

NPS-95/MERNOFF

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ELLEN MERNOFF

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RUSSIA, 1905

AGE 9

PASSAGE ON "THE RYNDAM"

NASH: Today is April 30, 1975. I am visiting with Mrs. Ellen Mernoff who came to the United States at the age of nine in the year 1905.

MERNOFF: About.

NASH: There about. Shortly after that time, she was awarded a special medal by the State of New York for an essay, and it was remarkable that she received that, as it was only a few years after she even arrived. Well, you say you are not certain about the date of your arrival. Why is that?

MERNOFF: Yes, I am not even certain about the day of my birth because in the little town where I was born, that was Lunum, at Grudina Gabarnia, records were not kept, especially of Jewish families, and there were no hospital births ever.

Women gave birth in their own homes, sometimes attended by their family or a neighbor, and therefore I am not certain, but as I can make out, I have tried very hard with the aid of my parents and older siblings, to find out what year. It seems that we all agree that it was July 4th, 1896.

NASH:That you were born?

MERNOFF:That I was born. I had three brothers and one sister. In other words, we were five children and my parents. We occupied a very large home consisting of about eight by ten room where we all felt very, very homey and comfortable. The only heat we had was from the oven where my mother cooked. We had a cleanly swept earthen floor, and on the Sabbath my mother usually sprinkled sawdust, and I thought that was the height of luxury. my mother worked very, very hard because my father had gone to this country, left for america, trying to earn enough money to bring his family across because of two very important reasons. The state of affairs as far as pogroms, anti-Semites, were most unbearable. Our lives were constantly in danger. Our home was broken into by drunken soldiers. They demanded vodka, which we did not have and

we tried to explain that the reason we did not have it is because we had no man in the house and there was no need for it, and they were greatly aggravated by this answer and they were ready to use their spears and they were very close to our bodies when somehow I slipped out unnoticed and spread the alarm, and our neighbors came in and rescued us from almost certain death.

NASH:How did they rescue you?

MERNOFF:Well, they, our neighbors, were a wealthier couple, wealthy couple, and they promised to give them all the liquor they wanted if they could come into their home and just put down their weapons, and they did, they called them off.

NASH:How old were you at that time?

MERNOFF:At that time I must have been about five. And there was another very harrowing experience that I had. When I was only about four-and-a-half or five, I was coming home at dusk from Hebrew School and I had to cross a bridge. It was quite a distance from my home, and as I was getting onto the bridge, a soldier accosted me and with his spear almost, almost close to my body, he threatened me if I

didn't halt, but instead I had the presence of mind to keep running, and I ran, I outran him because he was under the influence of liquor and he was sort of weaving and I made a straight line and just barely reached my home when my mother saw me through the window and she reached out to me and grabbed me and we bolted our doors. And this happened time and again. We were constantly threatened. And being in the minority, some of the non-Jewish people were very unfriendly. Some were very friendly. As a matter of fact, a lot of them shielded us. My mother did sewing for the peasants, for these people, and she was very good to them. she gave them anything they wanted for whatever they could pay, so she did her sewing during the nights. I remember my mother undressing to go to bed only once a week. That was Friday night for the Sabbath. She never worked Friday night or the Sabbath the rest of the time. She did sewing during the night so that she had her days free to do dying of yarn for spinning for the peasants. So between my mother's earnings and my father's meager earnings --he worked in a sweat shop --and instead of renting a place to live, to sleep, he slept in the shop and he did double duty, so he was a watchman at night and he slept on whatever he could find, old mattresses and rags, until he saved

up enough money to bring my sister across, to give her an opportunity at the age of thirteen, to get a little education. This seemed to obsess my parents, the idea of an education for their children, and it was their greatest hope that we could come to America where education was free. you see, there was a quota for Jews in Russia, and only one of so many, and that was the upper class usually, who was accepted in the public school. So, we finally, finally managed, at least my parents managed to accumulate enough to bring the rest of us, that is my mother and the rest of the four children.

NASH: Tell me something about your education in Russia.

MERNOFF: In Russia the only education I had was a little Hebrew.

I could read and write Hebrew and Yiddish, and the rest was not available.

NASH: Did you ever speak Russian?

MERNOFF: I spoke a little Russian. I still remember a little bit, but I really did not speak it fluently because, you know, we lived mostly a ghetto life, see, amongst the Jews, with mostly Jewish people, so I never learned Russian too well,

but I did go to school here and I did take a course in Russian and I learned a little bit more, tried to brush up on Russian, but it is a difficult language. But I can still read and write Hebrew and Yiddish. And then when we came here, of course, we took to the schooling like ducks take to water. We were just so starved for learning that I went through elementary school in about four or four-and-a-half years. I don't remember whether it was four or four-and-a-half years and I was always considered a top student.

NASH:Well, I would like to go back to the trip. do you remember when you left?

MERNOFF:Yes, I remember when we left and it was about 1905. We, of course, did not travel in grand style. My mother sold all of her little valuables, her little antique jewelry that my father had given her, even the candlesticks that are very valuable to the Jewish housewife, in order to have enough to subsist for the duration of the voyage because we did not eat non-kosher food so we had to provide for that, so we bought bread and little things like that, herring, whatever we were allowed to eat, my mother exchanged all her valuables for this. But the trip took

so long that before we even got on the ship we ran out of supplies. And I do remember we stayed over waiting for our boat in Rotterdam. We stayed over, it must have been about four or five days, or maybe six or seven, and my brother, who was then thirteen, you see he was the oldest after my sister had left. He was thirteen, and he took his younger brother, our younger brother who was two years younger, eleven, and they used to go to the docks and carry luggage for passengers in order to get, you know, for the little tips, and in that way we bought new, fresh supplies like an orange, an apple, a little fruit and things, luxuries. And, of course, the voyage was a difficult one because we were all crowded together in what looked like one huge shelf with just little partitions in between, and the stench from the poor people vomiting, especially the older people found it hard to take. We youngsters took the voyage a lot better. We were able to get out on deck and then we did a little service by bringing water to these people who were so uncomfortable, lying there in that terrible, terrible stench all the way down in steerage. Occasionally, one of the passengers from first or second class used to throw down an orange or a banana to us or little luxuries from their table. They traveled in better style, of course. But our voyage was a very

difficult one, it was very difficult, and we ran into some very, very heavy storms, and not being able to stand the atmosphere down below, we youngsters used to try to stay aboard ship and there were times when we had to hold on so as not to be washed overboard. So, we finally made it.

NASH:And what was the name of the ship?

MERNOFF:The Ryndam. We arrived in Ellis Island, and oh, before that I must tell you the sight of the lady holding the torch was the most excitable thing, most rewarding experience in our lives. I said, "This is America where we are at last free of pogroms, free of hardships," and a feeling of knowing that the family will be together. It was a wonderful feeling. And then we got into Ellis Island and, of course, went through the regular procedure of examinations, bodily examination. Doctors were very, very careful about condition of the eyes.

NASH:Can you describe as much as you remember of that process? What happened to you when you actually, your boat docked at Ellis Island or did it dock in New York and you had to take a ferry to Ellis Island?

MERNOFF: We took a ferry, yes, we took a ferry now that you remind me. We did take a ferry to Ellis Island, yes. And there we were cleansed, we were bathed and our hair was carefully examined. Fortunately for our family, my mother, in spite of all her hard work, was an immaculate and a most devoted mother, most devoted parents we had. she kept us very, very clean so we had no great problem. Of course, it was a problem wanting to get out to see, to get to see our father who we knew was waiting. My sister couldn't afford to take time out between school and work. she couldn't meet us at the ship. But we were treated very humanly in Ellis Island. They did what they had to do, and then we were released and finally we saw our father. Well, it was seven years since I saw him. He was gone seven years before we came, and I could hardly recognize him, but he made himself known to us. And I said, "Well, that God, we are in America." And I remember boarding the elevated train. It has long since been torn down. And that was quite an experience for us. And we were taken to our uncle's home, my father's brother's home. My father had not succeeded in finding a suitable apartment for us, and then he thought it might be better if he had my mother with him to help him search for a suitable living

quarters, and we stayed with these relatives for about a week and then they found an apartment on East Sixth Street and Avenue D, and we thought this was a palatial home.

we actually had wooden floors and we had a bathroom in the hall which we never had before. And this really was heaven. The only thing that made me, as a child, unhappy was the fact that I couldn't say, "Oh, let's go upstairs," as soon as I learned a few words. I heard my friends say, "We are going upstairs," and I thought, "Well, this is the height of luxury." to be able to go up. We had never been up.

NASH:This was on the ground floor?

MERNOFF:Yes, this was on the ground floor. However, we were very, very happy in that little one-bedroom house. Before long we brought across relatives who shared this little apartment with us, the one-bedroom apartment, and beside relatives, one or two boarders to help maintain this little apartment.

NASH:I wanted to ask you, before your father came were there many people who left from your town to go to the United States? Were there many, many people?

MERNOFF:Yes, there were many who were fortunate to have the means to come, who had relatives who could help them to pay their way across. As a matter of fact, we did not even have the means to take the journey to the boat, to cross the border. It takes money.

NASH:You had to pay?

MERNOFF:You had to pay, yes. There were always people who acted as agents, and for a little less money they would sneak you across, and that was a horrible experience because this had to be done during the night and here, there was my mother and four little ones trailing after her and walking through the woods. Running, not walking, and in constant fear of having somebody stop us and send us back. But fortunately, we made it. We did not travel in good style. That I can assure you.

NASH:What happened when you got across the border? What border was that? Was that Rumania?

MERNOFF:No, no, that was Holland.

NASH:In other words, you were going from which country to which country?

MERNOFF:From Russia to Holland, through Poland.

NASH:Does Holland have a border with Poland?

?:I think so, I don't know. Well anyhow, they landed in Holland.

MERNOFF:In Holland, in rotterdam, yes.

NASH:How did you get there? Did you go there by train, railroad/

MERNOFF:Yes, we went by train. We went by train part of the way, part of the way by truck. You see, we had these people show us the way. They were supposed to know, well, everything about America and knew their way around, knew the back roads. And, as a matter of fact, while traveling they told us wild tales about America being, the streets being paved with gold and oh, we children were so fascinated. However, in our hearts we felt that anything, anything is better than what we were leaving behind.

NASH;I would like to ask you about the borders. I mean I know that that must have been an institution at that time. What was it like to have a border? How did you find your border?

MERNOFF:How did we find the border? Well, this man led us and we just, you mean the border that we had to cross?

NASH:No, no, no, no. I didn't mean that border. No, I meant the boarder. Now I am going to where you lived in the Lower East Side. How did you find the boarder, your star boarder, your boarder?

MERNOFF:Oh, my star boarders. Well, usually people recommend one another. you know, the people who are planning to come to America get in touch with relatives of those already across and they are recommended. And then those people, those boarders, become part of the family. They really become part of the family. So my mother, instead of cooking for seven, cooked for about ten, eleven, and our living room during the day seemed fairly normal, but at night out came little couches and little cots, all sorts of little cots, and in between some slept on the floor, and I do remember sleeping three in a bed. But we never thought that we were underprivileged. We never had that

feeling of being underprivileged. We were so grateful for what we had, and even in Russia, actually we never felt underprivileged either, or denied. Now we used to get a pair of shoes once a year. Well, those shoes were kept locked up in the trunk and they were used to go out.

You know, you take a walk with the family, my mother dressed beautifully and she dressed us beautifully because she could sew so magnificently, and everybody used to envy us and say, "There goes Sarah, proud Sarah with her wonderful family," because she was able to do those things herself. But as far as living quarters, as I tell you, we knew most of our neighbors had beautiful homes. I do remember going to a neighbor, Minuka was her name, I can still remember. She had a large brewery and I used to love to go there occasionally on her grounds. You know, we were allowed to visit in order to pick up pieces of orange peel and smell it. That is the closest we ever got to an orange, but it was such a rarity, and to us it was the height of luxury yet we did not envy her because she had all that and she had servants, but we thought we were lucky we could come and see these things and smell these things. It was so wonderful. And when she would call us into her house, we used to admire her beautiful silver. But then when we would come home and look at my

mother's candlesticks which, by the way, these were the ones my father bought for her that are an exact duplicate of the ones that she sold before we moved. I used to admire ours and I used to think our home was palatial because it was always so spotless. I remember we had one bed, there was one bed that my father and mother had, and when my father left the country, naturally a few children slept with her in this bed, and there was always a bedspread that was beautifully ironed with those --do you remember the curling irons that we used to use years ago for the hair, she used to iron the ruffles with that. Everything was done so magnificently. She was such a, well, she was artist. And she used to sit and sing at her work. And so we had, actually, we had a good home life. When we were running short of food, my mother would tell us, she would not frighten us, not say, "Look, there won't be anything for dinner." she said, "I would advise you children to go out and catch some fish." And we all went fishing. we had a river running through our town in Lunum, there was a river, and it was full of fish. so, we used to go fishing. The little three-year-old went overboard and he was going down for the third time when my oldest brother grabbed him and pulled him back into the boat, and I was wiping his cap and his coat so my mother wouldn't

be worried when she saw him dripping. so, we managed, and we used to go picking mushrooms and berries of all kinds, so we never went hungry. We were very resourceful because my mother was resourceful, and she encouraged it without making us feel that we were poverty-stricken. And we just did not feel poverty-stricken.

NASH:Well, in returning to the Lower East Side again, well, we were talking about the boarders. Well, tell me something about the Lower East Side. What school did you go to?

MERNOFF:Public School 15 on Fourth Street and Avenue C, I think C and D.

NASH:What was that experience like?

MERNOFF:It was a marvelous experience. It was very rewarding. We came to this country in the spring just before Passover, so we actually did not get into school until September. By September all of us children spoke English fluently. Of course, the first word my brother learned was, "Get out of here," because that's what he heard in the streets. But we learned to speak fluently and, of course, all of us were good students. I happened to be the best, so I

skipped from the first grade into the third, the third to fifth, the fifth to the sixth, seventh. I was out in no time and I graduated and went to high school. But I could not complete my high school because I felt my earnings were needed because we had, see, my sister worked as a milliner. The earnings were very small, very meager, and my father got sick so his earnings were cut off completely. He was very sick, he was hospitalized for years. Then my oldest brother got a smattering of education. I think he had to quit in his, I think in the fourth or fifth grade. My brother who is two years older than I am went just about a year more --that is, as I said, my sister was working as a milliner, but all the rest of us were going to school, sold newspaper in seventh Street Park, Seventh Street and . . .

NASH:Thompkins Square Park?

MERNOFF:Thompkins Square Park, and I was the runner. I used to go run down to the newspaper office on east Broadway for the later editions, and then I supplied them with the newspapers. They used to carry stacks. I was that big. And then when I saw that the newspapers were not selling

as fast as they should, I found myself another corner of the park and I stood there yelling, "Morning Journal",

NASH:Not the Forward?

MERNOFF:Yes, Forward , yes, all the newspapers.

NASH:What about English-speaking newspapers?

MERNOFF:No, Journal, we sold the Journal, yes.

NASH:Why is it that you sold Yiddish newspapers? In that area people didn't buy English language?

MERNOFF:That's right, it was all Jewish speaking. And in between my brothers did other things. They shined shoes, and at that time there was sort of a racket. They used to stand on a corner with a scale and weigh people for a penny. You paid a penny and you got your weight.

NASH:And why was that a racket?

MERNOFF:Well, actually it was not a racket, but it was a common sight at that time. That's what it was. It was a common thing.

All immigrants did more or less the same depending on their situation. So, that was all during the time my father was sick and we just had to supplement my sister's income, my sister's earnings, and after all, what the boarders paid barely covered their food, their own food.

Nobody took advantage of anyone. You know, you protected. Of course, the relatives paid nothing. Later on when they were able to get work, they started to pay a little bit toward the food, but our income was very meager.

NASH:How many years did you have relatives living with you?

MERNOFF:We had about six years, about six years, and some relatives of my mother, we brought my mother's nieces, two nieces stayed with us until they were married. They remained, they were part of the family.

NASH:And how many rooms did you have? You were still at East Sixth Street?

MERNOFF:Yes, that was East Sixth Street. Then we moved to Stanton Street where we also had only one bedroom, but the rooms were a little bit larger.

NASH:How many people were living in a one-bedroom apartment?

MERNOFF:In a one-bedroom apartment, well, there were seven of us and at times there were three outsiders, sometimes there were five. You know, it depended. So some of the non-relatives stayed a short time, then they got better living quarters as their situation improved.

NASH:It is hard to visualize how you could have ten people . . .

MERNOFF:You would be surprised how you can manage if you want to. We would take what they called --do you know what a is? That is like an oversized pillow. Put that down on the floor and three or four of us would sleep on that. We didn't think that that was a punishment. That was perfectly alright. Of course, there was very little privacy. We had no bathtub, of course, so we bather in the tub. And that was sort of a hardship because we had to try to do it when we had privacy, see. So we had to get that in when the men were out of the house, you know. But, we were clean, we managed, but I do want to point out that when we got off the ship, we were met by a group of people from the , I think it was HIAS, who helped us

the first Passover. As I said, we arrived just before Passover. They sent in matzo and wine and gave us some money. We applied for no help at any time, but I think that this organization made it their business to find out the condition of the people that are coming in. Jews take care of their own, and we never went for help anywhere.

But, in order to furnish our beautiful three-room apartment, some of our relatives who had been here for some time did help us. One gave us a chair and the other one a table.

NASH:

MERNOFF: On Sixth Street they gave us some. We already had some furniture there and some cots and things like that. The necessities. Had no icebox yet. After we got rich we got an icebox, but, and this, I think it was the HIAS.

I have been trying to find out, but I am quite sure it was the HIAS who found that we were in need and when the winter came, they sent in coal, so we did get some help.

But we never applied for help. And let me see now, what else would be of interest to you. And from there, from Stanton Street, as I started to work and I did fairly well, held down a pretty good job.

NASH:Doing what?

MERNOFF:Well, first after I left, see I was taking a general course in high school, but when i found I couldn't make it, so I left and I took a commercial course at night and during the summer, steno and typing, and I got a job and from there I worked into very, very good positions later on. I became the first woman chemical broker. I worked for a firm who was in the egg business and then developed into chemicals and I kept my eyes open and my ears open and instead of going out to lunch like the rest of them did, I used to bring along a little sandwich and I don't know what else I had to drink outside of water, but I sat down at the phone and I kept snooping around, I found out who needs what in the line of chemicals and before long I became the first woman broker and my boss said, "Well, now you'd better get yourself a secretary, and all I want you to do for the salary I am paying you is take care of the cash book and the checkbook, and the rest of the time you spend doing the work that you are doing," and he offered me a commission.

NASH:How old were you when you became the broker, the chemical broker?

MERNOFF:Oh, at that time I was already about twenty, about nineteen.

Nineteen, twenty, I was married at twenty-one. No, I was less than that. I was about eighteen, and I did very well. But it was always my regret that I could not get a college education, although I was taking courses in college. I was taking courses right along, went to school at night and I did a little writing. I had what they considered a little ability to write, so I was encouraged to go into it more seriously, so I took a course in writing in the high school in the evening and then I went to the New School on Thirteenth Street.

NASH:When did you go to the New School?

MERNOFF:Much later. Yes, yes, since I was married, of yes. but I tried to keep up with my studies, but it is still a painful feeling for me not to have achieved the things that I had hoped to achieve. But, I mean scholastically, but I will tell you, the only one in the family whom we concentrated on is my youngest brother. He was two years younger than I and that's why I felt if I stepped out of school and contributed some money toward the home, he could get a college education, and he did. So that was a

satisfaction. He was the only one that was able to make it. He died three years ago. he was an engineer. But, well, I don't know what else you would be interested in.

NASH:Well, tell me something about your mother. How did she, did she learn English eventually?

MERNOFF:Yes, my mother learned English, but she spoke it with a decided Yiddish accent, and we tried to encourage her to speak more English, but she was a little self-conscious, but with her it was a mixture of English and Yiddish. but she spoke Russian fluently and she had studied Hebrew quite thoroughly, and she was an artist from head to toe. If she had had the opportunity, she would have turned out to be a very wonderful, well, she was a wonderful person, but without any formal education except in Hebrew, because she came from a very poor family. That is she lost her father when she was very, very young and they lived on the dorf, you know what a dorf is?

NASH:That's a Jewish ?

MERNOFF:No, no, no, no, that is a, out in a village, in a small village. And she came from a family of artists. Her

brother who was a few years younger than she died at the age of about eighty-five. He was both a Rabbi, an artist, a painter, a composer, a music composer, and a writer.

And a younger brother who was highly educated too. she came from a highly cultured family, though they were poor.

NASH:. . . Stanton Street.

MERNOFF:Oh, from Stanton Street we moved to Metropolitan Avenue where we had a large apartment. we had three bedrooms.

NASH:You moved to Metropolitan Avenue from there.

MERNOFF:No, I mean in Metropolitan Avenue we had three bedrooms, we had an indoor bathroom, and we had wooden floors, and we live up --I finally got my wish to go up --and we lived on the fifth floor. It was quite a climb for my mother, but it delighted us children to go upstairs. And at that time we didn't have any outside boarders anymore. We only had my mother's two nieces living with us. And then one of the nieces did leave us to go to live with another relative, with the uncle, the one that I described to you as the artist, and it was only the one cousin that lived with us. I slept with her. We shared a bed. And it was

there at that time my father had already regained his health to a certain extent and he was working and all the rest of us were working and we lived quite, quite nicely. We thought we were really in the chips.

NASH;What did your father do at that point?

MERNOFF:Well, you see, my father as a young man had a very, very bad accident, frightful accident where a horse stepped on him and almost mauled him, and he was crippled and he was in bed for about seven years. That was in Europe when he was a young man. So he could not learn a trade so he had to do menial work there. He got a job in a tobacco factory as a tobacconist making cigarettes, which paid very, very little, and when he came to this country there was no need for that kind of work so he really had to take anything, anything he could get. And it was sweat shop work. He used to carry packs on his back, and as I said, and sleep on the rags at night, and he skimped and saved. Now, afterwards, after a few years after he got out of the hospital here, he was in Gubineer Hospital for a long, long time. We used to visit him. He got a job as a weaver. A nephew of his had a knitting mill and his nephew taught him the knitting so he took care of a machine and he got

a living wage. it was, wages were very, very small, however, the cost of living was comparable. That too was small. But by this time we were all, you know, able to earn a little. Well, we always worked, we always worked.

We never took vacations. vacation was a time for earning more money, and there wasn't a lazy one amongst us and we did alright. And then from Metropolitan Avenue we moved to Hart Street to parlor floor basement house. Then my sister got married. She took the upper apartment, we had the parlor floor basement. My cousin was still with us. My mother married her off later on, after I got married, and we lived comfortable. We lived very comfortable.

NASH:And did you ever become a citizen?

MERNOFF:Well, I'll tell you. I became a citizen when i married my husband. See, at that time, of course, now you have your own citizenship.

NASH:Yes, right.

MERNOFF;That's out, so when I married my husband I became a citizen
Well, what else would you like to know?

NASH:Well, I wanted to know about your conflicts, about becoming an American and how you felt about that and how did your mother and father feel about that.

MERNOFF:Well, we were very proud of the fact that we were Americans, very, very proud and very, well, we felt completely fulfilled. We appreciated everything, every opportunity that we got. And I'll tell you. Do you know how we spent Saturdays when we were all free from school? My mother, as I say, she was very artistic and appreciated culture. she couldn't afford to take us to places where you pay, but we managed car fare and she used to take us, Peter Cooper . . .

NASH:Cooper

MERNOFF:No, no. Peter Cooper, there was a department store. It was . . .

NASH:John Wanamaker.

MERNOFF:And there was John Wanamaker. They used to have . . .

?:Organ recitals.

MERNOFF:Yes. She used to take us to all the free concerts. Wherever there was a free concert, that's where she took us. Then there were concerts in the park that were free. She exposed us to everything that was cultural and free. Whatever she could afford. and, well, you know, car fare for seven of us, it did amount to, I mean it was a consideration.

?:Ninety-five cents.

MERNOFF;Yes.

NASH:Well, what I would like to ask you is sometimes some of the people I interviewed said that, you know, the fact that their parents spoke with an accent sometimes embarrassed them or that they read the paper in Jewish. you never had any feelings like that?

MERNOFF:Never, never had that feeling. No, never. And my parents appreciated when we used to sit and read English papers of English books to them. and my mother, my mother learned English very quickly. I mean she was able to read street

signs within weeks after we arrived. She learned very quickly. And, of course, my father, as far as we were concerned, was American by the time we came because he had been here so much longer, although he appreciated education a great deal and did everything possible for his children to have an education, he was not as education conscious as my mother. She was all for culture. It meant everything to her.

NASH:I would like to ask you about your religion. Did you practice it? Did the family practice it actively?

MERNOFF:Yes, yes, orthodoxly. Orthodoxly, we went to Orthodox synagogue and my brothers became bar mitzvahed. Of course, in later years they did get away from it a lot, although all of them belonged, still belonged to temple, those that are alive. i have lost two brothers, one older than I and one younger. But we all belonged to temples, and our children now, we are looking forward to the 8th of this month for our youngest grandson to become bar mitzvahed.

/:Twenty-fourth.

MERNOFF:On the twenty-fourth. And we are quite thrilled. And all our grandchildren have been exposed to Hebrew education.

?:That's reformed.

MERNOFF:That's the reformed. The children and grandchildren turned to reformed temples, and my husband also, he would much rather, if possible, if he could manage it, go to reformed service, although as far as I am concerned it doesn't make any difference.

NASH:Did you ever belong to any Vansman Shofthen Society?

MERNOFF:Yes, my father belonged to Soutenever Society and he and my mother are buried on Soutenever Cemetery in --where is it? --Long Island.

?:No, it is right in Queens. Israel Cemetery.

MERNOFF:Not Israel.

?:It is right outside of Masbeth.

MERNOFF:I have forgotten the name. Yes, we did belong and all immigrants joined some sort of an organization.

NASH:But you have lost contact with that organization?

MERNOFF:Oh yes, oh yes, but most of the people that belonged to that organization are dead. I see them, when I go to the cemetery I see their gravestones and I remember those people and some of them had their pictures on the tombstone and the faces are not only familiar to us, to me in particular, but I get a very warm feeling. Even seeing his name, like Spilkia, who has his picture on the tombstone, and his wife, gives me a wonderful feeling of relationship. It was a relationship, and everybody helped one another in case of need. Those are the ones you turned to. You didn't have to ask for help, people came to your aid. See, now all of those things are passe. Of course, there are some family organizations. We don't have a family organization as such, and, of course, most of my family is gone too. I still have, thank God, I have a sister. She is six years older than I am. And a brother who is four years older. There are three of us left. But now we work for

causes. i am very, very much involved with Israel and her problems, and I was the one who really started the Hadassah organization here. As soon as I came I asked if there was Hadassah and they said --see, this place was already in operation a year before we moved here, and I was told that they had tried to organize and they couldn't. So I said, "I will not rest until we do get Hadassah formed," and I got a lot of my friends involved and we have a very well going Hadassah group and send a lot of money to Israel. but in spite of the fact that I worked so hard for Israel, we are very, very friendly with our non-Jewish neighbors and friends, very much involved with them. So we really have now a very good life, a good, our old age is very worthwhile. We are lucky, we really consider ourselves very, very fortunate.

We manage very well financially, we are not wealthy by any means, but never in my life did I ever feel that I was financially deprived, never. But now I could say owning a little home is a great satisfaction to us. It is such a feeling of being self-sufficient, fulfillment. And then, of course, we are very, very happily married and we have been married for fifty-seven years and we have a fine

family. We have two wonderful children. They have marvelous mates, and we have the most wonderful grandchildren. They are a source of pride and joy to us. What more can anyone ask for? And all this we found in America.

NASH:Okay, thank you very much.

MERNOFF:You are welcome.