<u>EI-860</u>
LILLIAN ANDRON
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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
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GERMANY, 1950
AGE: 3

SHIP: ONE OF THE "GENERAL" SHIPS
PORT:
RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is February 25th, 1997 and I'm here in North Miami Beach, Florida, with Lillian Andron, who came from Germany in 1950, through Ellis Island. This story is unique and I think perhaps Lillian is one of the youngest people to have—Ellis Island, immigrated through Ellis Island. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.
If you would start by saying the name with you born with your birth date?

ANDRON: I was born on May 11th, 1947. It was Mother's Day that year, but my mother didn't know it was Mother's Day because we were in a displaced person's camp in Germany. My parents were Holocaust survivors, and I was the second of three children. My brother was born later in America, but my sister was older, and she was born in Warsaw and her name was Alechka [PH], which was Alexandria in Russian, or the Polish equivalent of it. She was not named after anyone because at that time it was right at the end of the war and my parents did not

know which of their families had perished or who had survived. So they didn't want to name her after anyone, so she was called Alechka [PH], but her name was Allah. And when we came through Ellis Island, the clerk said, "Allah, that must Ellen," so she became Ellen.

I was named Rajaleah, after my paternal grandmother, my father's mother who perished in the Warsaw ghetto. She dived of starvation, actually, and her name was Rajaleah, or Rachel Leah, who were the two sisters in the bible who married Jacob. And my parents did not call me Rajaleah or Rachel, they called me Leahla, which is Leah, but it's like little Leah. Leahla is like the term of endearment. So when the clerk at Ellis Island heard Leahla, they put it down as Lillian. So that's how I got to be Lillian and that's how my sister got to be Ellen. So we're Lillian and Ellen, but we're really Alechka [PH] and Rajaleah.

LEVINE: Okay, now, perhaps you could tell a little bit about the history of where your mother was coming from? Give their names, your mother's maiden name and where your mother came from and where your father came from.

ANDRON: My mother was Romanian. Her name is Manya [PH]. Her maiden name was Peter, actually, like Pietro and they were originally a Turkish Sephardic family and in 1939, when war was obviously brewing, her brothers left home. She had older brothers and they left home to join the Russian army. My mother was born in 1929, so she was eighteen in 1939. She left, too. She was quite a spunky person, so she went to Russia, as well, which actually turned out fortunate for her because Romanian Jewry was quite devastated during the Holocaust. And she joined the Russian forces as a practical nurse and she spent a good part of the war years in Leningrad, which was under siege, which is I guess St. Petersburg now, which was not a great place to be. But she did manage to survive the siege and she was with the army. So as the Russian forces began to move west, as they started to gain the upper hand against the Nazis during the war, her unit, her medical unit actually moved west with them into Western Russia and into Poland.

My father was born in Warsaw, Poland and in 1912, and he—his is a very interesting story, actually. He left Poland in 1935 to live in Paris. He was a fashion designer. He made women's coats and suits. That's all he did, no dresses. His name is Hiam [PH] Jose Freeman, or Fryman, as they pronounced in Poland, I guess, and his father was a Hassidic tailor in Warsaw. And my father left home in 1935 to make his fortune in Paris, and before the war he had—he had really become quite secular in his own practice, even though he was from a religious family, and he was a soccer player. So he was very strong and among the Jewish leagues quite well known. The Jewish leagues had to play separate because Poland was quite a segregated country, and he

managed to make quite a bit of money before the war. So in the summer of 1939, he decided that he was going to go back to Warsaw and try to convince his parents and his five siblings, five brothers and his one sister—six siblings all together—to come back to Paris with him.

In retrospect, it probably wouldn't have mattered too much because Germany did occupy Paris as well and Jews from—you know, Parisian Jews were also deported, but who knows? More French Jews per capita survived than Polish Jews did. But anyway, what happened was when he got back to Poland, he was drafted because he was a Polish National. So he was drafted into the Polish army and of course, they were defeated in September, and he was sent to the Warsaw ghetto, without any of his money, without any of his assets. And he lived in the ghetto until 1942, at which time he was taken during the selection process to Treblinka, but he never made it to Treblinka. He jumped off the train and it took him about six weeks to get back to the ghetto because he was part of the organizations that were organizing the uprising in Warsaw. So he felt that he should go back. What was he going to do, you know, stay in the woods by himself and, you know, get caught by the roaming bands of Nazis that were, you know, combing the woods for stray Jews and Jews hiding and so on? So he went back, and he was there until after the uprising. So he was one of the handful of survivors of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, and when they were finally destroying the ghetto, he was sent to Mydunik [PH], which is Newbleen [PH], which I had the opportunity to visit last year.

It was quite a harrowing place, and he was there for sixteen weeks and then what was going on was the Russians were moving west and there was my mother with her unit, and they took the able bodied workers. They were going to transport them probably to Auschwitz or further west to forced labor situations, and once again he jumped off the train, but this time he found himself in woods near where his grandparents owned orchards when he was growing up. So it was a familiar place to him. So he dug himself a hole in the ground about six feet deep by three by three. It was like a closet, and he slept in this thing all day long, you know, covered up with leaves and dirt, and at night he would go out and he would forage for potato peelings, an occasional egg, and he lived in the hole in the ground until he was liberated nine months later by the Russians. And if you realize that the Warsaw ghetto ended, it was destroyed at the end of May, so he was in Mydunik [PH], June, July, August, September, and then he was in this hole in the ground during the winter months, October, November, December, January, eight months. When he was liberated, he weighed forty kilos, and he was taken to a hospital, and there was mom.

LEVINE: Oh, my gosh.

ANDRON: And she was his nurse and she was his nurse and she was also—he recovered pretty quickly because he had been, you know, he was a strong—he was an athlete, and she was actually taking care of a friend of his and he would go visit his friend. Then when they married, she actually deserted the Russian army because she had no loyalty to Russia. She was Romanian and Russia, especially in the Ukraine and so on, [unclear], they were not particular sympathetic to the Jewish cause. So she felt that she had no—

LEVINE: Allegiance.

ANDRON: Allegiance to them, so she actually just deserted and she married my father, and then they went back to Warsaw. Warsaw had been a liberated city at that point, my father thinking that maybe they'll stay there and wait, see who comes home. See if his brother came home, or his sister because he didn't know what had happened to them. He knew that his mother died of starvation because a neighbor told him, but will he was on route to Treblinka and coming back, that's when his siblings were taken out for selection. So they may have perished at Treblinka, at least some of them probably did. But he—he went back to Warsaw, which is where my sister was born. When they realized after a short time that there was really nothing there for them, you know, family was not returning, friends were not returning, they decided that they were going to try to move west because they felt that they would have a better chance of a future in a Western European situation, an American controlled situation than in a Soviet controlled situation, which was quite reasonable and fortunate, from their perspective. And they ended up, they had gone to Romania and elements of my mom's family did survive, but she did not want to stay there. She didn't want to live under a communist regime. She had done that because she lived in Leningrad.

So she was quite happy to leave, and they went through Czechoslovakia and so on, until they got to Western Germany. At this point Germany was occupied in half. You know, the soviets had one side, the Americans had the other and they ended up in an American run displaced person's camp about a half an hour outside of Nuremburg and it was in Vinceheim [PH], which is where I was born, and it wasn't a bad place, as I recall, because it had been an officer's barracks before the war and during the war. So they were like rooms, apartments. We didn't have—we had our own room that had like a Pullman kitchen, but there was no bathroom. So my mother would bath us in wash tubs, which I remember very clearly. And she says, "How can you remember this? You were, you know, nine months old," and I said, "Well, did it look like this?" and she said, "Yes."

I remember very, very clearly one night my father came in and my mother and my sister woke up and, you know, I was sleepy and I woke up. And he took my mother into this little alcove, which was a Pullman kitchen and he opened this little box and inside were two eggs, which were like diamonds. You would think he had diamonds in there. There were four of us, of course, but two real eggs. God only knows where he got them, but I didn't feel deprived until years later when I looked back, I said, "Wow, real eggs as opposed to powdered eggs. Real sugar." I remember there was an American army soldier who would give us rye bread with butter on it, sprinkled with sugar, only it wasn't butter, it was margarine because we didn't get real butter. But it was real sugar and I remember it being very, very special. They gave us chocolate bars. We had toys, which I understand they didn't have at the—you know, in the Soviet run camps because Americans value that. So we had a tricycle and the children shared it. We had dolls that all the children shared, you know, like set up as a nursery because Americans are extremely generous in terms of their spirit.

I remember once we had to cross a checkpoint because we were starting to—they were starting to move us to repatriate people after the war and, you know, these camps were temporary. They were not going to be permanent. There was no question in anybody's mind that they were going to be permanent, and I remember my parents and my sister getting to the other side of the checkpoint and for some reason I was separated from them, and they couldn't come back to get me. It was not allowed. They were already on the other side. That was it. So the soldier at the checkpoint came over to me. I was terrified of him. This is a strange man, and he held out his hand and in it the little candies that look like these tiny, tiny little jawbreakers. They were too big for colored sprinkles like you would have on a cupcake, but they were smaller than mini jawbreakers. And he just held them in his hand and I looked at the candy and I WANTED the candy. So he just kept kind of backing up and I just kept kind of walking with him until my mother grabbed me. I did get the candy, though.

And then we were taken to Bremen, which was where the ship was and I remember we had gotten there a day early, and the ship that we were going to be coming to America on was a day late. So we ended up sleeping on our bundles, which included feather pillows and two huge feather comforters that my mother had made in Germany. She had them made, because they were so afraid that they wouldn't be able to get this stuff in America, but of course anything you can get in Europe, you can get in America. So we had these huge bundles and we slept on those. And I remember the room was very big. The benches were wood, very high ceilings. Exactly the way I remembered Ellis Island later, except I didn't remember the wood at Ellis Island. It seemed more like windows, whereas in Bremen everything seemed to be dark, dark brown.

And the ship, I remember the whole time I was on the ship, I was terrified. I was so afraid that I was going to fall into the ocean that when we would go up on deck, I would make my father stand by the wall of the building, as opposed to the rail, because I didn't want to be anywhere near the water. I was afraid of falling in. But we had a cabin that had beds on either side of it, and they were single beds, bunk beds. So there were four beds in the room, and that's all it was. It was just a very narrow room with the beds on either wall with a narrow—

LEVINE: Aisle.

ANDRON: Aisle between them and a little closet towards the front, like a very small hospital room kind of thing. And we shared it with another woman and her son and my mother and my sister and myself, and the men were below decks in steerage. And they were working on the ship and the women and the children got the state rooms, even though they weren't really state rooms. But the men slept in barracks and the women slept in state rooms, and we all ate together in a big dining room. There was a huge dining room with tables that had clothes on them. So it was nicely appointed.

And the crossing took ten days because we went to Venezuela first. I remember pulling into the port. It was extremely hot and I was very, very uncomfortable. It was the beginning of June and it was very hot and I remember seeing parrots in the trees, in the palm trees, and I remember these little black boats, tiny little rowboats overflowing with beautiful colored flowers that the Venezuelans just set—you know, they pushed out to great us. And some people did get off because they had visas to settle in Venezuela. I remember the colors were so bright, I had never seen colors like that before and I'd never seen birds like that before that were that big and green and yellow and gold.

And then we came to New York. Another couple of interesting things happened on the crossing. One was that we actually saw a school of dolphins, and I always—when I tell the story, I remember them taking us up on deck, one of the times that I was terrified and they said, "We're going to see flying fish." I said, "Flying fish, wow!?" And we saw them swimming and it wasn't until about six months ago that I was thinking about it for some reason, and I realized those were dolphins because I remembered what they looked like. But we didn't know. We called them flying fish, but they were very big and they were quite, quite beautiful.

And then another thing that has really helped shape my life as a human being actually was an event that happened on the ship. My mother was a very beautiful woman, and people would stop, you know, men would stop on a street and stare at her. Stop traffic gorgeous, I used to call it, but anyway, she had—having grown up in Romania and in—and in—and you know, spending the war years in Russia, she had

never seen Black people before. The first Black people she saw were American soldiers in Germany and it frightened her terrible because the first time she saw an African American was it was dusk. It was evening and they were taking a walk and a truck that was being driven by an African American was coming towards us and she couldn't see the driver. The thought this was a truck that was running amok by itself and she was terrified and she grabbed the kids and she said, "That truck doesn't have a driver," and my father, who had lived in Paris and was a much more cosmopolitan person, laughed at his country bumpkin wife that, you know, she was so unsophisticated that she couldn't, you know, she couldn't adjust to the idea of people with dark skin, people who had differences.

And in the dining room on the ship there were African Americans who worked there and there was one man who kept staring at her and it made her very, very uncomfortable and very frightened. One day after lunch, she just grabbed us and took us to the room and put us down for a nap. About four o'clock, four or five o'clock in the afternoon, much later, she had forgotten about this fellow who was watching her, there was a knock at the door and she thought it was my father, and she swung the door open and there was this man standing there. She panicked and through some language and a few isolated words, he made it—and he held out a brown paper bag for her, and he communicated to her somehow that he noticed that her children were not eating because we were very seasick. And so he brought us a bag of fruit, so that we would eat it and my mother was like, very relieved. And after that, he would offer to baby-sit for us and he would play with us, so that my mother could visit with my dad. So her first encounter with racial differences, other than of course the Holocaust which can make anybody very frightened and very leery of anybody that's different, was such a positive experience that we were brought up that one of the most tremendous evils on the planet is racism.

And so we were brought up, you know, in New York in a very liberal environment and it always stuns me when—because I now work in the Dade County Public School system and I work with predominantly African American children and it always stuns me that, you know, racial slurs come out of teachers. They come out of administrators. They come out of kids. They come out of the Hispanic kids to the Black kids, the Black kids to the Hispanic kids and I'm sitting there saying, "No, this is bad. We're not going to do this, and if you're going to do it, you're going to take it outside."

It was because of this, you know, because a mother has such a strong influence on her children and my mother was—she didn't have a racist bone in her body and I think it was because of this experience on the boat.

And then when we came to America when we finally—I never thought we'd ever actually see land again. I just figured, "This is now

my existence, and I'm going to have to be on this boat forever." And this whole boat, every passenger on this boat was a Holocaust survivor. The sponsoring organization was HIAS, which was the Hebrew Immigrants Aide Society. So everyone on this boat had lived through the horrors of the Holocaust where, you know, the Gestapo could knock on your door in the middle of the night and just drag anybody away any time, or in a camp they could sound reveille at four o'clock in the morning and then make you stand outside for twelve hours.

It was close to the morning, it was really predawn and all of a sudden you hear people yelling and screaming in the halls outside your rooms. People pounding on the doors and, you know, the doors open and people are crying hysterically and carrying on and they grab us all and they bring us up to the deck. And just as we get up there at sunrise, and there we were, and there she was. There was the Statue of Liberty and she was bathed—I will never forgot this. My birthday's in May and this was June, so I had just turned three. I remember it like it was yesterday. The orange light around her head and we didn't know. It was almost like, "Is she lit or is this the sunrise?" It was almost impossible to tell the difference, and people are crying and carrying on. This was America. This was freedom. When it says, "Give me your tired, your poor," they mean it, you know. I mean, there was nobody who was more tired and nobody more poor in all—you know, in the hundred years of the immigration, than this, you know, really motley boatload of people who were coming. And there she was, green and gorgeous and bathed in this magnificent orange light.

And then we went into this building, and I guess that was Ellis Island, which I said was different from the dock in Bremen because that was all wood and paneling and this was more like metal and paint and windows. Long lines. Again, you know, sitting and resting on these bundles and then they—and that's where suddenly I was Lillian. Suddenly my father, who's name is Hiam [PH], became Charles. He never went by the name of Charles. That's the way he was listed in the phone book, but he was never—his social security card, everything was Hiam [PH], except the phone book. The phone company just always called him Charles. My mother's name was Mania, they kept it Mania. That was never changed. It was just the two of us, Allah became Ellen and Rajaleah became Lillian.

Then the HIAS found us a place to live for three weeks temporarily, which was the old Astor Library on Lafayette Street, which is now the New York Shakespeare Festival and my husband always teases me about that because I have a Master's in theater and my specialty is Shakespeare. And he said, "You see, when you were an infant, this was imbued in you." It wasn't the Shakespeare Festival then, the Joseph Taft Theater but it, you know, is all connected.

And then they found about eight families apartments in a section of Brooklyn, which was not a Jewish neighborhood, so all the other kids I grew up with who were Jewish, were children of survivors of the Holocaust. And that's—that's my story. And years later, when I wanted a passport to go to Europe, I became a naturalized citizen when I was nineteen. I never bothered to get naturalized because I was technically naturalized under my parents' naturalization until eighteen. Then I wanted a passport, so I was naturalized and I remember the swearing in. Everybody there were much more recent immigrants. Everyone had an accent, you know, except my sister and I, who stood there. My sister was a political science major and I was—I think I was a junior in college at the time, and we were—we were so American. We were SO American that it really, you know, brings all these things back that we could have been anywhere. My father had considered going back to Paris after the war. Friends of his were going to Australia and while France and Australia probably would have been lovely places to live and to grow up and I would have been talking quite funny now, actually, but I'm very grateful that they chose to come here and that I was able to grow up in this country because I think it's an amazing place.

LEVINE: Wow. Wow. Beautiful story.

ANDRON: Thank you.

LEVINE: Let me just ask a few questions.

ANDRON: Sure.

LEVINE: How about being a child of survivors of the Holocaust, do you—can you talk a little bit about the impact of the Holocaust through your parents on you?

ANDRON: Sure. I always tell my husband that, you know, I have my little quirks and I know where they're coming from. They're coming from fears that my parents' had. I have my passport in my purse at all times, because—you know, it was funny. I went to buy an appliance at store down here called Brands Mart, and I was arranging to pay for it with a check, and the clerk was teasing. She said, "I need some form of ID. You know, your driver's license. Do you have a passport? I'll give you a pen." I said, "Here it is," and she said, "Nobody ever carries their passport." I do.

When my son was an infant, I made sure that he got his own passport. Nowadays—he's twenty. He'll be twenty-one in July and nowadays I think you have to get your social security number before you leave the hospital. They make you—at least in Miami they do. But

when he was a baby they didn't, and I didn't get my social security card until I was like thirteen or fourteen and I wanted to get working papers. But I made sure when he was nine months old that he had his social security card. I made sure when he was two he had his own passport with a separate picture with himself.

I always made sure that they were accessible. I didn't want them in a vault in the bank because what if we have to leave on a Sunday night? You know, as I say, I'm very grateful that I live in America, but there's always a part of me that's afraid that something could happen and it could happen in America. Nobody thought it could happen in Germany. Nobody thought it could happen in countries in Europe that considered themselves, you know, modern and twentieth century.

And I knew that it's coming from my parents and their fears, but I've been to—I've been to meetings of children of survivors. When I lived in North Carolina, I went to a meeting with survivors, liberators and children of survivors, and we formed a circle and the gentleman who was running the group was an American who had an interest in the Holocaust. He was a Reform Rabbi and he began going around, and it just so happened that I was the last person in the circle.

LEVINE: Okay, let's just pause here.

ANDRON: Okay.

LEVINE: I want to turn the tape over.

ANDRON: Great

END OF SIDE A
BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay, we're now resuming on Side B and you were the last one in the circle.

ANDRON: Right, I was the last one in the circle and as we went around, the liberators were happy to tell their stories, but the survivors kept saying, "Oh, we don't want to talk about it. It's painful. It's behind us. What's the point?" and I was getting very, very upset, and I was getting very angry. And by the time it got to me, I—there was a part of me, it was almost like I had lifted out of myself and I was watching myself do this, thinking to myself, "What are you doing? These poor people have suffered enough." I started screaming at them, and saying, "How dare you not tell me your stories because I have all these quirks." You know, I know I have certain insecurities and I know they're coming from somewhere and I know they're coming from the fact that my

parents were Holocaust survivors and they didn't tell me anything until I was in graduate school. And I started yelling at them and saying, "You have an obligation to people like me to tell us why we have these problems," and I was just yelling and screaming at them and they just looked at me like "This woman has gone ballistic. What's her problem?"

When I finally caught my breath and stopped, they started to speak and they started to tell their stories. Some of them were amazing. One woman was in a gas chamber with her mother. She was fourteen. Her mother was in her thirties and they heard an argument outside the gas chamber. The SS guards were arguing that there was a transport of old people that had just come in. They said, "How can you kill young people who can work, when we've got these old people." So they opened the doors. They let them all out and they put the old people in, and she and her mother survived. They both survived. It was an amazing story, and I can only imagine what that was like. Having been in a gas chamber this past April, when I visited Poland, and you stand there and you say, "I understand. I understand." My father's work at Mydunik was emptying these gas chambers, and putting the bodies in the crematoria. He helped build the crematoria. The chimney he actually built at Mydunik, and there I am standing at the site and saying, "I understand. I understand why I've got these fears."

I've overcome a lot of them and I think a lot of that has to do with growing up in America and feeling secure because even though we do have Neo Nazis in this country, there's no question. I came home from school about four months ago very depressed, and my husband said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, "I've come to the conclusion that I'm a racist," and he said, "You? A racist? You can't possibly be a racist." I said, "I'm White and I'm an American. That makes me a racist by definition," and he said, "No, that's not true." But it just seems like, you know, America has become so much more polarized and it pains me to see that, that people can't get along. That everything, like the OJ Simpson trial, everything boils down to a racial issue and this is—this is painful to me that, you know, someone that if a person is on trial, that there's a concern that if the jury, like the Rodney King thing, goes the wrong way, there'll be riots. Why does it have to be like that? Why can't we just measure people by their worth, you know, and what they do and just look at the facts objectively and make your decisions based on that. Why does anything have to be racial in this country?

It's not—it's not what this country's about. It's really not. This country is about freedom and opportunity and the interesting thing is, when it comes right down to voting, Americans always reject the—the racially extreme, you know. Usually, you know, they don't like to vote for legislators who have a reputation of say being, you know, in the

KKK or something like that. So when it counts, Americans will do the right thing, but this is very painful to me, and my husband said, “You are the last person on the planet to be a racist,” and yet I hope that’s true, and I hope that’s part of having been a child of the Holocaust because I grew up without grandparents.

When I visited Treblinka last year, I went to the Warsaw Stone. I didn’t think I would have any reaction at all, because I’ve seen pictures of Treblinka. It’s quite beautiful. It’s a park. I took one look at that stone at Warsaw and I fell apart. My reaction at that stone was worse than it was at Auschwitz because I didn’t feel like my family was at Auschwitz. My family was probably at Treblinka. Mydunik was very difficult for me because I was there where my father had been.

The wonderful thing about the whole experience was that we were there with four hundred teenagers. Actually, seven thousand from forty-two countries, but from South Florida, and they were the ones that supported me. I was there for them, and yet they were there for me, and it was really a very nice cross generational experience, but I never dreamed that I still carry the pain of growing up in Brooklyn in a non-Jewish neighborhood where most of my friends were Italian, who have huge extended families. And I thought the difference growing up, I thought the difference between Jewish children and the non-Jewish children was that, you know, if you ask some of the little ones now, they say, “Well, we have Hanukah, they have Christmas.” I thought the difference was they had grandparents. They had aunts and uncles. They had cousins, and none of the people I knew in this neighborhood who were also children of the survivors—we all came together—they didn’t have uncles and aunts. They didn’t have grandparents.

I found out as an older teenager that one of our close family friends, the parents were survivors and the children grew up together. We were all born in the same—we were all in the same DP camp. That their mother had had a husband and a daughter before the war and it was quite amazing, too, because she had two boys. And I tried to imagine what that was like, to visualize her with another man. Visualize her with a daughter. She never had girls. And her oldest son was drafted during the Vietnam War and he was sent to Vietnam and she wrote a letter, a very touching letter to Senator Javitz [PH]. At the time it was Senator Javitz [PH], and she said, “I lost a husband. I lost an infant daughter. I lost my parents. I lost my siblings. I lost everybody in the Holocaust. Now my son is in Vietnam. How much am I supposed to lose? How much am I supposed to sacrifice?” The next thing he knew, he got orders that transferred him to Hawaii, because Senator Javitz [PH] did not feel that this was—that this one soldier should be there, and he spent the rest of his service, three years’ worth, in Hawaii.

So you know, we do have these things inside us that—that I think Americans do—they want to understand. I do a lot of speaking in my classes about the Holocaust and as I say, I teach African American children, so they look up at me and say, "How could this happen?" you know, and I say, "Well, you know, the Nazis don't like Black people, either. They don't like—they didn't like anybody who was different from them. So chances are nobody in this room would have survived, either," and I always try to bring it home to them. I always end on a up note saying that my father did not participate, even though he was invited to participate, in the 1936 Olympics. He was supposed to be on the Polish Olympic Soccer Team, and he didn't want to go to Berlin because that would honor Hitler. And Hitler was convinced that his race of Arian supermen would, you know, win all the gold medals and I say, "But there was an American who ran that year, and he broke all the records, and he was an African American, and his name was Jesse Owens," and their faces like light up. Like we all have this bond.

We all have this connection and it's interesting because the President spoke about it in his inaugural speech just this year. He said that our differences—our diversity is our strength, and this is true. Absolutely true. Whereas, Hitler referred to the United States as a mongrel nation because we're all mixed up, but it's because of our ethnic mix that I think makes us generous of spirit, and when it comes right down to it, we won't vote for the racist. You know, a few places will and they'll continue to do it, but for the important things they don't. They don't vote for the extremes. They're always voting, you know, more for the moderate guy because Americans don't like it. They don't like it. There's a very live and let live attitude in this country and I think that's good.

LEVINE: How about your parents? First of all, the name of the ship, you had mentioned.

ANDRON: I don't remember the name of the ship. It was something like the General Batchelder, something like that. I remember as I was growing up that it sounded like bachelor, but it wasn't. But it was something like that and it was named after a general. So I know it wasn't the General Eisenhower, that I would have remembered. But, you know, as a child, especially when your parents speak with an accent, sometimes they're mispronouncing it and then you hear it differently. It's like a game of telephone. But it was something like that. The General Batch—something like that.

LEVINE: I can look that up, actually. That would be interesting.

ANDRON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember your parents talking about the displaced person camp?

ANDRON: No.

LEVINE: At all?

ANDRON: No. They never—they never talked about really anything with us. It wasn't until I was old enough and I was saying to them "I remember that there was a grocery store with—that had salamis hanging on it," and I would stare at the salamis and watch it swing and the German man who owned it thought I was hungry. So he cut off a piece and offered it to me, and I panicked because I wasn't hungry. I was—I liked to watch them because I thought they were fascinating. Then after that I never went back because I was embarrassed. I was afraid he was going to try to approach me again.

I would describe where my mom bought her pots. There was a truck that came to town with a—or into the compound with a canvas back and he rolled it up and she bought these red enamel pots. They were burgundy, actually, and she said, "You can't remember that. You were two," and I said, "Did it happen?" She'd say, "Yeah, it happened," you know, because I remember being very frightened because all the women were, you know, crowing around. They wanted to see what he had, so I grabbed onto my mother's leg and I sat on her foot and I just held on for dear life.

But they were two-story buildings. They were not wooden barracks like you visualize in the movies. They had ivy on the sides. I do remember very clearly, and this was something that I carried with me until about four years ago. I have not seen the volcano movies yet, Dante's Peak or—because for many years, I had this phobic terror of volcanoes which is very bizarre, growing up in Brooklyn. Mount St. Helene's erupted, I was like freaking out. "We have to leave America. There are volcanoes in America. We have to leave." And then my husband and I took a hypnosis class where they deal with a lot of these phobias and it comes from my experience in the DP camp, where there were huge craters around from bombings. We used to—my sister and I used to stand at the edge of these craters and we used to look in and we'd watch because there were rats running around. I used to call them "catella," [PH] which means kitten because I thought, you know, "Aren't they cute? Little furry animals," and of course they're not cute.

And the buildings themselves had hallways and the rooms were like, you know, because it was a two-story thing—it was like an officer's barracks, so each one had their own room. But at night we used to close the doors because the rats would just run through the halls, and I would peak out and say, "Catella, catella." And my mother

told us that we must never, ever, ever play near the craters because we'd fall in and we would be lost forever. We would never be found again, and she did that obviously because she was worried for our safety, but wording it that way and as I—once we were in America, I remember seeing a PBS program on—I was very young at the time. I was about six or seven, on Pompeii and the volcano and that very same week there was a glass factory, a lamp factory on the corner of the block where we lived that went up in flames and we had to evacuate our apartment. It was a Friday night and we were watching the flames shoot up and for some reason, everything kind of merged together in my psyche. This pit with the rats in it, this program about volcanoes, the flames shooting out of this factory, and I developed this phobia. Every time from that age, from the time I was six or seven, I would say until I was—we took this workshop three years ago. So that's a lot of years because I'm turning fifty this year. That's a lot of years and I had this phobia of volcanoes, which was completely irrational. So now I felt like that in session, that hypnotic session, I blew it off. So now I have to go see Dante's Peak and see if I have a nightmare, but every time I'd have a bad day or I was under stress or something, I'd have a volcano dream and it would be terrifying. Wake me up in a sweat in the middle of the night. So now I said to my husband, "I'm ready to go to Hawaii. I'm ready to visit Japan, and I'll start by going to see one of these volcano movies."

But that's what—those were my earliest recollections of the DP camp, but my parents never talked about anything. I didn't hear stories about the Holocaust until a professor from Bennington College came to interview my father. He was writing a book on the Warsaw ghetto uprising and I happened to be there that Sunday morning. I was in graduate school and my father told these stories, and I had the same reaction. I looked at him and said, "Why didn't you ever tell me this? Why didn't we know?" When I was a child, he would wake up sometimes and he would—you'd hear him scream. You'd wake up and the next day I'd hear him talking to my mother, "I had a dream Hitler was chasing me," and I knew that these were nightmares, perpetual nightmares that were residual from the Holocaust, but I didn't know why. I didn't know—as a child I imagined this man, Hitler, whom I'd seen in pictures, with a gun shooting his family, when he said, "Hitler killed my family." You know, I didn't imagine this whole killing machine, this whole organization that was devoted to this. It's very hard to fathom, even as an adult. Even as an adult.

LEVINE: Are there other attitudes that your mother and father passed along to you, not necessarily linking them to their experiences in the Holocaust, but just ways of living that they wanted you to—

ANDRON: Well, there was always a fear of authority. You always had to—one, you had to get an education. It didn't matter what you decided to be, if you have an education, you have more options. They always felt that way. So even though they had both gone to trade schools and they had learned crafts, their formal education ended like in sixth grade and then they went into these other programs, we had to go to college. We had no choice. I do that with my son. I did that with my son. My son wants to be a film maker and he was in a film conservatory for two years. Actually, for a year and a half, and then he transferred to a university because I said, "You have to get a Bachelor's." So he's majoring in film at a university, but this—and he knew. He knew from the time he was a baby that he's got to get an education because once you do that, you become the authority figure and that makes it easier. But my parents always had difficulty in asserting themselves with physicians, clerks at, you know, bureaucrats. The Motor Vehicles Bureau and things like that,.

And for a long time I had those problems, too, and then, you know, you grow up and you—and you get your education and then you—you go into certain—like I had done analysis for three years, where I learned about myself and the fears that I had. Fears of loss, fears of authority, things like that. In the day to day, that really affects you more than the big stuff. You know, yeah, I carry my passport, but it's quite different to have to deal with a check out a clerk or a sales lady who, you know, feels a little on the superior side. Those day-to-day things, dealing with an administrator in any capacity. My husband always teases me. He says, "You know, come on. Make that phone call, you know. Stand up for yourself." I said, "I did," and he—now, in middle age I'm starting to, but the beginning of our marriage and a good part of my son's growing up, I still would behave timidly with authority figures. And that is problematic. I don't do it so much anymore, but I'm getting into that—what is it? They call it the crone stage where I can say and do whatever I want. Be myself, you know.

Thank goodness, too, for the women's liberation movement because that helps, too. That helps, too.

LEVINE: Your husband, what is his name?

ANDRON: His name is Michael Andron, right.

LEVINE: And did he have any connections with the Holocaust himself?

ANDRON: No, he's quite interesting, actually. He is—he was brought up in an Orthodox Jewish family and being a child of the Holocaust, everyone I knew who was Orthodox, had accents. Americans didn't. They assimilated. His family was—he was from a very prominent Rabbinic family that came here. He had branches of his family that were here

before the Civil War. His grandmother was born in America, and yet they stayed religious, and I never knew—I never knew Jews like this. I never knew Orthodox religious Jews who were Americans, who were Americans for five generations. And there must have been family that perished because everybody had family. If you were Jewish in America, you had family that perished in the Holocaust, but it was not immediate family. And culturally this was difficult because he couldn't' understand why I would say, "Michael, you make the phone call." This would drive him crazy sometimes and his parents and my parents never—you know, sometimes the in-laws socialize. They never did. They had nothing in common with each other. My in-laws were very American. Very American. Orthodox Jewish American, but very American and my parents were the greenhorns.

You know, they always called the 'greenah," [PH] the greenhorns, and I remember once I was about four and a half years old. It was summertime and I was sitting on my dad's lap out in front of the apartment buildings, the way they used to do in Brooklyn on beach chairs. And I was sitting in his lap and everybody was talking and they said, "greenah," and I said, "When am I going to be yellow?" I didn't want to be green. I wanted to be yellow, but my husband's family wasn't even yellow. They were red, white and blue. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Well, that's interesting that persisted because "greenah" was something that was used early on with immigrants.

ANDRON: Really? Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, and the funny thing is my son now is very seriously dating a girl, whom he will probably marry, whose parents are from Columbia. Different wave of immigration, and she did not speak English until she went—she was born—her parents immigrated to the United States two weeks before she was born. I think that was timed so that their children would be born in America and she was—she spoke Spanish only until she was in kindergarten and then she learned English. So even though she speaks English without an accent, there's a Hispanic lilt to it, you know. And her sisters, too. It's very interesting, and when they answer the phone, they say, "Allo," and while we get along with her parents and know them well and socialize and things like this because they—they are active in the school where we run the theater program and so on. So it's a connection not just through our children, but you know, through the community that we're in, but it's a different culture. It's a different culture and there's certain things that my husband and I look at sometimes and say, "Well, that's the Latin culture, you know, that the boys don't need chaperones, but the girls do." Or the boys, you know, they can—they can fool around and they can, you know, have a million girlfriends and stuff, but the girl has to be very sheltered, and she has to help out with the chores at home, but a boy doesn't. A boy has to

be waited on hand and foot. So it's a very different—a very different culture and I see, while this is to a much lesser extent with us, how much more so it must have been with my parents and my in-laws because they were just worlds apart. Absolutely worlds apart.

And my parents were brought up in Eastern Europe, which means that the only brand of Judaism they grew up with was Orthodox, but their practice was Secular. So they were the religious American Jews and here were my parents who were Secular Eastern European Jews, but whose training had been in ultra, ultra, ultra Orthodoxy compared to the American branch where everything was much more liberal. Even among the Orthodox community, you know, the sermon is delivered in English and, you know, there are English things that go on in the synagogues. That never occurred. The vernacular, the—even Polish. Polish was never used, or Romanian ever used in my parents' growing up experience. It was everything was either Hebrew or translated into Yiddish. They never used the secular language of the country that they lived in, whereas in America they do. English is absolutely used in every Orthodox schul [PH] that I've ever been to.

LEVINE: And were you—were you raised as religious Jew?

ANDRON: I was brought up schizophrenic. [Laughs] Actually. My brother was sent to a very, very right wing ultra Orthodox yeshiva, for elementary school, whereas my sister and I went to public school. But then we went to an after school program that was Hassidic. It was Farmer, from the Fatmir [PH] Hassidim because that's what was in our neighborhood, but it was certain odd things. My father, even when, you know, money was really, really tight and we—because we were poor. We were immigrants. There was no question about it. He would never take overtime that required him to work on Saturday. So we always had our nice meal, Saturday lunch. You know, when I came home from school on Friday, everything was prepared for the Sabbath. You know, the floor was waxed. You walked in the house and it smelled like chicken soup and floor wax, and the *Jewish Daily Forward*, which was the Yiddish language paper, the old copies of it were spread out on the floor, so that we wouldn't mess up the floor wax on the linoleum. And, you know, so there was a Sabbath feeling, a Shavaz [PH] feeling to the house. We were not permitted to play cards or sew or knit or crochet or anything like that on the Sabbath, but we could go to the movies, which was schizophrenic.

My mother only bought kosher meat. She never mixed meat and milk, but she had one set of dishes. Whereas, in a kosher home you would have two. So it was very typically eastern—

LEVINE: [unclear]

ANDRON: It was very typically Eastern European because it was the way they were brought up. My father, actually once tried a Conservative service. He didn't—he couldn't relate to it. He didn't know what—he said, "They left this out," and he couldn't relate to it, and the kinds of places, the kinds of synagogues he preferred going to were the ones where they were still using Yiddish as the vernacular, as opposed to English. So when I met my husband, it's funny because I knew—I knew how to keep a kosher home, which I just didn't do it. And I knew how the Sabbath was supposed to be observed, but when I went to speak my husband's rabbi, he said, "Who's going to teach you how to do this? Your mother-in-law?" I said, "I know how to do it." So there was a real schizophrenic quality to it, and I have found, because now we are an Orthodox Jewish family, a modern Orthodox family. I don't wear a wig. I wear pants. My son is going to be a film-maker—how that worked out, I don't know, but I do feel that it was very easy for me to embrace the spirituality of the Sabbath and of the Jewish ritual, because I was very fortunate in that my husband is a very spiritual person. More spiritual—I hate the term Orthodox in religious observance. While we are observant in our practice, we are spiritual in our heart. There are lots of people who are observant, but who—you know, who are very left-brain, who are very intellectual about it. We tend to more from a mystical, spiritual side. My husband teachers classed in Kabala, so I've learned from him actually more than anything else. So that's how I got to be where I am,

But my sister and brother are not religious at all, and, you know, they kind of look at me like, "You really like living like this?" I said, "Yeah, I really like living like this." One day a week I can say, "The world can't touch me. The world can't touch me," but I tend to be a Universalist. You know, I believe that the Orthodox and Conservative and Reform movements need to build bridges to each other. I don't like the fact that they—you know, there's a lot of barriers between poverty, you know, action that they can take. You know, a united front and confronting certain problems that ever community has, you know, whether it's child abuse or AIDS or anything, and I feel that every group is like so fragmented. We could work together and we don't. So I try to bridge the gap in my personal life, in my personal practices.

LEVINE: Okay, I think—let me ask one quick last question. Is there anything else you recall about the HIAS and how they were instrumental in your family and others coming?

ANDRON: I do remember that they got my father a job. That was right away. They did give us—you know, they did help us find the apartment. They did give us that. We lived there at the Astor Library for three weeks and they clothed us. They—

END OF INTERVIEW