light in my refrigerator is not burned out. I loosen the bulb on Fridays." And --

Q: Did she turn off the refrigerator, too?

A: No. That's an interesting -- That's --

Q: So she --

A: I know. Tha -- Well, that's --

Q: She says [indecipherable] compromise [indecipherable] there.

A: Right. But, you know, and I thought, well isn't this stupid. When you open the door, you don't have to do anything, you know. I mean, I can see where in -- in 5000 B.C., they had to make lights by, you know, collecting logs and scratching two sticks together and so on. Why -- Why is she doing that? Well then, when I got older, I realized it's symbolic, it doesn't really have anything to do with the fact that turning the lights on is no work in, you know, whatever that year was. But I find that a little extreme and it -- I mean, I th -- I -- you know, I'm very -- that's fine, you want to do that, that's -- you know, go ahead and do that, and I -- I fully will, you know, go along with your right to do that. But it seems a little funny and extreme that, you know to do things like that in 1999, you know. You don't want to eat milk and meat together, that's fine, but you know, you -- I put my dishes through the dishwasher and they're not clean enough to go from one to the other? It seems a little funny and extreme to me. You know, I-I -- I somehow feel

people should be scientific and logical to some extent. You know, not entirely necessarily -- I -- you know, you can have your little foibles, but I guess -- I ge -- I mean, that bothers me, it doesn't bother me only about Judaism, it bothers me about every religion. You know, there are the charming parts of every religion, and then there are the dodo parts of re -- for example, you say you're Catholic. Well, you know, that's -- I -- I spent a lot of my young years in -- in New York, going to churches to listen to the B minor mass, and all this good music and so on, and I also once made a terrible gaffe. I walked into this church and I saw all these things, and I thought, "Oh, that's really nice, they have all these footstools," and put my feet on one of these things, and then somebody told me those are not footstools.

Q: [indecipherable] to kneel on.

A: Right. So -- You know, so that's all very charming and so on, but then there are things, for example, I don't know, I hope I'm not stepping on your feet, but you don't practice birth control. You know, I mean that's -- we got too many people already, you know, and -- and -- and also this comes into my thing about, I don't thing any child that is not really, desperately wanted, should be born into this world. And I would -- Do you know, I was really bothered, for a long time, that I was an accident, because there's this large age difference. And it wasn't until I was 40 years old that I one day sat down with my brother, and I said, "I need to know whether I was an accident." And he said, "No, you were very much wanted." And I said, "Well, why didn't they have us closer together?" And my brother said, "Well, because of the depression." And my response

was, “Oh, great. So they waited for the depression to be over, and then they had me at the -- at the doorstep of World War Two. Well, that was pretty smart.” So -- You know, but -- but the relief that I f -- I -- that I felt that night, knowing that I was planned, you know, and wanted -- you know, an-and sometimes friends say to me, “Oh, oh,” you know like one friend of ours got pregnant, and she said, “Well, you know, we really hadn’t planned to have a child for a couple of years, but I got pregnant, there was a hole in my diaphragm, so we figured, well, now’s as good a time as any.” That’s horrifying to me. That is -- you know, I mean, I -- I kid people and, you know, I mean you can’t plan that well, but both of our kids were wanted and planned and I tell people, “Both of our kids were born on summer weekend days, because I couldn’t take the time off from work,” you know. So, I don’t know, religions have their good things and their bad things and I realize that some people don’t do well without religion, and I think those people need to have it. But I don’t think it should be imposed on people who -- who are good people without it, and who don’t need it.

Q: Mm-hm. I’m going to -- I want to ask you one more question, but I’m going to --

A: Okay.

Q: -- flip sides here first.

End of Tape Five, Side A

Beginning Tape Five, Side B

Q: And the -- the last thing I wanted to just ask you was, mi -- picking up a little bit on what we’ve just been talking about, when you -- when you look back at -- an-and think

and reflect on -- on the meaning of what you've gone through, and -- and the -- and the meaning of the Holocaust, I wonder -- well, I-I wanted to invite -- invite you to reflect on that, but I want to ask you one specific thing about it. I've done a number of these interviews, and talked to people about whether they see this as a -- primarily as a -- as a tragic, horrible, unfathomable event in Jewish history, or -- or i-in human history, or both? I m -- To -- To be a little more specific, I have a close friend who's a photographer of Armenian background, and he has, in his own memory, his grandparents memory, the -- the Armenian genocide of 1915.

A: What's that guy's name? Cause I know a photographer.

Q: Newbar Aliezanian.

A: Oh, no.

Q: No, he's in Gloucester, where I live.

A: Okay.

Q: And Newbar recently -- There's a film maker, Arel Morris, that -- that Newbar went to shoot some stills for a -- for a film, that he made, partly in Birkenau, and Auschwitz. And -- And Newbar of cour -- you know, spent like 10 days there, and of course was, you know, tremendously affected by it. And, you know, his understanding is, this is t -- what this says to him, is what human beings have been capable of doing to each other. And of course, many Jews would experience this as something much more specific to -- to what was directed at Jews. And -- And I guess I wanted to ask you in ter -- I don't know if you

think about it in these terms, in terms of the lessons, is it -- is it a lesson primarily for Jews, or for humanity, or -- or do you not think of it in that way?

A: Oh, I very much think of it that way. I think -- lesson. I don't think it's a lesson, because I don't think we've learned anything. I think -- I c -- I find it very hard to believe that it's not going to happen again. I mean, like right now, when I turn on the radio, and I hear, "Well, you know, the Russians are kind of siding with the Yugoslavs, and China is getting a little alienated," and so on. And immediately, in my head, I see the map switching into the scenario for World War Three. Because -- I mean, I hope that nothing like that will ever happen again, and -- but -- but I don't have faith that it will never happen again. And I -- I think -- Well, I think of the Holocaust, as what the hell did they pick on the Jews for? I mean, the Jews are -- you know, as I said a minute ago, I mean, of all the pe -- if -- you know, if I were a bad guy, and I wanted to pick a group of people to pick on, it would not be the Jews, because, you know, by and large, they're more or less law abiding, they don't drink. They're -- They have a reasonable family life, and by and large, they're educationally oriented, and they kind of do good things, you know. If I were going to wipe somebody out, I would -- I would find groups that do bad things, to wipe out. You know, people who -- who -- who are very warring, or you know, or self-destructive, or destructive of other people, or -- I -- I'll tell y -- I'm going to say something which is a horrible thing to say. And I don't -- I mean, I don't really mean it the way it sounds, but it's a thought that has often crossed my mind. I thought, you know, if Hitler had to get even with somebody, and he had to sort of wipe out a group of people,

why did he pick on the Jews? Why didn't he just decide that he was going to clean up the earth of all the people who do bad things? You know, go out and kill all the people who do bad things.

Q: Wh-What does that mean?

A: I don't know what that means, I'm just telling you this is a thought that I've often had. You know, that if he had to have this crazy passion, to go and -- and do -- you know, now they call it, or th-they ca -- they call it ethnic cleansing. Why didn't he, instead of ethnic, which makes no sense, why didn't he do some other kind of cleansing? You know, get rid of -- of people who -- who murder other people, who -- who go out and, I don't know, steal, who -- I mean, you know, I -- I -- I don't know, but why -- why didn't he get some sense -- some -- some more sensible agenda? I mean, why did he pick on this random group of people, who undoubtedly have a lot of bad folks in them, but, you know, by and large, they're a -- a reasonably okay group. You know, why didn't he decide he was going to do in everybody who was in the jails? You know, or -- or sometimes I hear it costs, you know, I don't know, x thousands of dollars to keep somebody on death row. Well, I've changed my mind about that, because as I've gotten older, it suddenly has occurred to me, you know, there are people on death row who really aren't guilty. But -- You know, so why didn't Hitler make a project of finding out, you know, who -- like who was really guilty, and if somebody really did something bad, you know, make a project of getting rid of all those pe -- you know, or something more sensible, something -- I mean that -- you know, tha -- tha -- it's a very childish statement that I've just made. But -- But

I -- You know, and I -- I don't think the Holocaust affected only the Jews. First of all, lots of other people, you know, Gypsies, [indecipherable] a lot of other people got killed.

Q: Gays, and handicapped.

A: Right, right. But -- But I think -- I think -- I think the whole world, or a lot of the whole world was affected, and I think the Germans were not the least of them, because first of all, the good Germans, are often living some kind of horrible guilt trip. I mean, I don't think I have ever yet met a German who didn't tell me that they hid Jews in their house, during the wars. And I've calculated that if every German who told me that they hid a Jewish family in their house, really had done that, there wouldn't have been any Holocaust, you know? So that must be a terrible thing to have to live with. And the other thing was something that actually happened to me. I was invited to give a talk at some library in Brookline, some years ago, which didn't work very well, because I cracked up in the middle of my own talk, and started crying, and then I ooof. But anyway, at the end of the talk, there was a long line of people waiting to talk to me. And so, you know, most of them just said something nice and left. But there were two people, standing one behind the other. The first one was a very elderly Jewish man, who bawled me out for saying that there are good Germans. And right after him, there was a very young, very blonde, German woman, who was probably in her 20's, who came to thank me for understanding that not all Germans are bad. So that was -- that was a kind of a heavy moment.

Q: I'll say.

A: And I think -- Aw, you know, there is something else that I -- that I -- I don't think I mentioned this on the other interview, and I think this is maybe an important issue. I told you earlier that I had sort of, in a very casual way, decided I wanted to go back to all the places that I had been in my childhood. In 1961 - '62 -- '61 - '62? No, '63, s -- 1962 - '63, my husband and I took that year off, and my mother took a trip to Israel, and we met in Vienna, because I specifically routed that we would go to -- to see where I was born. And we had lived in these -- we had these two apartments, and they had knocked down the wall between them, so my father's practice was on the right hand side, and our living quarters were on the other side. And, so I knocked -- I was with my husband, and my mother met us in Vienna, she came from Israel. I knocked on the door of the left hand apartment, cause the wall had been re-put up there, to -- to make it back into two apartments. There was no answer. And then the most unbelievable thing happened. I knocked on the door of the right hand apartment. My husband was standing sort of right beside me, and then, my mother was here, next -- sort of next to -- to him. The door opened, there was a woman who opened the door. She looked at us, she looked at my mother, and she turned absolutely snow white, and started apologizing. I couldn't believe this scene. We left in 1930, in -- in May of 1939. This was now 1963, spring of 1963. This woman recognized my mother, and she started apologizing, "It's not my fault that I have some of your furniture, the landlord told me to keep it. What happened isn't my fault." You know, and she -- she was just continuously verbalizing -- this was in German. And I said to her, "All I want to do is, I want to come in for 10 minutes, and look around

to see where I grew up. You're welcome to the furniture, I'm not coming to take anything away. There's nothing to worry about." This lady followed us all around her apartment, and [indecipherable], you know, "It's not my fault," you know, "the superintendent told me wa," -- you know, "not my fault, not my fault." Well, that lady probably did not -- has not had a very good life either. I mean, I don't know how often this conscience thing came up, maybe it never came up except this time, but I mean, can you imagine this -- this scene. So, I went in, walked into the apartment, recognized the green and sort of beige-y streaked linoleum from my father's office, you know, where my father's dental chair had been. And there was a funny -- under the linoleum, you could see a round hole, was about this big, that had been covered over, and I thought, that's where my father's examining chair must have been. And I still think that's probably what it was, but when we got finished looking around, and we left, and said thank you and goodbye, and this woman was like a nervous wreck, and my mother was -- my mother was a nervous wreck, and I -- I really felt very bad, afterwards, that we had taken her there, because I thought, you know, she didn't need this. We came outside the building, and there was a plaque on the outside of the apartment house that said that a bomb had fallen through this house, but it had not exploded. And so then I started to wonder, afterwards, you know, was that really -- did I remember correctly that that's where my father's chair was, or was that where the bomb fell? And I don't -- I don't know what the answer is. In 19 -- I don't know, maybe the early 1990's or something, my husband and I went back to Vienna again, just the two of us, and I went back to that house again, and this time the building

looked like absolute slum, it was just awful. And I went upstairs and I-I -- I rang the bells, nobody answered, and my husband said, “Do you really need to do this again?” And I said, “No.” And we walked into a fabric shop just a couple of doors down, and started talking to the woman, and told her why we were here, and we went for a ride in the riesenha -- you know what the Riesenhardt is, in Vienna?

Q: Never been there.

A: It’s a -- It’s a ride, it’s -- it’s like a Ferris wheel, except it’s got closed cars, and they’re really rather enormous, I mean, a lot of people fit in them. So we -- we went for a ride on that, and -- but anyway, that was -- that was -- that was a -- quite a bizarre thing. And then, I don’t know, I sometimes think I’d like to go back again, but I don’t think I would go back to the house again.

Q: Mm-hm, yeah. Once is probably --

A: We did go -- We went to my -- We went to my father’s cemetery that second time, and -- to see his gravestone.

Q: How was that?

A: It -- It’s tilted, but it looks brand new. When my mother was alive, she sent money every year to up -- to keep up the grave, and then when she died, I thought, “Aw,” you know, “I’m not going to do that.” So it’s -- you know, it’s not nicely kept up, but it -- but the stone is still there, and it looks -- I took some pictures of it, it -- it -- it’s tilted, as I said, but it -- it really looks like new and it’s funny, funny -- not funny-funny, but I don’t know, just weird, going to this place.

Q: Yeah. Well, I really thank you so much for taking so much time to -- to talk about this. Are there any other last thoughts that you have, that you want to share? I think we've gone through sa --

A: Probably not til after you leave [phone ringing]. Excuse me for just a minute. I'd like to ask, is --

Q: This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Liane Reif-Lehrer.

End of Tape Five, Side B

Conclusion of Interview

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