

HERSHBAIN: Until I was seven years old.

LEVINE: Oh. Ah, what was your father's name?

HERSHBAIN: Ah, Armand. The first name.

LEVINE: And his last name?

HERSHBAIN: Gorecki.

LEVINE: Gorecki. And that's G-O-R-E-C-K-I?

HERSHBAIN: Right.

LEVINE: Okay. And your mother's name?

HERSHBAIN: Miriam.

LEVINE: Miriam. And her maiden name?

HERSHBAIN: Jaffe.

LEVINE: Jaffe. Okay. You know, I'm going to pause here just for a second. We're resuming now. So you were in Paris up until you left. Did you have grandparents?

HERSHBAIN: Yes.

LEVINE: And were they people that you saw much of?

HERSHBAIN: Well, I don't remember my grandfather, but I saw my grandmother somewhat, yes.

LEVINE: And who's mother was it? Your mother's?

HERSHBAIN: My mother's mother.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with your grandmother before you came to this country, when you were in France?

HERSHBAIN: Ah, well I do remember experiences. She was very sweet and I loved her.

LEVINE: Can you remember going anyplace with her, or when you went to her house or she went to your house what...?

HERSHBAIN: I don't remember that but, because when the Germans came I was on line, and my grandma took me off the line and put me in the bakery. And then after going to the convent, I got out and I went with my Uncle Harry to live. And he told me that's she's bad and he made me run away from her. So that's the only thing I remember and it always broke my heart.

LEVINE: Hm. Before that time when the Germans came, was she around much? Did you see her?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you describe anything about her like what she did or what she was like?

HERSHBAIN: Oh, she was very sweet. She was little. She was probably about four nine, maybe. And she had white, very white hair. And she was very thin and very gentle and sweet. And she always called me "My Evelyn". And she was always sweet and gentle and you know, she seemed sad. Because all, you know, her daughter was taken, her son-in-law and her other daughter were taken. So what she to be happy about, you know?

LEVINE: Now was she born in France? Or did she come from somewhere else?

HERSHBAIN: I think she came from Poland to France.

LEVINE: Now how about your father's mother and father? Did you have any contact with them?

HERSHBAIN: I don't remember them at all.

LEVINE: And aunts and uncles?

HERSHBAIN: I did. My Aunt Rachel, that was my mother's sister. She was also taken. And my Uncle Harry was the one I went to live with.

LEVINE: And that was your mother's brother?

HERSHBAIN: No, that was my mother's, my grandmother's son-in-law.

LEVINE: Okay. Well now, what are your memories before the Germans came? Can you remember anything before them?

HERSHBAIN: No.

LEVINE: No. Okay.

HERSHBAIN: That seems to be uppermost.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, can you say in your own words what it was like? What your experience was when the Germans came?

HERSHBAIN: Well, I just remember being a little girl. Probably around three, four years old. And my mother was stirring something on the stove. To me, I don't know why I always think it was chocolate pudding. I don't know if it was. But she kept stirring and stirring. Usually you do that with chocolate. And then all of a sudden in the window, we must have lived on the ground floor, a German, a guy with a green hat and a big bayonet gun, and a uniform, banged on the window and I remember that they shoved us all in the street. And then it was lines and lines of people screaming and everything and then the only other thing I remember is that my grandmother pulled me out of my mother's arms and I wanted to go to my mother. That's all I remember with that. And then I remember I couldn't breathe. And later on I was told that I was put in a flour sack in a bakery so this way I wouldn't have to go on line again. So my grandmother saved my life.

LEVINE: So do you, in other words, everybody who was in your house was pushed into this line?

HERSHBAIN: It's only me and my mother that I remember. I don't remember my father being there.

LEVINE: And then, did you see your mother and father after that?

HERSHBAIN: No. Not once I was pulled off the line.

LEVINE: And do you remember what happened after you were in the flour sack in the bakery? What was the next thing you remember?

HERSHBAIN: The convent. And the nuns. They tried to make me, make the cross. And I knew I was Jewish and I wouldn't make the cross. And I wrote with my left hand and they kept hitting me with a ruler to write with my right hand.

LEVINE: Where was the convent?

HERSHBAIN: It was in Paris. But I don't know exactly where.

LEVINE: Do you have any idea how you got there?

HERSHBAIN: I understand my grandmother brought me. Because in a convent they protected the Jews. So I guess she knew about it.

LEVINE: Now, did you ever see your grandmother after that?

HERSHBAIN: When I got out of the convent and she took me to my Uncle Harry's to live with him.

LEVINE: Now how many years were you in the convent?

HERSHBAIN: Probably a year.

LEVINE: Shall we stop for the phone?

HERSHBAIN: No. I put the machine on. This way we don't get disturbed.

LEVINE: It will speak it out, right? In the room?

HERSHBAIN: No. I shut the sound.

LEVINE: So you were about a year in the convent. Could you describe what that was like?

HERSHBAIN: It was awful. All I remember is the holy water that they wanted me to make a cross, and I wouldn't do it. And that horrible smell of the holy water. And every time I wrote with my left hand they hit me with a ruler and my hands used to bleed. It was a horrible experience, and I hated them all. And every time I see a nun I get crazy.

LEVINE: Really.

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. I can't stomach them to this day.

LEVINE: Were there many children there in the convent?

HERSHBAIN: I don't remember too many.

LEVINE: They were mostly Jewish children?

HERSHBAIN: I don't know. I don't know.

LEVINE: So let's see. How old were you? When did this happen? When did you go to the convent?

HERSHBAIN: After I got out of the bakery.

LEVINE: Which was 19-, do you remember what year?

HERSHBAIN: Well, I would have been five, let's say.

LEVINE: Okay. So it would be 1944?

HERSHBAIN: 1947. 1944

LEVINE: Do you remember what the convent looked like?

HERSHBAIN: All I remember is a church with the stained windows, and I remember that hor-, that big bowl standing where the holy water was. And these crazy nuns.

LEVINE: So you went to classes every day?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. And if you wrote with the wrong hand they hit you. With a ruler.

LEVINE: So was there anybody there that treated you kindly?

HERSHBAIN: No. Cause I wouldn't make the cross.

LEVINE: Oh. The other children were all making the cross.

HERSHBAIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So...

HERSHBAIN: I stood alone, as usual. I always do things alone anyway.

LEVINE: Were there children of all ages, do you remember?

HERSHBAIN: I remember a lot of little ones. Like my age. I don't remember bigger kids.

LEVINE: So then, do you remember the day that your grandmother came and took you out of there?

HERSHBAIN: No.

LEVINE: Then how long were you with your Uncle Harry after that?

HERSHBAIN: About a year, until my mother, my grandmother wrote to my uncle here who was her son. See, my grandmother had four children. Miriam and Rachel -- they were both taken. That's my mother and aunt. And she had another son, Sam and Jack. And Jack (gasps), and Jack when he was seventeen joined the army and came to the United States. And then he married here and she wrote, so my grandmother wrote to her son here, Jack, who was really my uncle, my mother's brother, if you want me to die in peace, you must bring my Evelyn to the United States. So that's how it started the ball rolling. And her brother was a doctor. Dr. Bludnick, helped. His wife hated me.

LEVINE: This was your grandmother's brother?

HERSHBAIN: My grandmother's...? Ah, yes. Dr. Blodnick was my grandmother's brother.

LEVINE: Talk about the contact you ever had with Dr. Blodnick and his wife.

HERSHBAIN: Oh, him I was crazy about. Dr. Blodnick. After the convent, it seems that I had nits in my hair and every night he would wash my hair. He'd put my head backwards in his sink and we'd do it with a fine comb and seek out all the nits. And my aunt resented the attention he gave me. She was also a school teacher. And she was my teacher when I started school, like fifth-, like first grade I guess I was. And every time she'd tell me to get on line, cause she was mean to me at home I wouldn't listen to her. So one day she smacked me. All in front of everybody. (sharp intake of breath) Across the face.

LEVINE: You were living with your Uncle Harry when Dr. Blodnick would take the nits out of your hair?

HERSHBAIN: Before. That was before my Uncle Harry.

LEVINE: So you were still in the convent?

HERSHBAIN: No.

LEVINE: This was in between.

HERSHBAIN: No. I was living with my Uncle Blodnick until my Aunt Bertha, that was her name, said that she didn't want me there. Then I went to my Uncle Harry.

LEVINE: Oh. So were you, how long were you there?

HERSHBAIN: I would say probably six months.

LEVINE: I see. So you really were uprooted.

HERSHBAIN: I never had a home.

LEVINE: And all of this took place in Paris? Each place where you stayed?

HERSHBAIN: Paris. Each place.

LEVINE: So you started school in the first grade and then you went to your Uncle Harry's. Did you continue school?

HERSHBAIN: No. I don't remember going to school when I moved with him. That's why my grandmother wanted me to come here. He was a furrier, and they took

his wife. Which was my Aunt Rachel. But they spared him because they wanted him to make mink coats for their wives. You know, fur coats. They liked fur coats.

LEVINE: Now what was your mother's sister's name? Masha?

HERSHBAIN: Rachel. R-A-C-H-E-L. Rachel.

LEVINE: Rachel. So do you remember her at all?

HERSHBAIN: I just remember every morning I used to run and give her milk. We used to get little bottles of milk and I used to run and give it to her because she was right across the courtyard. You didn't have to cross the street or anything.

LEVINE: Do you ever remember seeing your grandmother after you got out of the convent and after you were at your uncle's?

HERSHBAIN: When she used to try to see me at my Uncle Harry's, and he wouldn't let me go out to see her, and then I'd sneak out and then he's day, she's gonna get you and she'd have to run after me all around the block.

LEVINE: Why didn't he want you to see her?

HERSHBAIN: Because he didn't want me going to America. He wanted me to live with him.

LEVINE: So he loved you. I mean is that why he wanted you?

HERSHBAIN: I don't think he loved me. I think he, I don't know what he did to me, because, who knows? Cause if you love someone... He scared me. He said when I come here my mother, my aunt is going to be black. I didn't know what black meant. So for the first year I was here I didn't even look at her. I was terrified. Even though she was white. I thought, what's black. So he tried to make it hard for me to leave, you know? My grandmother insisted. And she got, and then my Uncle Blodnick paid a woman to take me across the ocean. He paid her fare. See in those days if you didn't have, if you were a child and you didn't have anyone to travel with, they paid your fare. So he paid the lady's fare. And I used to love chocolate. So he gave her a whole bunch of chocolate for us.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about the war, about the Germans, about...?

HERSHBAIN: I just remember being on line and the people screaming and then my grandmother pulling me out of my mother's arms. That was a very bad effect on me.

LEVINE: Did you ever see Germans after that?

HERSHBAIN: No. Cause then I went into the convent.

LEVINE: So do you remember then, when the war was over?

HERSHBAIN: I remember going to the canteens with soldiers. Yes, I do remember that.

LEVINE: With German soldiers?

HERSHBAIN: No. The American soldiers when they freed us, it must have been. Because they came, German, American soldiers came to this tremendous canteen and they gave us all oranges and you used to dance and sing. All little kids. They were giving us candy and oranges.

LEVINE: And did you do that often?

HERSHBAIN: I just remember once. But it could have been more than once, you know.

LEVINE: So you were mostly speaking, you were speaking French.

HERSHBAIN: French. Sure.

LEVINE: And when it was decided that you would leave, do you remember anything that was in preparation for your leaving? Do you remember...?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. I was told I was going to America and I was terrified because my aunt was supposed to be black which I didn't know what that meant. But I was terrified. And I didn't want to leave my grandmother and my Uncle Blodnick. Cause I loved them. Even though I didn't see them much because I lived with my Uncle Harry. But my grandmother pushed it out and got me out of there.

LEVINE: Did you ever see her again?

HERSHBAIN: No. But she used to write to my mother here, who was her daughter in law. Because she was married to her son Jack.

LEVINE: And what was your grandmother's name?

HERSHBAIN: I can't.. Bella.

L And she was Jaffe? No, that was...

HERSHBAIN: She was ah, she was Jaffe.

LEVINE: Now, who was Jaffe, of the ones you lived with?

HERSHBAIN: My father. My Uncle Jack was her son.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

HERSHBAIN: In America. And he was married to his wife Sarah.

LEVINE: And then they legally adopted you?

HERSHBAIN: Well, I didn't want to be adopted because I felt that wasn't right since I had my parents I should look for them, but in 1952, I'm still looking for my parents. I just got a reply about my father.

LEVINE: Really?

HERSHBAIN: Oh, yeah. I've been looking for them since 1952.

LEVINE: And does this reply...

HERSHBAIN: It was negative. He died in Auschwitz. Six months after they took him.

LEVINE: Do you know what became of your mother or your aunt?

HERSHBAIN: No record on my aunt and my mother, there's no record on her either. But she would probably be in her eighties or late, early nineties.

LEVINE: Will you keep up the search for her?

HERSHBAIN: Oh, yeah. I still have all the papers with the Red Cross. I'm working with Israel on it.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything you brought with you when you came to this country?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. I brought a horrible cat fur coat that my Uncle Harry made me wear. Heavy boots. And ah, I had, and I wore a pretty, two-piece knit, pink and white sweater that my aunt had knitted for me.

LEVINE: Your Aunt Bertha?

HERSHBAIN: No. My Aunt Bertha was Dr. Blodnick's wife. She didn't like me. That was my Uncle Sam's wife. He was the second brother. You know my grandmother had two sons and two daughters. His wife made me a beautiful set. That's what I came with.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving, leaving your uncle's house and traveling to the port?

HERSHBAIN: I remember leaving his house because I was hysterical crying. Cause even as I was leaving he says, you'll be sorry. She's black! You're gonna see. And I didn't know what black meant. And nobody ever said anything and I never said anything, what black is.

LEVINE: Were you religious at any point in your growing up, before you came to this country?

HERSHBAIN: I don't remember. I must have been because I didn't want to do the holy water. So I must have had some kind of religious background.

LEVINE: Did you have a sense of, of Jewish, what Jewish meant, given the whole...

HERSHBAIN: I don't think at that age. I just thought that, I'm Jewish and I shouldn't be doing this. Because I knew we don't do that. And I wasn't going to do it. For two reasons. I felt that I shouldn't do it, and secondly, I couldn't take the smell. (laughs shortly) And when they made that cross, you know...

LEVINE: So when you left, what did you do? Take a train?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. They took, I have pictures when they took me to the train. My grandmother, my grandmother was there. My cousin, my two cousins, Roland and his other sister. And believe it, my Aunt Bertha. She was so happy to get rid of me she went there to make sure I got off.

LEVINE: And whose children were your cousins?

HERSHBAIN: They were my, Dr. Blodnick's children. My grandmother's brother.

LEVINE: Were you close with them at all?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you remember any experiences with them?

HERSHBAIN: Only when I went to visit my Uncle Blodnick they were there. And I always liked them. But that's all I remember. I don't remember much happiness. It was so short lived.

LEVINE: So when you think about Paris and living there before you came here, are there any pictures that you see in your own mind?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. I see myself with my grandmother sitting by a park. And they had beautiful black railing with gold trim all around. We used to sit there a lot. So that must have been, you know...

LEVINE: So what was, do you know the name of the person who was supposed to bring you on the ship to this country?

HERSHBAIN: I don't remember her name. She lived in Manhattan though.

LEVINE: And what was that like, traveling with her?

HERSHBAIN: It was awful. Cause she really wanted a free passage, she didn't care about what I did or didn't do. And ah, she used to, you know, she was supposed to be with me and every night she made me stay in the upper bunk and she'd disappear and the next thing was daylight. I was always alone in it, two berth, you know, bottom and top.

LEVINE: Were you, you and she had a cabin just for the two of you?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. My uncle paid for that.

LEVINE: So do you remember anything about the voyage?

HERSHBAIN: I remember we got lost at sea. We had terrible storm. I remember falling down the stairs and I was like near a steam room, or the engine room, some kind of room. And I have a scar someplace on the back of my leg because a door slammed on me. And I remember always being alone and scared cause she was never there. Apparently she was enjoying whatever there was to be enjoyed on the ship. Dinners, dancing, whatever you do. And I was always alone.

LEVINE: So your feelings about coming to this country must have really been...

HERSHBAIN: It was very (chuckles), between my, this woman that didn't take care of me, my other who's supposed to be black which I didn't know was supposed to, what it was, and I couldn't talk English. I could only talk... Thank goodness my uncle here spoke French. Even though he came here when he was seventeen he still remembered words in French. So in order for me to communicate here, he'd [define] different words and during the day if I had something to say to my aunt then I would say it.

LEVINE: Do you remember the ship coming in to New York?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah, I remember coming into the ship and everybody was yelling and screaming from happiness because we had been at sea about seventeen days. It was only supposed to take ten days.

LEVINE: And do you have any idea why, the ship got lost?

HERSHBAIN: Oh yeah, we got lost because there was terrible electrical storms. Lights and everything. And the ship was tipping back and forth. We had terrible storms. He had to turn around and go a different way.

LEVINE: You said you couldn't remember the name of the ship. But do you remember the port you left from? Was it in France?

HERSHBAIN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: So maybe it was Cherbourg.

HERSHBAIN: Could be.

LEVINE: Wow. So when you came into New York, do you, did you see the Statue of Liberty?

HERSHBAIN: I saw the Statue of Liberty and everyone screaming and screaming and screaming. That's all I remember. People screaming and happy and everything. I was the only one that didn't scream. I just wanted to get off that ship. I didn't care where I was.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about Ellis Island? Any impression that you had of that?

HERSHBAIN: It made me feel sad, because there were a lot of people crying. But I think they were crying because they were meeting other people probably. Cher!
(shouts at her dog)

LEVINE: You mean you think they were crying out of happiness?

HERSHBAIN: Happiness. But at that time I didn't think they were happy, but now as I reflect... Cause everybody was crying. (chuckles)

LEVINE: And did this woman that took you over stay with you at Ellis Island until someone met you?

HERSHBAIN: No. She went, her merry way.

LEVINE: So what did you do?

HERSHBAIN: Well, they met me.

LEVINE: Oh, your uncle came?

HERSHBAIN: My uncle, my aunt, and my cousin Eleanor, cousin Moe, her mother and father. I had like such an entourage of people I'd never met, it was like who is this army of people, you know? (chortles)

LEVINE: What was it like meeting them?

HERSHBAIN: I didn't understand a word they said. They didn't understand a word I said, and when they told me this is my aunt, I ran away.

LEVINE: She was supposed to be black.

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. Whatever that meant.

LEVINE: I would assume it might have meant bad, I mean in your mind.

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. Because the way he said, you'll see. She's black. You're going to be sorry. You'll see. You'll see. He always said that to me until I left. That day.

LEVINE: Can you remember your Uncle Jack? What he, how he received you?

HERSHBAIN: Oh, he kissed me. He hugged me. He spoke French to me. He was terrific. And then my mother, I wouldn't go near. I kissed him, I hugged him. I

liked him right away, but I wouldn't go near her. Didn't go near her for a year.

LEVINE: Did she do things to try to get you to like her?

HERSHBAIN: Yup. And then, see, I was so nervous from all my places that I lived with, I used to urinate in bed. And when I did that in France, my Uncle Harry used to hit me or lock me in a bathroom. But she used to show me how she's gonna wash the sheet and the pad underneath. So I said, my god, she's so good. So what if she's black. (laughs) I didn't know that.

LEVINE: So where did you go with them?

HERSHBAIN: We went to the Bronx. We went, took a cab, I guess they saw I was tired. And I had a big trunk. So they took a cab and we went to the Bronx and everybody came upstairs. And they showed me where I was going to sleep and everything. And then they gave me a bath, washed my hair. And put on a pretty pajamas.

LEVINE: So how did you feel by the time you went to sleep?

HERSHBAIN: I didn't want her near me. That was my only fear, that she should come near me. But I liked my uncle.

LEVINE: So then did you start school soon after you arrived?

HERSHBAIN: Then I went to school but I couldn't talk English. So they took me from Kindergarten -- they put me right into second grade. That's why I skipped geography. I never had geography in my life. Usually in second and third grade you learn that. I don't even, I don't even know anything about geography. And ah, I started school and then I became crazy about my mother. And finally in 1952, I'm gonna continue my search, but I'll be adopted, you know. So I went to Manhattan. You get sworn in front of a judge and they ask you questions. You have to recite the Pledge of Allegiance and all that. And do you want to become an American citizen. They ask you questions.

LEVINE: You mean you had to become a citizen before you could be adopted, or no?

HERSHBAIN: No.

LEVINE: That's two different things.

HERSHBAIN: That was two different things.

LEVINE: So you were only...

HERSHBAIN: I became a citizen in 1952.

LEVINE: So you were young. And did you, did you want to do that? Was that your choice?

HERSHBAIN: I think in order to be adopted, I had to be a citizen for some reason.

LEVINE: Oh.

HERSHBAIN: But I had fought them so many years. I fought them since '47, '48, '49, '50, '51 - I said, it's enough already. They're so good to you. It doesn't mean you're gonna love your parents less, it doesn't mean your going to stop search for... And the wonderful part is that my mother here, did everything. Went with me to the [aliya] and all over to find for my parents. So how could you not love her?

LEVINE: So you said you had a trunk when you came.

HERSHBAIN: Oh, a big trunk.

LEVINE: Can you think of anything else that was in there.

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. I brought my dollhouse. I had a little pink wooden dollhouse. I still have it. And you open it, it has a closet for clothes and different things. I brought, I had a black doll. Black bridal doll. That I always loved. Isn't that ironic? She's black. I never associated it. That was the only doll I had. A black doll. Isn't that weird that I never associated that?

LEVINE: Especially since you loved the doll.

HERSHBAIN: I loved her.

LEVINE: And this person who was supposed to be black, turned out to be really nice.

HERSHBAIN: And the doll, as soon as I got there, my mother put in a curio chest in my room. In the living room, because they only had three rooms, I slept in the living room. And she put it in a curio chest. It looked so pretty with the glass.

LEVINE: Now, did you ever tell your uncle or your Aunt Sarah what your Uncle Harry had told you about her?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. Mm, hm. Mm, hm.

LEVINE: Early on, did you tell them?

HERSHBAIN: I told her when I started loving her. About six months, nine months to a year.

LEVINE: Can you think of any things when you first came that struck you as new or different about America?

HERSHBAIN: The very tall buildings. The taxi cab. I'd never been in a taxi cab before. And they were, everyone's talking a different language. I didn't understand one word they said. They were all hugging, kissing me and talking a different language. And like they all seemed so happy to see me. And I didn't know why.

LEVINE: And did you, how was it for you learning English?

HERSHBAIN: It was very bad. I didn't talk the first year when I went to school cause the kids used to call me Frenchie, cause I had an accent. So I didn't talk. For a whole year. Nothing. Not a word. Only in the house.

LEVINE: And in the house you'd speak French.

HERSHBAIN: To my uncle. So either way, I was a loser.

LEVINE: Were any teachers particularly nice to you?

HERSHBAIN: Mrs. Mansfield. She was wonderful teacher. She was my second grade teacher. Very sweet. Very thoughtful. Very kind. And every time I had somebody call me French -- you know Evelyn doesn't like... So then they switched and they started calling me Redhead. And I -- Red! Red! Red! And I thought that was something bad. Seems I have trouble with colors I guess. I thought that was something bad, and I used to go cringe, you know.

LEVINE: So did Mrs. Mansfield help you with the language?

HERSHBAIN: She was my second grade teacher. She was more kind. I don't think I understood that much at that point.

LEVINE: So what did you do? You just stayed in the class and you tried to...

HERSHBAIN: I tried to keep up. And then they, she, I'm going up and up and finally about fourth grade I started picking up. And I completely, I never spoke French again.

LEVINE: Really?

HERSHBAIN: Yup. Because the kids made fun of me. So I did everything I could to lose my accent. Never spoke.

LEVINE: Even with your uncle at home?

HERSHBAIN: Mm, mm. No. Because once I learned it there was no need to speak French.

LEVINE: Wow. Are you glad to you did that now?

HERSHBAIN: Well, I took it in high school and I got 95 plus. But ah, I don't speak it still. In fact, very few people know that I, you know, what happened to my past. I don't talk about it.

LEVINE: Hmm. Hmm.

HERSHBAIN: I do remember one thing in France when I was living with my Uncle Harry. I used to go outside and play. And there was a mean little boy and every day he'd say, ah, I'm going to hurt you. I'm going to beat you. I'm gonna this, I'm gonna that. And one day he took a milk bottle and he broke it, and he threw it in my face. If you see, I have a scar. I don't know if you can see. It looks like a sleeping line. Here and here and over my eye. And I remember that. And as he threw the bottle, I said, now the wolf is going to get you for being so mean! And the next thing I was in the operating room. So whoever the surgeon was...

LEVINE: They did a great job.

HERSHBAIN: My cheek was out. And I remember laying in a pool of blood. So that was an experience there too.

LEVINE: So you must have been about six or something like that.

HERSHBAIN: Uh, huh. And then I had a very bad scar, like a red welt. So I used to sit like this so nobody could see. So this is how I sat in school and then the kids would tease me and push my arm so they could see the scar. I had a lot of tragedies, you know. But I came out of it all right because ah, thank god, I have a good personality. I can make do with that.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Now did your uncle and Aunt Sarah ever have children?

HERSHBAIN: No. My mother was pregnant. She had a miscarriage. Way before, many years before I came.

LEVINE: I see. So they were probably very happy to have you.

HERSHBAIN: Ah! They were thrilled.

LEVINE: Let's see. Did you have friends when you came over?

HERSHBAIN: Well, I had a friend in France. Her name was Monique. I was crazy about her. Blond hair. Beautiful little girl. She was in my Aunt Bertha's class. And I don't know, somehow she separated us. I don't know what happened to Monique.

LEVINE: And how about when you came here? Did you have like a best friend, or kids you hung around with?

HERSHBAIN: I made a lot of friends. As soon as I spoke without an accent, I made a lot of friends. And all my friends that I made then, I still have.

LEVINE: Really?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. In fact, I'm gonna go to see my son and granddaughter the 26th of December and my girlfriend Nedru, who I met when we were six or seven, she in, she lives in California so she's gonna be there with me. Isn't that nice?

LEVINE: Oh, how sweet.

HERSHBAIN: And my girlfriend Alice and Lois, we all...

LEVINE: All from grade school?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So do you think you got over at some point, got over all the harsh life that you had before you came to this country?

HERSHBAIN: I, I, I, I think I rose above it, but I never forgot it. I never forgot it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERSHBAIN: There were too many hurts. You know, I, I, it bothers me to the point that one maniac could have such a following. And it bothers me another thing, which is wrong to say, but why didn't all our Jewish people just take a chance and 500 just attack these [modern] soldiers. Even if we lost a hundred of them, we wouldn't have lost six million. Cause there was one soldier with a gun guarding maybe forty people. If they, I know it's wrong and they were probably terrified and everything or too weak, maybe. Cause they were put in cattle cars. But it just seems like somehow, some way, something could have been avoided with that.

LEVINE: Yeah. Let's see. How do you feel about it now? Do you follow, the Holocaust is such a live issue right now, a topic.

HERSHBAIN: I think Steven Spielberg is doing a beautiful job about it. I didn't see Schindler's List because I think it would be too sad. Ah, I did see the Holo-, wasn't there a movie a Holocaust several years ago, about eight years ago with what's her name? Vanessa Redgrave, where they shaved her head. That I saw. It was very hard to see that. I never see a war movie. I never go to the war movies though. Anything with war.

LEVINE: Do you, are you part of any Jewish groups? Do you...?

HERSHBAIN: Well, I go to the Jewish Y. We have rap sessions, things like that. Like I'm going next Thursday to a Hanukah party at the Y. I go to temple, you know, like on the holidays.

LEVINE: Was your Uncle Jack religious at all?

HERSHBAIN: No. For the Jewish holiday. Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. We ran into temple, and ran out.

LEVINE: Right. Uh, huh.

HERSHBAIN: But I went to Hebrew high school. And I, I went to Jewish school and everything. I have a, I was graduate with a torah.

LEVINE: Oh. So you graduated from high school and then what did you do?

HERSHBAIN: One of my teachers in high school wanted me to be, continue, or go to college. Cause he felt I would be a good psychologist and psychiatrist and blah, blah, blah. And I said, no, no, no. I said, my greatest dream is to become a secretary. That was my biggest dream in the world. So I became a secretary. Where did I work? The United Jewish Appeal in New York. All my friends were making at those time, \$120 a week. I was making \$60 a week because I wanted to work with Israel and help everybody that I could in Israel. It was always important to me, my religion.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you think, I mean, it sounds like you were, you said it earlier, you were always alone. That is, you were against crossing yourself, and the holy water and you were against, with your... What was the other thing you wouldn't do?

HERSHBAIN: With my grandmother?

LEVINE: Oh, you wouldn't be adopted at first because you didn't feel it was right. Do you think you were always like that? It's very courageous.

HERSHBAIN: I'm always like that. Even when I went for my divorce. I didn't want to aggravate my mother so I went and got my divorce and then I came home and told her. Cause I didn't want her to talk me out of it and I didn't want her to be upset for a year and a half 'til the divorce was through. So I told her after. And I did that with most of my friends. Cause I didn't want to be talked out of it.

LEVINE: Can you think of any other ways that maybe what you went through as a young child has had an affect on you as a person?

HERSHBAIN: Always willing to please, even beyond and above the call of duty and always afraid I might be hurting somebody or not doing the right thing or not saying the right thing. And ah, very low self-esteem.

LEVINE: Do you think that come, came from...?

HERSHBAIN: Ah. A thousand percent. There's no question. I never had a chance. Because it started off bad. When you're pulled out of your mother's arms, to me, that's it. That ruins you for life. Because then you feel how bad was I that my mother had to be pulled away from me? How bad was I? You always blame yourself. Children tend to do that.

LEVINE: Mm. Mm, hm.

HERSHBAIN: It took me many years to figure that, she, it wasn't her fault. You know.
But my mother here is wonderful and I was crazy about her. Unfortunately she passed away seventeen years ago. And I was very close to her.

LEVINE: Well, thank god for them. Your uncle and aunt.

HERSHBAIN: Unfortunately, my father here passed away when my son was two. That was thirty-two years ago. And my mother passed away seventeen years ago, here.

LEVINE: So did you marry soon after you finished high school?

HERSHBAIN: I married when I was twenty-one. So about four years later. Cause in those days if you weren't married by twenty, twenty-one, you were considered an old maid. Who wants to be an old maid? Even though I was the first one married of all my friends. But I happened to marry a, a sort of a brutal man.

LEVINE: Was he a Jewish man?

HERSHBAIN: Yup. Very selfish, controlling, dominating. And he just, you know, and I was so afraid of everything that he took all control.

LEVINE: So now his name was Hersh bain.

HERSHBAIN: Harold. And I don't like to talk ill of him because he passed away, but he was not a good husband. He was not a good father and that's why I went for a divorce.

LEVINE: So did you have more than one child?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. I have two. I have a son and a daughter. And a granddaughter now. My granddaughter's thirteen months.

LEVINE: And what are your children's names?

HERSHBAIN: Joy is my daughter. She's named after my father here, Jack. He, when he passed away.

LEVINE: Did you say Joy?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. And ah, my son is Michael after my mother in France. Miriam.

LEVINE: So then did you continue as a career person? Or did you, when you were...

HERSHBAIN: Well, then I, ah, I worked for, you know, I graduated and worked for the United Jewish Appeal. I think I was there three or four years. Then I met Hal. Then, I lived in the Bronx at the time, then I came out here. To New

Jersey. Cause he was from New Jersey. And I worked for about a year and a half, and then, I was pregnant so I stopped and then I had Michael.

LEVINE: When did you resume working?

HERSHBAIN: I didn't resume working cause then, ah, in those days the mother didn't work. You only took care of your child and cleaned, cooked, ironed. You know. And then after, four years later, I had Joy. And then when Joy was three years old that's when I filed for divorce. So I had my son, Joy was ah, three, and Michael was seven. They were four years apart and two months. And then I lived in a house, a bigger house in Livingston, and he proved to the judge that he couldn't keep me there with the kids. And I didn't want to take them out of the school system. So we sold the house and we each got nine thousand cause we only had been there four years. And I put it down on this house. And this way they were in the same school system, they were only five blocks from the other house, they have the same friends, so I didn't have to uproot them like I was uprooted. I wanted them to have stability. And ah, I have great kids. They're not on drugs. They're not on alcohol. And I'm very, I'm very proud of them. You know.

LEVINE: I was going to ask you what you feel proud of.

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. Very proud of them because they're both ambitious, they're both kind, ah, and ah, they just have nice, they're nice natured. Nice natured kids.

LEVINE: Is there anything else besides the idea that you wanted them to have a stable life, is there anything else that you can think of that was influenced in the way you raised your children that was influenced by the childhood you had?

HERSHBAIN: When I raised my children, as soon as they were starting to grow or make demands or whatever it was, I always superimposed myself as a child and what I said to them, I superimposed myself, would I like to hear what I just said to them? This is how I worked with them. To see, how would I like it as a child. Because I never had choices. I was never told... you know.

LEVINE: Well, you didn't have much of a childhood really.

HERSHBAIN: No.

LEVINE: So is there anything else that you think affected you as far as coming to this county, as far as making your life here, rather than in Europe?

HERSHBAIN: I just don't feel my life, I don't know if it was worth coming here because my life wasn't that happy. It was only happy from the time that I accepted

my parents here in 1952. Then I got married in '59. That was seven years only. I was so anxious to get married. I thought I'd be an old maid. Isn't that ridiculous? My daughter's thirty. Let her marry when she's thirty-five. Let her enjoy her life. Or whatever she wants.

LEVINE: Yeah. We all felt that way at that time.

HERSHBAIN: It's terrible. Cause I had left a good home. I had a wonderful home. I always regretted that. But then of course, you have to look at the better side, that I wouldn't have had Michael and Joy. I would have had other children, but it wouldn't have been them.

LEVINE: Well, do you ever wish you had been able to stay in Europe?

HERSHBAIN: I wish I could have stayed in Europe and everybody would have been an alive and there wouldn't have been a war, but that's not reality. But I would have loved to see my mother and my Aunt Racha cause I was crazy about her. I loved my mother. I remember that very much when I was pulled out of her arms. That killed me. My father I don't remember as much.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about him?

HERSHBAIN: No. Just that he had wavy, red, wavy hair and he was very tall.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, let's see. Is there, when you think about the Holocaust, you mentioned before you were thinking why didn't people... Is there anything else that...?

HERSHBAIN: Why didn't they all band together and say, some of us will lose our lives but better than being put in cattle cars and beaten and abused and starved to death, and whatever they were – you know, the horrible things, thrown into the ovens. Why didn't they just, if there was a guard in one room, with one gun, and there was fifty people, why didn't these fifty people attack? Even if three got killed, six million wouldn't have gotten killed, if they could have continued killing these horrible soldiers.

LEVINE: Well, I suppose there were others...

HERSHBAIN: Merging in.

LEVINE: I guess, I don't know. It seems almost irreconcilable to make sense of it all.

HERSHBAIN: There is no sense and I feel guilty even saying that these people should have done something because I wasn't in that position. It's just so sad that nobody did anything. And that the Americans didn't come in sooner, even though supposedly ah, Roosevelt knew about it. If he knew, I don't know, is there a guarantee he knew?

LEVINE: Well, I mean I've heard that too, that he knew.

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. How could he not protect? I mean, look how we're protecting Bosnia? We're losing all our soldiers. Cause Jews were always and always will be in the minority and nobody cares about us because we're too bright, too good and too kind. We're the better breed and people doesn't, don't like that. They don't like, they're afraid of people that are secure in their religion and can do something. Jewish people can do something and that's why we'll never have a president that's Jewish.

LEVINE: Hm.

HERSHBAIN: Same thing as the black people. They make black people minority and they make the Jewish minority. And this is still going on and my biggest fear is this ah, these skinheads and all these groups. Why don't, are they working on watching them? They meet in Wyoming or wherever they meet? Are they keeping an eye that they don't start a second holocaust? You think so? Why are they letting it even go for... They should stop it immediately, before they gather. It should never happen again. And all the children in this world should see this, anything that has to do with the holocaust. I think it should be taught from the fifth grade on. You know, today children are very spoiled. They want everything their way. The parents have to walk on eggshells. Let them see this. Let them see how other children live and how

other parents suffered. I think it should be shown in every fifth grade class, or sixth grade class. And it should be shown again at the end of high school and the end of college and people should never forget it. And if they see or hear anything, a group gathering, go right to it and disband them before anything else happens. It should never happen again. Not only to Jewish people, to any religion. I hate those Germans. I really do. I find out someone's German I don't even talk to them. Between the nuns and the Germans. I really have no use for any of them. You don't take little children and beat them. If you're going to help, help them. Don't.... You know what I mean? If they're taking you in to save you from the Germans, what are you beating me for? Power. Everybody with their power.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything good about the convent?

HERSHBAIN: No.

LEVINE: Mm.

HERSHBAIN: Mm, mm.

LEVINE: Well, you must have been a frightened little girl.

HERSHBAIN: That's why, I urinated in bed until I was about nine. And sucked my thumb. I still have a scar I think. I think I sucked my left thumb. I'm sure I have a scar because I used to always look at it. Maybe it's faded after all these years. (pause) Here it is. See, it's like a line. I used to bite it. So between the scare on my face, my hand, my this, my that... I had my tonsils removed in France. I would never go back to France. If I...

LEVINE: Really?

HERSHBAIN: Never. No. Because all the people I loved there passed away and it was a horrible childhood. The first few years weren't I'm sure, but from... So I would never... Like people say, oh, you know, you could win a trip to France, I would never even enter the contest, in case I won. I would NEVER, never have gone.

LEVINE: Did you notice yourself changing, like as you grew older, after you were here? Did you notice how you began to change, I mean, once you didn't have to be afraid?

HERSHBAIN: I didn't really change. I always felt I belong – I'm outside looking in. I've always felt that I'm on the outside looking in.

LEVINE: And that's probably, you think that's because your family, you weren't in your family.

HERSHBAIN: I wasn't with my family. I was pulled from all pieces from different people. I didn't have roots. And when you don't have roots and you don't have, you know, two parents with you, it's very hard.

LEVINE: Well it sounds like you've counteracted that with your own children, by doing just the opposite of what was done to you.

HERSHBAIN: I tried. I tried. I mean, I'm very close with my, my kids. And ah, like the 26th I'm going to go see Michael, that's my son, and my granddaughter. And he's all excited. I'm all excited. So it's going to be wonderful.

LEVINE: Can you think of any attitudes that your Uncle Jack and Aunt Sarah had that they tried to instill in you when you were living with them?

HERSHBAIN: Well, my father, my father and I had a good rapport. He used to be a delicatessen clerk and he worked at night. So when he came home at two o'clock in the morning he'd wake me up and we'd play checkers. And then we would whisper. And then sometimes my mother would come out, get out of bed, she says, what are you doing sitting here? She has to go to school! What's wrong with you, Jack?! The next day we'd do the same

thing. I enjoyed that. And my mother and I, we used to go to Connecticut. She had cousins in Connecticut. So I always fell asleep on her lap. And ah, my mother, I always kissed my mother. She used to call me kissing bug. (chuckling) From not looking at her because she was supposedly black, whatever that means... I was very close to her. She, I called her every day. And then when I got married, he put a stop to that. So I used to run to the corner with Michael in a carriage and call from the phone booth. With the few pennies he left me. I had a hard life. It's, it amazes me, and I have to say, not that I'm praising myself, god forbid, it amazes me that I'm so into people and want to please them, and, and, and, do for them. There's not a selfish bone in my body and I wish I was selfish sometimes. Cause I always get hurt. But like I've, I always heard that if you're a Holocaust survivor, you either go one way. Either you're too good, or you're rotten. There's no in between. So I'm on that side. Too good. But I wouldn't want to be any other way. Because I love people. I love to do for my friends, and do anything I can. But that, even between anything else, it's always selfish because it's really wanting to be accepted, after all these years I don't relax. I should feel secure with my friends. That I'm accepted if I say no. It's no big deal. No. I get stomachaches for days and like it's the end of the world. Meanwhile, they forgot what they asked me if I, if I should EVER say no. Which I don't. So that's all part of... I feel from the past I became a very insecure and held me back in my future. I think I could have been something and made my, my kids proud and had money. I'm struggling.

LEVINE: Well, I'm sure your kids are proud of you.

HERSHBAIN: I hope so. I think so.

LEVINE: Well, I guess you, I mean, that's the effects, I mean, physical effects, like you're saying you get a stomachache and all that when something is...

HERSHBAIN: It's all part of that childhood that you repeat. The same repetitive patterns. And um, it's nice to have some people to lean on.

LEVINE: But you must have overcome some aspects of it?

HERSHBAIN: I'm very independent. I don't let anybody do for me unless it's absolutely necessary. I won't ask, and if I have to ask somebody a favor, I die inside. Like it's such a shame to ask. They'll ask me and I would never say no, but I get very ashamed. And if I do ask them, thank you so much. What can I say? What can I do? So grateful, like it's, like they're going out of their way and they're not. What I ask is very meager.

LEVINE: Okay. I guess you consider yourself an American. Or do you? I shouldn't say that. How do you consider your self when you think of French? American?

HERSHBAIN: I don't ever consider myself a French citizen. I consider myself an American citizen. I'm very proud of it and everything. France only holds sadness for me. So I wouldn't want to be a citizen in France, and I will never go there. The only way I would go there is if my daughter decided to get married in Paris. I would go there for the ceremony and take a jet right back. But otherwise, I'm not going there. Ever.

LEVINE: How about your children? How do they feel about France?

HERSHBAIN: My kids know very little about this.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

HERSHBAIN: I've told them very little. Cause I didn't want to hurt their feelings.

LEVINE: What were you afraid of?

HERSHBAIN: That they would feel sad for me. I didn't want them to be sad. I don't want to cause any sadness to them. So they know just a little. I, very surface. They don't know how I suffered with my uncle. How he locked me in a dark bathroom, because I once made in the bed he put me in a dark bathroom. In France, the bathrooms don't have a light switch, they have a chain. And in order to put the light on you have to have hit the chain. And

he put me there, and overnight in the bathroom, and I stood on the toilet bowl, closed, and couldn't reach that chain, which was the light. So now, because of that, I'm afraid of the dark, so I always sleep with a night light. So everything has a reason and a cause. So, I don't want to tell them these horrible things. And other things that he's done.

LEVINE: Do they ask you?

HERSHBAIN: I always fluff them off so they don't ask. I always fluff them off.

LEVINE: Have you seen your grandchild yet?

HERSHBAIN: Oh yeah. She was here in June. And I have millions of pictures. I just got more. And Michael mails me videos of her. Every couple of weeks I get new videos. He's a terrific father. And ah, he's special my son. Very special. So is my daughter. My daughter got a new job. She has a very responsible position. She'd doing exactly what I would have like to do.

LEVINE: What's that?

HERSHBAIN: Like right now she's in Illinois. She'd doing a training program where she'll come back here and improve things in her office and everything and train other people or show them the procedures that she's done. And she's

very independent. And it's great. I know that if I was to go today, both my children would be fine. And that's really what a parent can give a child.

Give them wings. Make them secure and give them wings.

LEVINE: Do you think in any way, your experience with the Holocaust has had any affect on them? Even though you haven't discussed it with them, do you think that there's any....?

HERSHBAIN: Maybe in the only part that they didn't have grandparents. They had my mother and father here, but they didn't have my mother and father from France. My grandmother. They didn't have that. And they don't have any aunts and uncles. They only have on my husband's side, one aunt. And a couple of cousins. That's it. They have like my sister-in-law and her four children. That's close. But then like all the aunts are in their eighties, nineties. We're a very small family. It's just me and my kids. On my side, anyway.

LEVINE: So you're going to see your friend from grade school when you go out there?

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. And I saw her when I was out there in Oct, um, in May I saw her. And it's funny. I hadn't seen her in thirty years. We met again after thirty years. She traveled all of the world. And I just met another friend that we

went to ah, fifth grade together and she lives in Short Hills which is about twenty minutes. So we keep seeing, it's amazing.

LEVINE: Now, do they remember you as a little girl from France?

HERSHBAIN: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely.

LEVINE: Have they, I know this happens with my oldest friend. She remembers things about our childhood, about me, that I don't remember at all. Does this...?

HERSHBAIN: Well, my girlfriend Nedra told me a story that I didn't remember. My girlfriend Roberta, I was friends with this girl Roberta Perlman, this was like about fourth, fifth grade, I guess, and ah, she said to Nedra, I want you to meet my poodle. I want you to meet my poodle. Meaning me. I used to have a poodle haircut, but she didn't know how to tell her because Nedra never wanted to meet new people. She had enough friends. So she came, so they introduce, and she says, this is my poodle. And she says, but she's not a poodle. She's a girl with a poodle haircut. Anyway, the wind-up was that Roberta Perlman and I, for some reason, did it out and Nedra and I became best friends and we still are. (laughs) Her and my girlfriend Lois, and Alice were all best friends, like. You know, it was like...

LEVINE: Well that was like a new beginning for you.

HERSHBAIN: Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well is there anything else you can think of that you might want to say about coming to this country, your life here, ah...?

HERSHBAIN: Well, my life here has been hard, but it's also been rewarding. I have my two children. I have wonderful friends. Ah, I like my job, but I know I could be doing more. And that's what I feel bad about. I didn't listen and go to college. I wanted to be a secretary. What a jerk. (laughs)

LEVINE: Being a secretary and get married.

HERSHBAIN: And have a little house with a white picket fence and have three and a half children or two and a half children. Your typical American... And a dog. I never got my white picket fence. But as long as you know, we're all healthy. That's the main thing. And ah, I'm very interested in people. I love to people watch when I go to the mall. See what they do for a living or this and that. And I like helping people. I have ah, my ex-husband's aunt, may he rest in peace, she's ninety-two. So I take her, you know, I take her sometimes food shopping. I went there the other day, I brought her, she likes People Magazine. So it's like re-living my grandmother. Anybody

that's older I get crazy, absolutely crazy for. I'm trying to find my grandmother.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Well, that's nice. Well, I want to say thank you very much for a most interesting interview.

HERSHBAIN: Thank you.

LEVINE: I've been speaking with Evelyn Hersh bain, who came from France in 1946 when she was seven years of age and today is December 13, 1995. And this is Janet Levine for the National Parks Service and I'm signing off.

END INTERVIEW