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MARGOT STEIN BRANDES

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RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: —March the 17th, the year 2004. And I'm here in Fair Lawn, New Jersey with Mrs. Brandes. I have just interviewed Dr. Brandes, her husband. [sniffs] This is Margot Brandes, who came here in 1939, and she was about—

MAN: Seven.

LEVINE: —eight—seven years of age and came from Germany. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay, if we could start, please. If you'd say your birth date and where in Germany you were born.

BRANDES: My birthday is December 30, 1930 and I was born in Zweibruecken, Germany. If you had like me to spell it—

LEVINE: Okay.

BRANDES: Z-W-E-I-B-R-U-E-C-K-E-N.

LEVINE: Is—where is Zweibruecken? Is it—

BRANDES: Well, it's near the French border; it's southwest.

LEVINE: Southwest, okay. Okay. And did you live in Zweibruecken until you came to this country?

BRANDES: Well, after we left Zweibruecken, which is a story in itself, we had to—we were taken to the border of France and we stayed in France, waiting for our papers to be completed before we left with the Bremen, the ship, the Is—for the United States. So basically, I only stayed in one other place before I came to United States, which was France.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay in France, just roughly?

BRANDES: About five months.

LEVINE: Five months, I see. Okay. So [clears throat] what do you remember about Zweibruecken? I know you were so young but—

BRANDES: Yes. Well, I do remember that when my first class at school—that we—we had a backpack and a blackboard. We had an actual blackboard with our homework on it, which was interesting. You had to keep it intact. You had to keep the—from smudging. So—

LEVINE: Your own individual—

BRANDES: Yeah.

LEVINE: —blackboard?

BRANDES: [unclear] like a [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

BRANDES: And we wrote on it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BRANDES: And that—and I remember that, across the way from where we lived, we were on the second floor, was a non-Jewish woman whom my mother befriended and gave her these beautiful, discarded clothing that my brothers and I outgrew. My mother had ex—exquisite taste. So she received it very happily, accepted them and so forth. And then I remember distinctly, the day I left, she threw stones at us. And that, to me, was very symbolic of what the world is in terms of its

relationship to Jews, that, sure, use them, manipulate and do what you want and exploit them. But in the final analysis, they're no friends of the Jews. So there was quite an eye opener too, because I had known her for quite a few years. What transpired was that the Germans, Nazis entered our house; the second floor is where we lived. And they promptly threw everything out the window onto the street, everything that we had. The only thing they couldn't move was the piano; it was too heavy. And the piano is right here in my home now.

LEVINE: Wow.

BRANDES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: And my grandmother, who was unable to leave at that time—she was too old—and so she was the one who sent, among other things, a few things to us—

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: —sometime later. But my mother did a very intelligent thing. It seems that she got wind of the fact that the Nazis had taken him and—bodily had taken him and they were about to bring him to a concentration camp when she remembered that he was a chaplain at the prison for Jewish prisoners. There weren't many. But he made friends with the chief of police, who was not Jewish, because the two played chess. My father was an excellent chess player. His brother was a champion in—in Paris. And so they became very good friends, so my mother had the—it was very intelligent on her part—called up the chief of police—

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: —and said, “You know, you have to do something. My husband was just taken. He's about to be brought to the concentration camp. Please do something.” The chief of police promptly called up the— whoever they were and said, “Release this man, Rabbi Bernstein [PH]. He's un—under my jurisdiction and you cannot take him.” And he was brought back. And with that, the chief of police provided a—an—two escorts on—on motorcycles on either side. We left at that very moment with nothing on our backs but our own clothes, with nothing. And [clears throat]—but to protect us, we had—he provided so that nobody could touch us, except, of course, this woman threw stones. And so then he—these escorts, the police took us to the border. And we lived for a while—my aunt was living there and I guess we lived

with her. Or—and I know my brothers were put into some kind of a Jewish home or something during the time. My father had entrusted someone to get his papers, had paid him. The man disappeared and my father had to start from scratch to get the—

LEVINE: Mmm.

BRANDES: —papers. Now, he had come to the United States about a year earlier in order to—in those days, you couldn't go into the United States without an affidavit. And you couldn't get an affidavit unless you had a job. So my father, by himself, went to New York, didn't know the language, was the hottest summer, I understand, they'd ever had. And he looked for a position as a rabbi, a cantor. And of course, we had no relatives to speak of and it was really a very tedious problem for him. He finally, a few days before he—his visa to return, you know, expired, he managed to find someone by the time of Mr. Acron [PH], who lived in Westerly, Rhode Island. And he said to him, to my father—he took a liking to him—said, “You know, I don't have a job for you right now but I'll write an—an affidavit for you. I'll give you—because eventually you'll come—you'll become our rabbi.” It's a small synagogue in Westerly, Rhode Island. So my father was much relieved. Now he could go back because he could fit into the quota as a member of the clergy, and that could get he—him and his family into the United States. So everybody said to him, “Eliazer [PH], what are you doing? You're crazy to go back. Nobody goes back.” He said, “I have to go back to get my family.” So he wouldn't—he wasn't deterred. And as a matter of fact, [chuckles] he's such a practical—he was such a practical man that, before he went back, he learned that haircuts for boys—men were very expensive. So he took a couple of lessons to learn how to cut hair, so that when he came back to the States he could save a few dollars that way. So he came back and—and that's when this incident just happened that I told you about.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: And fortunately, papers in zero hour came through. He was very disappointed that this guy let him down and just ran off with the money and with the papers. But—and—and then, to make matters worse, my brothers both picked up the measles. And of course, they—we couldn't get on a ship with it. So somehow, we managed—h—somehow. And we caught the last—I think it was the—I was told it was the last ship out of Germany to the United States. When we came to the—I'll give you a copy of—I think I have—when we came to the United States and we saw the Statue of Liberty, my father had such trepidation. He was thrilled. He was happy. He said, “This woman,” meaning the Statue of Liberty, “is—is saving our lives and we're so

grateful to be here.” But he was scared because he really didn’t have anything. He—he didn’t—we had nothing. And he didn’t have a job. He didn’t have a place to stay. He knew that he didn’t want to stay in New York. It—he didn’t like that kind of congested life. So—in fact, they offered him to stay at the—ah, what was that called? Where people—immigrants were allowed to stay and they received money and clothes.

LEVINE: HIAS?

BRANDES: HIAS.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: And he said, “No, I’m a young man.” He was in his 30s. “I’m strong. I’ll manage fine. Give it to someone who is ill or who’s old. I’ll manage.” So he—we eventually made it to Westerly, Rhode Island, which we loved. We were there for about a year.

LEVINE: Why there? Do you know? Wh—what prompted your father to pick that place?

BRANDES: Because the gentleman, Acron—

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: That was where the synagogue was.

LEVINE: Okay.

BRANDES: It was a little synagogue. So we went there and they were so hospitable. They had a—an apartment ready for us, the—all the blankets we needed, the dishes we needed. They moved us right in.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: My mother, my father, my two brothers and I. And we were just so happy. It was—I remember outside, a huge tree. My brothers and I made a tree house and it was a lovely community. And my father took English lessons because, you know, how’s he going to officiate at a service, you know, without knowing English. And, although we had very little—he got—virtually made nothing. But he was very creative so he decided he would sell doughnuts door to door.

LEVINE: Oh, my gosh.

BRANDES: So it was so much fun. I went with my father, was a little kid, and we sold doughnuts door to door. And—because he kidded around. He always complimented women and—and he kidded around with them, so they loved him. And in addition to that, he also bought wholesale clothes from New York. And he sold clothes and shoes door to door—

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: —in order to supplement his meager income. And then he came up with an idea, which we didn't know what was happening until after we were doing it. He—this is before he had a car. He bought a—eventually a very old car with a [unclear] thing that came up in the back, if you recall—

LEVINE: A rumble seat?

BRANDES: —which you had to—a rumble seat, and the thing that you had to turn to start off.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness. [chuckles]

BRANDES: But he was very mechanically oriented so he managed.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: Very determined. Never asked anything of anybody. And so he—we didn't have a car at that time. So I remember we walked to the beach. Westerly has a beautiful beach. And we kept walking, walking. We didn't see the water. We didn't see—my father said, "Just a little while longer, little while longer." We finally made it. And then he said, "You see over there? The bricks. Pick them up." "Why, Father? Why are we picking up bricks?" He said, "You'll see." These bricks are from the hurricane of 1939 because the homes on the beach were destroyed. They were made of bricks. So my father decided that he was going to use these bricks. And how did he use them? His brother—I guess was Max—who was an expert on making steel in a finery. And my father must have seen him doing this and—and decided to build his own little refinery—refinery of—of these bricks. So we used these bricks and he made a—a small, little—he rented a space somewhere and—and he made this refinery. And there, he created this wonderful—pieces of—I know they were shaped like this—of—of stainless steel, which he brought to New York and they said to him, "This is the finest quality of stainless steel we've ever seen. Where did you get it?" So my father, of course, was afraid to say what a primitive setup he had, that he was able to create the stuff. All this to supplement his income because he never took—never accepted, and

as a rabbi, he knew, going to the [unclear], you're not supposed to accept for funerals or weddings. So even though he needed it for his family, he never—

LEVINE: He never [unclear]—

BRANDES: —took a penny.

LEVINE: I see.

BRANDES: And so this is how we managed. And we—I remember we loved Westerly, Rhode Island a great deal.

LEVINE: Wow. Let me just ask you, what—what were those stainless steel things that he made?

BRANDES: They—they were shaped liked this, about this size. What they were used for, I should have asked my father. I never knew.

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: I don't know if he knew. But apparently, that's—he made—he must have gotten contacts with—

LEVINE: Ah—

BRANDES: —I mean, contacts with someone who said, "This is what I need."

LEVINE: I see. Wow. Well, now, your—your hu—your father's name was Eliazer?

BRANDES: Eliazer.

LEVINE: A—and your mother was—

BRANDES: Martha.

LEVINE: —Martha. Now, how did your mother take to this transplantation?

BRANDES: My mother was a remarkable woman. She had total confidence in my father, and my father was a rare man, very creative, very determined, very diligent, an extraordinarily gifted man in many ways. And my mother—and he was a bit more aggressive than my mother. My mother was a much more quiet—she was an excellent mother. She managed to whip up these wonderful meals on nothing. I mean, she would buy secondhand—not secondhand, maybe—

LEVINE: Day old—

BRANDES: —blemished fruit—

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

BRANDES: —or things of that sort. But she would really put together a beautiful meal. We always had people at our table when we moved to New London, Connecticut, which is what my father did after we left Westery. And she just was very supportive of everything my father did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: And—because what he did, it—it turned out always—it turned out just fine. So she was always behind him all the time.

LEVINE: Wow. Before we started the tape, you said that your father, to you, personifies what—good—good attitudes or thinking or—

BRANDES: To me, he—to—personifies the true Jewish leader.

LEVINE: Jewish leader. Why don't you say what that is? What his—he does personify?

BRANDES: Well, a man who sticks—although he was orthodox as a—as a young man—he used to fast every Monday and Thursday. He attended Wortsberg [PH], the most—the best school training, rabbinical and—and cantor and teacher training school at that time, which, no doubt, doesn't exist anymore. And he believed much in—he was authentic, an authentic Jew. So he was orthodox at the time. And then after all this happened with H—Hitler and the Holocaust, he lost some of his faith, I presume, when he came to the States. Even though he was no longer orthodox, he still stuck to the letter of the law.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: And the Jewish law, since it dictated, "You're not supposed to charge people for funerals and weddings," he never did. He would give the money back. And I remember one time, my—my father said to this gentleman for whom he did a bris—he learned how to do a bris as well—he said, "Oh, you know"—he knew the man was out of a job—he said to him, "You know, here. You know, this is fine. Please take the money." So the man said, "No, no. Cantor, I want you to have it." So

my father saw the man's feelings would be hurt if he didn't. So guess what my mother and father did?

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: They took the other kids shopping for clothes with that money. Now, I—I have not seen—very sensitive.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: I have not seen among the clergy today anything that is near this kind of—he was like a Pied Piper with the kids.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: They would follow him and, in college, they would write him and call him and say, "Cantor, I'm going with a Jewish girl."

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

BRANDES: Anyway, he was—he started out—as I said, he—he dropped some of his—he lost the faith and—because of what had happened to the Jews. He lost the brother with five kids, who—and this was brother very close to him. And so it—he was also a good businessman. I mean, the man had so many skills, it was incredible. So he bought a grocery store. I mean, he didn't own the building but he bought the business. And he was successful there too. Women loved him. He was always so kind and he was so good at—at that time they were rationing food. And I remember there were red stamps for meat and blue stamps—

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: —for canned goods and vegetables. And he was meticulous the way he kept records.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: I was helping him in the store. And of course, officially, you're not supposed to work till you're 16. So if we saw someone coming, I'd go to the back and stay away until the person had left. But—

LEVINE: This is in Rhode Island?

BRANDES: This is—now, we had moved to New London, Connecticut.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Okay. Here, don't—

BRANDES: [unclear]

LEVINE: [chuckles]

BRANDES: And my—as I said, he did very well. But people got word of the fact that he was a cantor. And so they'd say, you know, "We understand you're a cantor." They started out by asking him to read the magilla [PH]. So he read the magilla. Then they said, "Well, you know, we could use someone for the High Holidays. Would you do the High Holidays for us?" So he did the High Holidays. And then they said, "You know, we have—you have a good rapport with everybody. Why don't you become a teacher in our school?" So he became a teacher. Then eventually, he was hired as a full time cantor.

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: So he had the position of cantor, choir director; full time, five days a week, teacher. He was a [unclear]. He was a ritual director. He was a—a—he, as I said, did brissen [PH]. And he lived fully the life of someone—and a Zionist on top of that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BRANDES: He was the—he trained kids to be wonderful members of young Judea. And he, himself, became president of the Zionist Organization of America. And so he was always involved, made practically no money, but was always involved in these wonderful Jewish causes. In fact, while he was in London he would pick up little homes that were in disarray, and he'd fix them up and then sell them to make a few dollars. You know, that kind of thing.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: And so I always felt I had a very good life in New London, Conne—because my parents really never—I took piano lessons. My brothers were given piano lessons. We had a wonderful time and I never felt a deprivation of any kind.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: Even though I—my father's salary was ridiculous. It was so—so low. But he—it was obvious that he was fully respected by everyone. And the piano I was telling you about, which is now downstairs, we had in our living room. And the kids would come, the bar mitzvah—who were

preparing for bar mitzvah. My father would sit at that piano with a child with his arm around the child and would train even the ones with special—now, they have the term “specially challenged, special education”—and he would teach these kids in the house. And my mother would give them supper and my father would play chess. That was the procedure.

LEVINE: Wow. Very nice. Well, let me ask you about yourself. Do you, personally—I mean, how would you describe yourself as a young child when you left—when you left Europe and you were coming here? Wh—what kind of a kid were you?

BRANDES: Well, I think—I think—I would—I would think most kids, certainly if you grew up in an environment like I did, have complete faith in your parents. So I never—I never felt a sense of danger. I never felt the sense of discomfort. I think it was an admiration society.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: I felt that he never complained. He just managed, my father and my mother both, to resolve whatever problems came along. And so when we came to the United States, he managed to, as I said, in Westerly, Rhode Island, where he was a rabbi for a year. And then we moved to New London where he then, as I told you, he started this store. And then slowly, little by little—

LEVINE: He worked up to being the rabbi.

BRANDES: Then he—

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

BRANDES: He became—

LEVINE: Cantor.

BRANDES: —a member of the Jewish Theological Cantor’s Association.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: And in fact, he organized the Connecticut Cantor’s Association, which he was the executive director. They would meet on a regular basis, prepare concerts. And the money that they raised when they performed wherever, throughout Connecticut, they would send to the Cantor’s Institute.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: And he did the same thing when they ultimately settled in Florida. He established for the first time—he got all the cantors in Florida as well—

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: —together and they performed at the huge Miami Beach Auditorium.

LEVINE: Wow.

BRANDES: And he—he—that's why I'm having a very difficult time adjusting to the rabbinate [PH] and the [unclear] today, the people who are doing it today, because no one comes close to the kind of love my father perpetuated. I know that when he was honored in New London, Connecticut when he—my mother developed Parkinson Disease, so my father said, "Well,"—they had heard—my mother had heard that they have a Parkinson Institute in Pompei [PH]—in Miami Beach. So she said, "Let's go there." So they picked up and my father had been in New London for 25 years. So they gave him a dinner. And kids got—and the tickets were sold out in two days, 400. So the kids, his students, got wind of the fact that he was going to have this dinner. They came. They said, "Sorry. All the tickets are sold out." So they said, "Well, if we set the tables"—

LEVINE: [chuckles]

BRANDES: —"and wash the dishes, can we come?" So—

LEVINE: Ah—

BRANDES: I'm very disappointed in our leadership today. And—and so I'm looking at—at the Jewish world in—from a different perspective, because I've seen the ultimate in what can be accomplished. And I think they're letting us down today.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Mmm.

BRANDES: But in any case, he left a huge impact wherever he went. And I think what I am today reflects—

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-hmm.

BRANDES: —the home I grew up in. And the standards he had, I think—I guess I'm imposing on myself and on others today, as well.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, was—was the town of Zweibruecken anything like the town in Rhode Island that you went to?

BRANDES: I just remember it had some cobblestones and it had rows of stores. And beyond that, it was not much. If there was a lot of rumbling and going on—I'm sure there was because this was already six years after—or five and a half years after 1933. And—and Kristallnacht, my father's synagogue was burned.

LEVINE: Oh. Do you remember the buildup at all? Or were you too young to—

BRANDES: Oh, I—and I guess my parents kind of spared me. I didn't read the paper, obviously, and there was no TV. So I really didn't see it. I'm sure there was some anti-Semitic things going on as well.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BRANDES: But it was—we were young. But when I reflect back on what's going on, I see a repetition of the same kind of anti-Semitism today as what prevailed then.

LEVINE: What do you see—what do you attribute—wh—what's similar about today and then? Do—do you—have you made any sort of—

BRANDES: Well, we live in a non-Jewish world so we work with the non-Jews. And I get along just fine.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BRANDES: But I don't trust—I think the non-Jewish world is the non-Jewish world and we're the Jews, and that's a whole different world. I try as much as I can to inculcate the Christians I do trust with information they may not know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: For example, just the other day, I gave my friend who's in the physical education at the college where I taught a list—I told her about it first—it's three and a half pages long. It's got a—a third of the page, Nobel prize winners who are Arabs, and the three pages following that on the—Nobel prize winners who were Jewish. But she couldn't believe it. I brought that to her. So I try as much as I can to pass the word, to spread the word about Israel, to share. We watch the paper very carefully, my husband and I, and we see the medium—media as destroying us—our—destroying us. And they're anti-Israel. So various organizations I belong to, no matter where I go, I come fortified with

material that I distribute and I talk about Israel to enlighten—these young women, interestingly enough, are very interested because they're seeing now an encroachment in their beautiful communities. They're seeing signs of anti-Semitism in schools as well. And that's what I mean. It's not only in France and countries other than in—in—even in Holland, it's surprising; Switzerland, these countries, that there's infiltration of—of anti-Jewish feelings.

LEVINE: Do you know—do you have any sense of why now? Wh—I mean, assuming this is a new rise of—of anti-Semitic feelings.

BRANDES: Well, you know, in 1967 when Israel really did a remarkable thing, it won a war that—beyond comprehension. And it—it—it—it managed to regain a lot of this land and really became a—almost within a—in the confines of a small area, a superpower. And so they were untouchable and the world left us alone. But I think that as Israel has disintegrated in terms of size—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: —people have respect for power.

LEVINE: Mmm.

BRANDES: And the Arabs have respect for power. And what's happened is that people have seen, well, you know, Israel is vulnerable. And they're happy about it and they translate Israel and Judaism; it's one and the same. And they basically—because they don't like the Jews, it's easy; you get away with it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: And the Jews fall right into the trap. There are so many liberals among our Jews that are causing major problems.

LEVINE: I see. Okay. So can you say anything about your life in—compared—the two places, where you left Europe and you came to Rhode Island? Anything about the difference in your life or how things changed for you, personally?

BRANDES: You mean between Westerly and New London, or between Germany and—

LEVINE: Germany and Westerly, and then Westerly and New London.

BRANDES: I—I have a terrible memory so I can't—some people remember way back—

LEVINE: [chuckles] I know.

BRANDES: —when they're two or three years old.

LEVINE: I—

BRANDES: I have very little knowledge of when I was six or seven. I mean, I remember that when I came to the United States, they didn't have what they have now with this ESL. So they put me—even those I should have been going to the second or third grade, they put me back in first. And I remember there was a non—an anti-Jewish incident right—and my brothers [chuckles] pounced on this kid and nearly killed him. So they didn't touch us again. But I enjoyed the public school. I enjoyed the experience. I felt very comfortable. But you know, when you have a nice home with—with parents who are devoted to their children, who never complain about a situation, you don't even know there's a problem.

LEVINE: Right, right, right.

BRANDES: And so I don't remember. I think my brothers and I had a very nice childhood.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: We weren't spoiled but we—we all did our thing.

LEVINE: And how about your brothers? What were their names?

BRANDES: One was Ralph. Ralph and Er—Ernest.

LEVINE: Ernest.

BRANDES: And my youngest one, which is interesting, was born in the United States.

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: And my parents named him—at that time, they thought that Roosevelt was a friend of the Jews. So they called him Franklin after Franklin Roosevelt and Victor after victory.

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: So his name was Franklin Victor.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: So he's 10 years my junior and he was born in—in the United States. And so he's probably the most spoiled of all them. All three of them are engineers, very bright. And my oldest brother is also very Zionist ori—oriented and very Jewishly or—my youngest brother is not. He doesn't care for organized religion, and same thing with his son. So [chuckles] you know, I think—he didn't like some of the things he—he saw also while he was home. You know, the rabbi there—one of the rabbis was—was not nice. He would take away from my father a certain song on a Friday night and, instead, talk. And my brother heard my father being unhappy about it. So I think he—he was kind of turned off.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh.

BRANDES: You know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

BRANDES: —around it but just the stores and the cobblestones in the department. And there was a kind of a chained fence of some kind. But when we mov—moved to Westerly and New London, it was all suburban. And we had a—a very nice childhood. We did everything we wanted to do.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: And we—I didn't feel at all that I was deprived or anything of that sort. There is one [chuckles] story that's funny and that is, I remember it really used to snow then. We had huge amount of snow. So apparently, we only had one pair of boots though. So I wore the boots and, as I walked up the hill to catch the bus that was going to go to school, my brothers walked in my footsteps—

LEVINE: [laughs]

BRANDES: —as we walked up the hill. That, I remember. And—

LEVINE: [chuckles]

BRANDES: —I found that interesting. But again, we—you know how kids today, they want this; they want that and this and that. We just—I guess if we wanted it, we just made it or so.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh.

BRANDES: You know?

LEVINE: But you didn't feel any deprivation because you were—

BRANDES: No, in fact, my father made his own—

LEVINE: —secure.

BRANDES: —sidewalk in front of the house. He made his own cesspool in the back. He did that. He added a whole wing to—to—to the house that we're in. And he never complained about anything. He just—what he needed, he did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: He asked for—he—he didn't ask for anything. He just did it himself.

LEVINE: Huh. Okay, just to backtrack, do you have any idea where you were in France? Was it near any city that you know of—

BRANDES: Strasbourg.

LEVINE: Oh, Strasbourg. Uh-huh.

BRANDES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay.

BRANDES: My—my aunt lived there, who she and her husband eventually moved to Peru where they—he had a—

LEVINE: Huh.

BRANDES: —a gold factory or something. And then when things got rough there, they went back to—they went to Belgium, to Antwerp. And they set up their business there, still in gold and silver.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh.

BRANDES: And diamonds, I think. So we just spent a short time there. And I just remember one thing that my aunt used to get me, the whipped cream, schloksa [PH], it was called. That, I remember. I used to like it. And that's what she gave me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

BRANDES: But I—I don't—other than that, I really don't remember anything about—

LEVINE: France.

BRANDES: —my stay in France.

LEVINE: How about the—getting to the port? The voyage itself? The ship? Do you have any—

BRANDES: Well, that was interesting. My father always tried to—my father always tried to capture everything. And so I guess he had some—something—something else to do or something else to see. So when we came to the port to catch the ship, it already had gone.

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles]

BRANDES: So—

LEVINE: So—what port?

BRANDES: They got this—

LEVINE: Do you know—remember?

BRANDES: Le Havre.

LEVINE: Le Havre. Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: So my father managed to get—find someone on a little ship that took us to the ship. And I think I was seasick. It was a nice ship, Bremen—B-R-E-M-E-N.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: Other than that, I just remember them coming over and my father with the statue—I have a poem in here about what he—his reaction to the—

LEVINE: That your father wrote about the statue?

BRANDES: That he wrote about the statue.

LEVINE: Oh, that'd be nice to have.

BRANDES: Yeah, I have—

LEVINE: Yeah.

BRANDES: —to look for—

LEVINE: Okay.

BRANDES: —for it.

LEVINE: We'll have that.

BRANDES: And you know, it's interesting because when I interviewed for Steven Spielberg and I interviewed 80—75, they knew so much. Unfortunate—I'm not very helpful because I'm not telling you very much.

LEVINE: Oh. But they knew the—

BRANDES: The ones I'm talking about, the people I interviewed.

LEVINE: Oh, oh.

BRANDES: [unclear]

LEVINE: I see. And they—

BRANDES: So they had much more to say.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BRANDES: And I don't think I'm v—being—

LEVINE: No, I—I have to disagree because your story has its own vitality that's—that's your own. And it—and so we're missing a lot of facts. But that isn't the most important thing here, I don't think.

BRANDES: Oh, good. Okay.

LEVINE: I think, you know, it's a personal—it's a personal account by somebody who lived through it and whatever it is, it is. And—and that's worth—

worth it. You know what I mean? It's—each—each kind is different but yours is equally valuable, I think. So—okay, so—and also, do you think your forgetting is just a matter of—that you were young? Or that because of the—

BRANDES: No.

LEVINE: —of the traumatic nature?

BRANDES: No, it's not—it's not emotional, psychological thing.

LEVINE: Yeah. No.

BRANDES: Because that was the thing that I recall from my parents is that they never ever made us feel, 'This is a c—scary situation. We're in danger. We are deprived. We got—can't do this. You can't do'—I never had that feeling, my brothers either. I mean, in fact, as I understand, they told me that when they were throwing the furniture out in Zweibruecken out of our house, my brothers didn't realize what was going on. They were four and five, I guess, and they were happy.

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles]

BRANDES: They took some things, you know. They had no idea. So—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: —it was—it was a very—but it's because my father managed to befriend everybody that he managed to survive, you know.

LEVINE: You thi—you attribute it to that. Uh-huh, uh-huh.

BRANDES: Because it was such a—I mean, it was so close and he felt so terrible because he taught—what happened was that Jews were thrown out of the public schools. And they had to find their own way to be educated. So my father learned about all these Jewish kids that had no place to go. So he organized them all, from first grade through eighth in one room. And he taught them. They were—

LEVINE: Ah.

BRANDES: I have a picture [unclear]. And if it weren't for people like h—he—in fact, what's very interesting—I really should have you talk to her—I was once interviewed by a newspaper about something that had to relate to this. And I mentioned my father's name and all that. A

woman called me. She said, “Margot, I think I was in your father’s class—

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: —in Germany. And she—

LEVINE: Wow.

BRANDES: —only lives about—I’d say 20 minutes from here, 25 minutes—

LEVINE: Really?

BRANDES: —from here. She said, “I probably know more about your father’s teaching than you do.” She said, “I remember everything he taught me.”

LEVINE: Wow.

BRANDES: So that was interesting.

LEVINE: That’s great.

BRANDES: And I wanted to make sure. You know, maybe she—she described him perfectly. She even talked about the one day my father brought my brother in who had—that he was in a stroller. And that’s another story. And that is remarkable, so many years ago and—and she remembered.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

BRANDES: And she—we’ve been in touch. We’re—I was—

LEVINE: Isn’t that wonderful?

BRANDES: Yeah, we’re still in touch.

LEVINE: Oh, that’s beautiful.

BRANDES: And then she knew all—and how he managed to get these kids, to provide for them what the government no longer was willing to do.

LEVINE: Yeah. Wow.

BRANDES: The whole n—and—and because, still—even though it was still under the auspices of the German government, the school, his class—even though, somehow—he had to write lesson plans for all these grades—

LEVINE: Oh, [chuckles] my gosh.

BRANDES: —in the German—

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

BRANDES: —and the Hebrew—both departments, secular and Hebrew, because I guess they were under his jurisdiction. I don't know what they would have done if my father hadn't gotten them together into his classroom.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

BRANDES: So he—he worked with them.

LEVINE: Wow. So when he was—he was coming back with you, do you remember when the boat came into the New York harbor? Do you remember—

BRANDES: I just remember the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: And I remember my father, very serious, and then I saw the byproduct of what he wrote about how he was scared at the same time that he was grateful.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: And that now—what's going to happen now?

LEVINE: Mmm.

BRANDES: Other than that, I—I really don't—it's terrible. I do not remember. I can make up a story but I won't.

LEVINE: Well, no.

BRANDES: That I really don't know what happened between the time we landed and until I got to Westerly, Rhode Island.

LEVINE: I see. Do you have any idea if you had to go to Ellis Island? You might not have.

BRANDES: No. I often wondered why, but we didn't.

LEVINE: Do you know if you were traveling second class or higher than steerage or third class? Because—

BRANDES: I think it was regular.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BRANDES: Second class, it must have been.

LEVINE: The Bremen was a regular ship.

BRANDES: A regular ship.

LEVINE: It wasn't a cru—it wasn't a—a—an army ship or anything like that.

BRANDES: No, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay.

BRANDES: Oh, here it is. There's a picture right here.

LEVINE: Of the Bremen?

BRANDES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness. Ooh. Oh, wow. Uh-huh. Now, is this about you?

BRANDES: This whole—this is my—these pictures are of my brothers, my father and—

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful. That's a beautiful picture.

BRANDES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BRANDES: And then they have a picture of my—I don't know if you saw this one. This is very meaningful. I'll give you a copy that you can fill in some additional information.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, don't forget you're hooked up here.

BRANDES: I know. I realize that.

LEVINE: Oh, oh. Okay.

BRANDES: I'm being very careful.

LEVINE: Okay.

BRANDES: That shows—this is one—

LEVINE: Is this about—is this an article about you?

BRANDES: Yes.

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: And so is this one. See—

LEVINE: Okay. We're looking here at a—at an album that Margot made about her family.

BRANDES: See, and my brother took some of these out to make copies so it's a little mixed up. This is my—my father's family. He's got five—

LEVINE: Wow.

BRANDES: —four brothers and one sister. And this, he designed, my father. There's one that shouldn't be—it should be over—yeah, he—

LEVINE: So we're going to have the poem. Right? The poem for—

BRANDES: Yeah, I'll give you the poem.

LEVINE: That he wrote about the Statue of Liberty. And—

BRANDES: Right.

LEVINE: —I would—I would like to have that news—a copy of that newspaper—

BRANDES: Yeah, that's what I'm looking for now.

LEVINE: —article. That would be wonderful.

BRANDES: Somehow, it's mixed up. It should be in the front. It should be one of the first things. Here. "The refugee rabbi tells of one hour to leave."

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: Of Jews—Jewish children, and given an hour to leave home.

LEVINE: Wow.

BRANDES: See, that's—

LEVINE: Okay. So this is an article that was in the—

BRANDES: Right.

LEVINE: —paper.

BRANDES: In the—in the—

LEVINE: The “Evening Bulletin.”

BRANDES: —Westerly paper.

LEVINE: Yeah. And—

BRANDES: And I'm going to try to give you a copy of that.

LEVINE: That would be wonderful.

BRANDES: See my two brothers—

LEVINE: Yeah.

BRANDES: —and I. And this is when we're in Westerly; I guess in front of the synagogue. And here it tells you, “Pupils taunted and beaten by school fellows.”

LEVINE: Fellows. Wonderful.

BRANDES: So this will tell you—

LEVINE: Okay, so—

BRANDES: —much more even, personal—wait a minute. I think I have a copy in the [unclear].

LEVINE: Oh, I think you do.

BRANDES: So I can give you that.

LEVINE: So this is now a—a copy of a newspaper article from Rhode Island when they first arrived, telling about how they had to leave home abruptly. And that's great and this will be on file. Now, you mentioned how—how highly you think of your father and the way he—

BRANDES: See, here's another one. "Memories of Hitler not forgotten."

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: This came out in 1979. Maybe I'll make you a copy—

LEVINE: Great.

BRANDES: —of this and send it to you.

LEVINE: Here's another—

BRANDES: Leave your address so—

LEVINE: Okay.

BRANDES: I'll give you certain—now that I know what you're—

LEVINE: Yeah, okay.

BRANDES: —interested in.

LEVINE: So we'll have some articles on file. So—and your—so in—

BRANDES: See, this is the one in Westerly where we made the tree house—

LEVINE: Oh, wow.

BRANDES: —over there. We made a little—

LEVINE: Wow. That's a beautiful picture.

BRANDES: Yeah. So—yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. Wow.

BRANDES: So it was a—everybody was happy. We—

LEVINE: Actually—

BRANDES: My father—where there was no money and there was—but I never knew it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: We—we had people over that stayed all the time and—

LEVINE: You know what I'd like to do? I'd like to—even a photocopy of this photo.

BRANDES: You want to take a picture of it?

LEVINE: I don't know if I could take a picture or if—is this stuck in here?

BRANDES: I'll take that out.

LEVINE: Because I could take that with me, send it back—a copy—

BRANDES: I'd rather not.

LEVINE: You'd rather not. All right. Okay.

BRANDES: I'd—I'd rather—

LEVINE: I'll try taking a picture of it.

BRANDES: Yeah.

LEVINE: I don't know if it'll work but I'll try it.

BRANDES: Okay.

LEVINE: Yeah. Let me try that. Okay.

BRANDES: And I'll take it out so—otherwise it'll be glossy.

LEVINE: Yeah. I don't want you to—I don't want you to miss that—

BRANDES: There you go.

LEVINE: —in any way. Okay. So you—you're kind of—it seems to me, for a [chuckles] quick impression that you're t—you're following in your father's footsteps a lot with the work that you do.

BRANDES: Yeah, but I—I can't even come close to what he—what he accomplished and how vehemently he fought for everything.

LEVINE: Well, tell—why don't you talk about the kinds of things you've done i—in that vein to help Jewish c—causes and—

BRANDES: Well, I've gone to Israel at least 12 times, each—most of them were with educational—with a group. And while there, I did things with Israelis to help promote good feelings, and the first time I went as a student from NYU. I was given a fellowship of some kind. That was one of the first visits that ever, that—when the state was three years old.

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: 1951.

LEVINE: When you s—say “promote good feeling,” you mean among Israelis, amongst themselves?

BRANDES: Israelis. And among—and among Americans too.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

BRANDES: We have to convince Americans somehow that, you know, they're not always Zionists. And I belong to Hadassah and I'm a life member. My parents—my mother was a life member. She was what you call Ema [PH] of the Year; she was chosen. And so—

LEVINE: What's Ema of the Year mean?

BRANDES: Mother of the Year.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

BRANDES: It was an honor. And I do the media; I'm very big on media for—for Hadassah where I prepare articles and teach them how to watch the media, how to respond to it and how to make sure that Israel doesn't get the wrong—the wrong slant kind of thing. And I've been involved with the Yeshiva system, you know, for—all our four girls went to Yeshiva day school. And so [gap in tape]—you know, right now, I have to think. I—I'll give you my resume. That'll tell you more.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Okay.

BRANDES: And off the top of my—you know how when you're trying to talk about yourself [chuckles]—

LEVINE: Yeah. [chuckles] Right, you'll think of everything when I leave. I—

BRANDES: It's funny. I just met a woman at the funeral and she was the one who told me, "Oh! You're so unique. Look what you accomplished, what you did for our synagogue. You did this and you did that." And I looked at her and I'd forgotten. Did I do—you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BRANDES: So I—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: I don't reflect on—

LEVINE: Okay.

BRANDES: —these things, if you know what I mean.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. How do you think coming here, given the circumstances under which your family left and everything—can you say anything about the ramifications in—on you, on your personality, your psyche—

BRANDES: What I keep thinking when I see—and I see some really accom—[gap in tape]—proud of—and I say to myself—see, I'm—that's why this whole thing has had a tremendous effect on me, this Holocaust. And I keep saying, "Imagine if those six million had not been killed, we'd have more of what he is. We'd have more of what she's doing. We'd have more accomplishments. We'd have—the whole world would be different because you'd have these wonderful people." I—I'm involved with Yafa Elia [PH]. I'm sure you've heard of her.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: So I'm working with her on a—she's setting up a little shtetl. Her shtetl was destroyed in two days; 750 people were killed. The only reason she survived is because she fell—her mother fell on her and they thought—they didn't see her.

LEVINE: Wow.

BRANDES: Her mother was killed, fell on her. And so she promised—and she's become a real scholar. She teaches now in college. She's written a 950-page book. And in [gap in tape]—so you see, she's doing what I'm thinking of—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: To try to reproduce and emulate what we've lost. That's what I'm concerned about.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: I'm very—I'm very upset with what we've lost. With what you've lost, you can never really get back. I'm thrilled with the orthodox, the [unclear], what they're doing, the [unclear]. They're bringing—I go to lectures, you know, with the—they have the real thing. And I think they're perpetuating Judaism and then making it available to everybody. Money is not the name of the game at all.

LEVINE: Oh, that's nice.

BRANDES: You don't have to join a synagogue; you don't have to pay dues. They just want you. They give you programs and you're a part of it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: And I'm very much involved with them; I try to help them out.

LEVINE: I see. Can you say anything about—it's often said that the Jews who came from Germany w—saw themselves as Germans and so, you know, that the German culture was essentially their culture. H—could you talk to that at all?

BRANDES: I know what you're saying. However, they—I have not heard them address that issue. What I have seen is that what they emulate and perpetuate is the same fastidiousness that Germans have, which is exactness in doing things properly. They emulate perfection. That, to them, is very important. And they're the ones that contribute the scholarly aspects that make out society tick. I don't see them emulating the spirit that they were loyal Germans and—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. No.

BRANDES: They don't talk about that.

LEVINE: No.

BRANDES: So if they feel it, if they feel that this is part of their background, it's long forgotten and I'm sure it's part of something they want to forget.

LEVINE: Right.

BRANDES: But instead, they have that thoroughness of purpose, which they seem to consider important, and they—they—in that sense, they contribute a lot to the community.

LEVINE: Right.

BRANDES: They're the ones who become the leaders. They're the ones who conduct services. They're the ones who seem to have a good background. And it's amazing to think that what they've gone through, most of them, that they're able—they come here. They're—by and large, they're very successful. And I—when I interviewed, for example, there was one who had four kids. They were all doctors and all successful, and yet they—they've become Americans but I don't think they have ever forgotten or can they forget what transpired.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: It was subhuman.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

BRANDES: So I really—I'm very proud of the Jewish people because they seem to be constantly coming back to—they seem to—you can't destroy them. They're—they're just—seem to be able to perpetuate themselves. And I think that's one of the things that non-Jews don't like about us is that we seem—not only do we come back, but we're successful at what we do.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: And we're respected, and if you look at any accomplishments you always see Jewish names. So that it really is remarkable to me that Jews have been able to accomplish as much as—in Israel, you swallow a little thing this big and it takes pictures of your body. That was created by Israel. So there's a brainpower. That's what I'm concerned about. We lost so much brainpower.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you feel—as a Jewish person from Germany, do you feel that there's a distinction to be made between German Jewish people and the others who came from Eastern Europe who were not as cultured—

BRANDES: I—I've not seen that discussion on that. I've not heard discussion on that, and I haven't seen it. I think it's understood that the German Jews who came over weren't as knowledgeable. They were knowledgeable

but they weren't as entrenched in observance as the Eastern European Jews. And I respect them both.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

BRANDES: The Germans, because they represent the culture and the learning and the distinct, what they gave to the world. At this same time, we lost—and fortunately, we've got others who are taking their place or are trying to anyway—the Eastern European Jews and their religious fervor and their studies. And I feel we've lost a lot there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

BRANDES: So it's two worlds but they're both—to me, they're both valuable.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: They're on the same level.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And you mentioned in passing earlier on that you—that you feel you have some of the European, what, attitudes or heritage of thinking. Could you say what that is that you carry with you from your roots, let's say?

BRANDES: Well, I—I think that loyalty to your people or loyalty to friends—I feel a certain sense of discipline. A promise is a promise. A time commitment is a time commitment. A commitment to your people. I think all these things I've sort of learned, I guess, in my home and I've learned, you know, watching my parents. And also, I think they're—that you need those for the people to survive—Jews—for Jews to survive. And I—in that respect, I think I have a very big European bent in me that I—it's important, sometimes can get you into trouble when you—you're so involved with a task and you want to accomplish it. And yet, you face bureaucracy that doesn't think the way you do.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: And I feel, 'Go directly, do it and that's it. Don't ask questions.' And I—that—that I've kind of—I think that's probably part of what—m—it's a question of survival. I feel the way to survive is just to do what you feel will help you to survive, not go through the bureaucratic network, because that's only a stumbling block.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: I guess that's what I picked up.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: I suppose.

LEVINE: And I guess the bureaucracy really isn't about survival. [chuckles]

BRANDES: No.

LEVINE: It's a whole different thing.

BRANDES: No. I think—I think our congress people, our politicians, our bureaucracies are stumbling blocks to our reaching our goals. I really think that they're going backwards. I think they're being dishonest. And I think—I hope the Jews will continue in their way of just creating, doing their thing and—and just—what amazes me about the Jews though is they—they do their thing. They accomplish. They create. And they don't ask anything of anybody. They don't tell anybody about it; they just do it. And I think the non-Jewish world isn't quite used to that. I am. I like it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: They get things down. They get the results. Look what they've accomplished in every sphere, arts and science and drama and Hollywood and business. And I think that's because they're just very gifted and creative people.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: I'm glad to see my brother thinking—my oldest brother thinking along the same lines.

LEVINE: The same way, uh-huh, uh-huh. Well, why don't we—we have a little time left. Why don't you say how you met your husband and then your children's names?

BRANDES: What's interesting is that when I was a student at NYU, I—even then I used to go to all the Zionist meetings in New York City. And there I met a young woman by the name of Hadassah. And somehow, we spoke and she said, oh, yes, she used to go with a young man but they're—they're just friends. Would I like to meet him? I said, "Sure." So that was Joe, and she gave him my name, and because I was conveniently located in Manhattan—

LEVINE: [chuckles]

BRANDES: —and because he liked my name Margot, he looked me up and that was it. We met and—but again, it started out because I was a Zionist. I had—if I hadn't been—

LEVINE: Ah.

BRANDES: —at that particular meeting—I used to be there all the time to different, you know, Zionist—forgot—what was the other question? Oh, about children.

LEVINE: Your children.

BRANDES: My oldest daughter, Cheryl [PH], is an attorney. She's also a modern dancer, modern interpretive dancer.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: My next daughter, Lynn, is an optometrist. By the way, all my kids are very active in their synagogues, their leadership. They're on the boards, both of—two of them. The third one doesn't have time; she's an engineer. Now, she's teaching. Big Zionists—they've all been to Israel. My oldest daughter studied there. My—the optometrist spent the—her internship there at the Hebrew University. And Susan painted tanks—the third one who's the engineer—in Lebanese War.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: She was on the—near the border. And Avita [PH], who's the youngest one—she's now a teacher who is studying Middle East at Cornell—for six months, she taught Yemeni children English. She was in a village.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: And they've been to Israel. They're all very Zionistically oriented. They're all very, like—like I, very upset with the situation today in Israel. You know?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: My grandchild went recently with her school, with her class, and came back. Of course, they concentrated more on the Galilee and the—they have the—they kept away from—they did get to the wall once and that was—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: That was about it. And I'm very proud of them and they certainly have, without drumming it into them—they have a—adopted our way of thinking. They keep kosher homes. They send their kids to day school.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: They're Zionists. They belong to a foundation; you know, it's very expensive. They're doing all the kinds of things that my p—father would be very proud of.

LEVINE: Ah.

BRANDES: You know?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BRANDES: And—

LEVINE: Did he live to see any of your children?

BRANDES: Well, that's the trouble. My girls married when they were—they didn't marry when they went right out of college. They got married later. And that time—eventually, from my first one—that's story in itself. My father developed Alzheimer.

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: And he was preparing to—for the [unclear]. He was going to do the [unclear] at my daughter, the engineer's wedding. That was the first one. And it—it really got to a point; I wasn't sure what to do. And I called up a—a neurologist and asked their opinion. And they said, "Well, we understand what you're saying. It's possible. With that condition, your father could—it—it—he could disrupt the whole"—

LEVINE: Right.

BRANDES: So I made the decision that—and I—I remember it was a terrible day for me. I called up the rabbitzin and the rabbi and told them—it was an orthodox rabbi—and I got the idea that my father did the [unclear] for me, for my wedding. But it was on a big record.

LEVINE: Oh.

BRANDES: So I said to the rabbi, "Would—if I transpose it to a—a tape, would you play it at the wedding?" So he, being orthodox, I—he had only orthodox weddings, said, "That'll be fine. We have to say it the regular way, the voice has to be heard; then I'll play it."

LEVINE: So that's how you did it?

BRANDES: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Ah, good solution. Yeah, great. Okay. We're just about out but just before we close, how would you say the American dream was achieved or not for you and your family who came here?

BRANDES: Well, it certainly was achieved, the dream was. No question. I mean—

LEVINE: In what way was it achieved? I guess maybe that's more—

BRANDES: Well, as I said, we grew up in a—in a free country. Because I didn't experience the Nazism, per se, I can't honestly say that I could tell the difference. I know the difference because I read about it and my parents told me. And I experienced with them but, to me, I felt—I feel that I should be very grateful to A—America because you can basically do anything. You can educa—become educated. You can practice Judaism. You can—you don't have anybody that's going to tackle you and—and—and pounce on you because you're a Jew. And it's something that most people, American-born kids, Jewish kids take for granted. I've never taken it for granted.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: To me, it's a gift.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: And to me, it's—that I can accept or reject the non-Jew and it doesn't matter. I mean, it's my—my own personal opinion, that I can work within—I work within the framework of society and still live the life of a Jew. If anything, I—I make it my business to try to interject my thoughts to the non-Jews as well as the Jews, to try to convince them that what—that they should have a—a pro-Jewish attitude.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BRANDES: A pro-Zionist attitude, because people look upon Israel as if it's some type of empire because it's always in the news. They don't realize. They're in shock when I tell them. One woman was in shock. I told

her, "Do you know there are only 12 million Jews in the whole world?" She said, "No." I said, "That's right, 12 million."

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: We're .01 percent of the population, I believe, of the world and only two percent of the United States. She was in shock.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BRANDES: So that's why I have a tremendous amount of respect for Jews, and I wish the Jews would have a—a respect for themselves. That—that part bothers me because—and that's where I blame leadership. They haven't done a decent job of convincing their own people how wonderful they are and what a contributing people they are to—

[END OF INTERVIEW]