

Interview of Helen Freeman

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Ruth

Okay, so today is June 3, 2012 and I am Ruth Several. Michael Several is here and we are in the home of Helen Freeman at 1588 North Grand Oaks Avenue in Pasadena. So, we are mostly going to focus on your arrival in the United States and the years afterwards, but there are a few questions that I wanted to ask you about your background. First of all, your date and place of birth.

Helen

I was born in Poland on September 2, 1921.

Ruth

Okay, and Joe, your late husband was born when?

Helen

He was six years older, so, let's go back, 1915.

Ruth

He was born in 1915?

Helen

1915, on November 25.

Ruth

Thank you. Okay, what were the names of your parents?

Helen

My father's name was Israel Fluez and mother's was Lea Lovell

Ruth

And your birth name was Borenkraut?

Helen

Borenkraut, it is a long name, they cut it. My brother made it Boren now.

Ruth

And Joe's parent's names were?

Helen

Let's see... Oh my, I forgot the names. I have to think about it.

Ruth

That is okay, maybe we can add it when you think about it. And your grandparents?

Helen

Well they had been Liptschein. My grandfather, I knew from my mother side, but I knew the name, the first name, Schlerma, because one of my brothers got the name, but it is Liptschein.

Ruth

Were they also from Poland?

Helen

I am not sure about those things, but my father parents were from Lublin, but the grandmother, I do not remember the name, but the grandfather, Noef.

Ruth

So tell me a little bit about Radom, how many people live there, what size town?

Helen

Well, some time I compared like Pasadena, the size. Now exactly, I don't know how many people, I don't know how many and it is was quite a bit of industry.

Ruth

What kind of industry did they do?

Helen

Well they have a leather and they have ammunition and then what they called the cigarettes.

Ruth

Tobacco?

Helen

Yes, yes, tobacco. And you know, business and Jewish people mostly concentrate on one area, you know. This wasn't the ghetto. Some lived a little farther with the polish people, but not too many.

Ruth

And about what percentage of the population was Jewish? Like 50% or less or more?

Helen

It is hard to tell. I was very young, you know, and did not really pay attention.

Ruth

What did your father do?

Helen

Well he was a businessman. My mother was even in the business later. My father used to make cream of wheat, you know that in cereal. He used to sell it to a lot of people. They used to come in and buy it, you know, things like that. A big amount. Businesses.

Ruth

Did he have a grocery store?

Helen

No, my mother had a grocery store in the neighborhood right away, like here they have it, you know. Well, everything was close, you know, and my grandmother lived with us. She raised me. I come from a big family.

Ruth

You had five brothers?

Helen

Six.

Ruth

You had six brothers.

Helen

Yes, just one girl. I was fifth in the line.

Ruth

So you have five older brothers and one younger brother.

Helen

I had two younger brothers, two younger ones.

Ruth

So you had four older ones, you were fifth.

Helen

One the youngest one that took away. He was not bar mitzvahed. He was 11 or 12, something like this, they took away first.

Ruth

Did you live in a house or in apartment?

Helen

Apartment, on the second floor

Ruth

Were all the boys were in one room, all the kids in one room?

Helen

They were separate, but they slept two in a bed.

Ruth

Was your house, did you observe Shabbat and Kosher, orthodox?

Helen

Yes, very much

Ruth

You had a Seder and you went shul?

Helen

Yes. My two older brothers had to go to the _____, and then later they became more up to time and they had been very much, how do you say, Zionists. My oldest brother, he was in charge of like a little organization there, from the Zionists. What's it called, _____. My oldest one and even the younger one too. They had been not young., you know, older than teenagers I would say.

Ruth

So they were active in these organizations?

Helen

Oh yes, oh very much.

Ruth

So let's see, what was your education? Did you have a Jewish education?

Helen

Not too much, you know, they did not do it. I had a _____ come in. That is how I learned to _____. My grandmother was very orthodox so when it comes to the holiday, she would go and turn the pages, you have to _____ at home. There were men, you know, they were separate, the men, completely. In the holiday sometime I would go to the women, you know, we would sit down like when we have, not Purim, but before, maybe in the high holidays, you know.

Ruth

Sim Haftorah?

Helen

Sim Haftorah, I had a chance to go to the men, I was the one girl. My father was in the Hevra Kadisha. I don't know if you know...

Ruth

Yes, the burial society.

Helen

Yes that is right. He really conducted it too. It was a _____, so they allowed me and all the men knew me, I would have to do, what's it called _____, you know, when they have it?

Ruth

The lulav?

Helen

No, no, no, no. it will have to come back to me. Well, anyhow, I was the only girl. No girls, no women would come there. I was a little girl, so they allowed me. They had a lot of fun, you know, Sim Haftorah.

Ruth

Did you learn how to read and write Hebrew?

Helen

I was learning just to read, to know it and then no more. You know, I mean, I did it at that time, but I grew up as a teenager, my condition, 6 years, know they came and get those all the time.

Ruth

But in Radom, did you learn?

Helen

I learn how to read, to _____, yes.

Ruth

But you did not learn Chumash Torah or anything like that?

Helen

No. My father he was an orthodox man, you know, but I felt lost you know and everybody said, that is a reason you have been so strong, you know, one girl. Even the brothers, the older brothers watched the _____, they have been out. So what it was, like shabbat, you know, all the boys had to be there, there is no such thing. Friday night and shabbat, no excuse. So at night after he... what were we talking about? I forgot. We light....

Ruth

Candles?

Helen

No, at night, at the end of shabbat.

Ruth

Habdallah?

Helen

Habdallah. He would take the Chumash, he would read it to me and explain and I am never going to forget that. A lot time when we talked it comes back to memories, what my father was reading, you know, each time and explained to me. We had been very much a lot _____ rabbis, you know, he read one book and I don't remember which one. The the first one, I did, always from the first one, about _____, what they had over there, how they killed the Jews and there was was rabbi there, _____, and how we got him to house. You read this in the one of the books. Could you recall this, what they, you know, they used to talk a lot, the Jews and you know, they really killed a lot and this a little _____.

Ruth

So are you talking about even before the war?

Helen

Yes, I am talking before the war, life before the war. It is what like they just attacked you, so I mean, men, boys could not go a public school because they used to attack them. They had to go _____ and then yeshiva.

Ruth

So what school did you go to?

Helen

I went to elementary school, but they have been all Jewish girls, just happened, you know the section, that is all the Jewish kids, you know, so many they had, but this was a public school.

Ruth

What grade did you go to?

Helen

I went to business school later, private. We did not have high school like here, they could do direct, we had to pay. They finished the public school to 7th grade, that's finished, and then you are on your own, but you could do it or your family could do it. That for girls and boys everybody, but the boys, my brothers, they used to be _____ because not too many Jewish boys, you know, and that is what they did to Jewish people, so they had to go the

Hadar, finish the Hadar and then some of them went to Yeshiva, not all of them.

Ruth

Did they attack boys going to the Hadar and the Yeshiva too?

Helen

No, no, no, no. I did not hear about it, because the school this was more in the area where the Polish people lived. They had private too, just happened I think my husband went to a private school, regular school.

Ruth

He also was born in Radom and he went to, when you say a private school, you mean a secular school, not a yeshiva?

Helen

No, no, he did not go to Yeshiva

Ruth

Where he did go to elementary school?

Helen

He went to an elementary school, it was public, but mostly had been Jewish boys, maybe girls too at that time. He was at a different area, not on my street. I did not know him until later.

Ruth

Okay, interesting. Now, the four older brothers, they all went to Yeshiva, Hedar and all of that, and then what did they do afterwards?

Helen

Well it was really a big problem. Like I say, you had to be, you know, be able to afford it if they could go to a private school, so they really didn't do it. My oldest brother, what he did, he wanted to be, you know, _____, so he learn trades, he made some money and he had tutors and they used to come to the house, he would learn a lot of different even languages, he spoke Hebrew very good, and other languages, you know, he did this, but another brother like the second one, he was in business, he has a store. The third one, he was what they called, he learned a trade, so he learned in Radom and then when he knew it really good he wanted to go ahead to make money, so he moved to Batsheva.

Ruth

That's Warsaw.

Helen

Yes, Warsaw. And you know, and he was doing very good, you know, and then the other one, the fourth one, he was supposed to be electrician, he gave a little more problem. He was more in football, they called it different over there, you know, but my parents did not agree, they did not want it there, you know, they wanted more _____, you know things like that, learn more. The youngest one really did not get so much education, the war. Well, I did and that's a lot to establish, you know so even my older brother make sure that I go, we are going to pay, don't worry about it, you know

things like that. I had a little problem, I think I mentioned it in the book, I am not sure. You had to go on Shabbat, you know, but they had six days and I wouldn't do this to my parents or go to lie and go out and just like this, so I guess now I am thinking I had a little chutzpah. I went and talked to the principle, you know, that I will make it up on Sunday, you know. So, I got it some ways. Most of the Jewish girls attended Sabbath, the parent did know it.

Ruth

So in school did you have Jewish friends and non-Jewish friends?

Helen

Yes, but not in the public just when I went to the business school

Ruth

Jewish and non-Jewish girls and boys? Did you have non-Jewish Polish girlfriends?

Helen

No really not, because I lived in certain area, they did not live in my area, you know.

Ruth

So your friends were mostly Jewish?

Helen

Yes.

Ruth

So did you know anybody in the United States before you came?

Helen

No, I did not, but my husband, he had some but he did not know it when he left. He found out years later, somebody, he had an uncle here. Two uncles, I think.

Ruth

He found out about them later?

Helen

Oh, later years, yes. It was funny,

Ruth

So you did not know anybody in the United States. We're sort of going to jump ahead a little bit because you talked extensively and you had all the Show Off Foundation interviews, so we are going to just you know, so we are going to jump to...

Helen

That's fine. Whatever you want to ask me. No, I come back. He was printer, one of the my brothers, a printer.

Ruth

So we know all the things that happened during the war are already documented, so we are going to go into like post war when you married Joe. So you married him in 1945. I know you had two, 1945 and 1946, but there

were like two weddings, one was civil and one was Jewish. Which one do you consider as your.. 1945 or 1946.?

Helen

Well, the first one.

Ruth

The first one, so that was in 1945. So in 1945 the war was over and you and Joe married. Where did you get married?

Helen

The first time we had to go like here. We had to go to the, what's it called?

Ruth

In what city?

Helen

Oh, I lived in Munich.

Ruth

So how did you end up in Munich?

Helen

Well, we had been, really, it is a big story. Well I worked for Siemens, you know, they took me out from Auschwitz in 1945, May the 8th. They state you are free, you are free, so we all had been sick, you know, and the people, first the Russians came right away, the Americans, and they helped us, you know, they brought us back to health, stuff like this and then they said you are free. You could go home from where you came. Well nobody could accept right away, but we did, so decided, I had a roommate, you know, a rich kid or ghetto, whatever, I had to make friends and if you did not have friends, you lost. So I had one, she was with me at Auschwitz, and I had three more, but this one, she was with me and she said after the war wherever you go, I am going with you, you know. She married later my brother, you know. So we went back to Poland excited, they must probably be waiting because they did not know what happened to me and I did not know what happened to them because they grabbed me, you know. So I went to Radom. Where did I go? Up to the second floor, knocked at the door, excited that they are probably there and I am going to see them. Polish men opened the door and slammed it in my face. So that was the end, you know. I was shocked, I was confused and I questioned myself, why I am here, what I am going to do, what is going on, you know. I wandered the streets. I did not know where was am going to sleep, where I am going to eat. Somebody was getting closer and calls my name, Helen, in Polish. I am scared, I am moving back, I do not recognize him. He does not give up, he calls again and I still move because I don't believe somebody is still alive. I am here. So he called all the names of my brothers because he had met them, you know, they had met him and then, Oh my God, something is familiar. So after he repeats it again to make sure, that is when it started really. I met him at that time and we went back later, to _____, I think, this was DP camp. We stayed there. My brothers have been there and we stayed

together. Then when we got married we moved to Munich. It was close. It was like from here to Monrovia.

Ruth

So you _____ in the DP Camp just for a few months, then...

Helen

Yes. It was for longer, but we moved out because we had been married. Oh, yes. A lot of them lived there.

Ruth

So you lived in... When you got married you were still in the DP Camp?

Helen

Yes for short time, until we find it because even in Munich, it was destroyed really, you know, so somebody had to find a place for us. We had to share with some German woman. She had had to give up a bedroom. This was our bedroom, kitchen, everything, you know.

Ruth

So you went to Munich because it was close to Feldafing.

Helen

Oh yes.

Ruth

Did Joe or you know any people in the area?

Helen

No, no, no, we do not know, nobody, no. We were strangers but it's what you did.

Ruth

So what the Joe do in Munich?

Helen

Oh my. We had to make a living. He made himself like a little wagon. I don't where he got the little wood, but he put it together and he went to the country, you know. Over there it is the beginning of PX, you know what the PX is. It helped a little bit those people. It was very, very bad after the war. The city was destroyed you know and they had to, you know, we could not buy food, we did not have money, so it was the only way. The organization yes, you know, it helped those people you know, but still was not enough, you know. So he went to the country and if he had some particular extra, he exchanged. I don't know how if it was clothes because we did not have clothes. The DP Camp, they gave us clothes, we did not have them, nothing. If you had extra clothes we exchanged it over there we got some food, so he brought it and he goes on the city, he made a little payable, I don't know where he found little pieces of wood, he sold it to have a little money and he did this for a little while and then it came to a point, it took us a few years, he got the store. He built the store, I mean it is a lot you know.

Ruth

Was there Jewish community in Munich?

Helen

Then yes, they created, they created, yes.

Ruth

So there were other Jewish families in Munich.

Helen

Yes, but we did not see them so much no, no. They lived in different places because the city was destroyed so they had to find a place even to share, like we shared one room then we had the baby in the same and then I did not want to share the kitchen, so we put a stove there and the bed was there, but you accepted it. Now I'm thinking back how I did it. Over and over, I talked to my kids, because before I didn't want to think about it. I am going over, talked to my kids because they pull, I did not want to think about it, I wanted to forget it, go away to a new life and be normal, because I am not normal. I have not a normal life.

Ruth

Was there anti-Semitism in Munich?

Helen

I did not know. They did not have a chance because Americans had been there. I avoided them.

Ruth

Were you able to keep Kosher? Was there a Kosher butcher?

Helen

I don't think so. I don't think so. I don't know if we had even meat.

Ruth

You were vegetarians.

Helen

It was hard, but he could organize and bring it. Then they had like a community, a Jewish community like a what it is called?

Michael

_____?

Helen

A little, yes. Already it is was layed there. When I had even my little girl, you know, she attended there,

Ruth

So there were a few other Jewish families

Helen

Oh yes, but not in one place. You did not know where they are, no communication, how to drive, how to go, you know, stuff like that. We had to walk at first and then they had the communication, but it was destroyed, the city was destroyed.

Ruth

How did you know German? Did you speak German in Poland?

Helen

When I was in business school, I learned. It was a German course. I learned a lot of different things.

Ruth

Did you speak Yiddish at home to your parents?

Helen

Yes. I speak Yiddish now, too. I don't speak as fluent, my German or Polish, no, but Yiddish more I remember. With my parents, yes.

Ruth

So Yiddish was really your first language? Very interesting.

Helen

Yes, my grandmother, my grandparents.

Ruth

So here you are in Munich with your two little children and Joe has his store, his business.

Helen

That was later, much later. Oh no, not right away, he had the store later. First he had the cart and he made it.

Ruth

Okay, but your years in Munich from 1945 until 1951, during those six years you were there...

Helen

It was 1946, I would say.

Ruth

Okay 1946 to 1951, so the 5 years you were there, whatever business he had he established a business and you were at home with the two girls and then at some point you heard, did you hear about being sponsored to either... What happened?

Helen

Later. My brothers had been not together. My brothers had been in a different city because I hadn't been in the camps with them. I had been in a different camp, so they have been _____ guard, so I really did not have communication. Some of them later, it may have been like the third one, yes, because I did not know if he got killed, so the third brother was in a DP camp, but another one have been in _____ guard, so later they had a chance to come and visit me in Munich, so I saw them.

Ruth

I am talking about being sponsored to come to the United States. Tell me about how that happened.

Helen

Well they had up sign up. I even don't remember.

Ruth

One of your brothers?

Helen

I don't even remember how it was. You know, I don't remember, but we had to sign up. But lady you are not right, way at the beginning.

Ruth

No, no, no. Oh, I know, I understand it was later.

Helen

But I don't remember.

Ruth

So there was like an organization?

Helen

Oh I am sure it was, I am sure it was, yes.

Ruth

And you signed up to come to the United States

Helen

Yes, right. But not only to the United States. We signed up to Israel, you see, to Australia, I don't know if Canada too, I don't remember, but I remember Australia, America, and Israel.

Ruth

South America?

Helen

No, no, no.

Ruth

Okay, so you signed up to go anywhere...

Helen

Yes, oh yes, just to wherever it is going to get us. It had been six years. Most of them had left earlier, much earlier, my brothers, we were the last one.

Ruth

So where did your brothers go?

Helen

Well they came to America, but each one a different state

Ruth

So you did have brothers in the United States?

Helen

No after the war.

Ruth

I understand that. So your brothers came to the United States before you did.

Helen

That is right

Ruth

What cities did they go to?

Helen

One went to Detroit, one went to _____, but I don't know which city, one went to Scranton, and New York. The one in New York, his wife had some family. So she had a baby and with the baby she flew even.

Ruth

So you did have family in New York.

Helen

But I did not know about them. I don't know where and what until I find out later.

Ruth

Later you found out.

Helen

Yes, I did not know about them.

Ruth

So I am not clear. So here you are in Munich, your brothers, one was in Stuttgart, one was in a DP Camp, but you were not in communication with them.

Helen

With Stuttgart, no, not too much. Once he came to visit. Once. So he went back, he lived in a camp over there, the DP Camp, you know. There were a lot of them. He wasn't by himself. That's a lot of Jews to concentrate. Wherever they could go.

Ruth

So you took this opportunity because the organization said, okay, we have a place for you in Pasadena.

Helen

No. We came in the line. We came in the I guess. I don't know. Six years it took it. They left much earlier.

Ruth

So when it was your turn, your number came up or whatever.

Helen

My youngest brother, we find out later, he was in the Army, even.

Ruth

In the American Army?

Helen

Yes, yes. What was it? The last one. Let's see, which one the two wars?

Michael

The Korean War?

Helen

Korea or what is another one. I don't remember. He said one of those wars.

Ruth

Probably the Korean War. That was in the early 1950s. Like when you came to the United States he was already here in the Army.

Helen

Oh yes, right. I mean he had a chance to go and I guess maybe when he was here, they took him maybe to the Army. Because we didn't have the communication either so much, you know.

Ruth

Right. Okay, so you and Joe and the two girls came on a boat through New Orleans.

Helen

I have a little picture.

Ruth

Oh, okay.

Helen

I have a little picture on the boat and a little picture when we are going to Bremer Haven to the port in Germany.

Ruth

Okay.

Helen

I have a collection. A lot of things, but not everything. That's the way it looked, not my place.

Ruth

It does not have a date or a place. Helen, do you know where this was taken? Is this in Auschwitz?

Helen

Well, I will tell you, remember my husband wrote in one of the books how he met this soldier, but he did not know it? He gave him that. He gave him the big one. I don't want to see, no. I have somebody, Mr. _____, he brought me a book from the Jewish Soldiers. What happened, I think some of them went to liberate like Dachau or another camp, so we have from those soldiers a book, what is his name, Gutschein Sondolo. You don't know him either, but you know them.

Ruth

Charles and Ray Gutschein?

Helen

What Gutschein?

Ruth

Gutschein. You said Gutschein?

Helen

Yes, but you don't know them, they happened a long time ago, but the kids are here, what's the name, Bobbie...

Ruth

Slomp? Hy Vigo's daughter?

Helen

Vigo. He wasn't on, but he showed me pictures, you know, the older soldiers somehow got the book and they have names, which soldier went there

Michael

I can't remember who, but somebody's husband was one of the American soldiers who went into Dachau...

Helen

Yes, one of the Chezlov's? Yes, Chezlov was there. He used to go and speak too over there when I was speaking. And I have even a book I am going to show you, his whole story what he is telling.

Michael

I think I got it from Al Levy.

Helen

Did you get it?

Michael

Yes.

Helen

The same, for years he did not want to talk. Like I, for 20 years, I did not talk about my life until I don't know if there came a point, but my son attended the University and then I started speaking. It happened to the soldiers, too. A lot of them.

Ruth

I think we should go ahead.

Helen

I have so many things here.

Ruth

So you came to New Orleans, and in New Orleans you took a train from New Orleans to Pasadena.

Helen

Yes. And then somebody received us. We did not speak English.

Ruth

You did not know any English, so somebody met you at the train station in Pasadena?

Helen

Yes.

Ruth

And drove you to an apartment somewhere.

Helen

Yes some place. I don't know if we went right to the apartment, I don't know. But you know they arranged it, an apartment.

Ruth

In Pasadena?

Helen

In Pasadena, yes. I forgot the first street, but later I was on Winona, but I don't remember this street. I had one room and kitchen and then they made sure my husband had a job.

Ruth

Oh!

Helen

Yes. Oh yes. This was their duty. They could not get us here until they arranged jobs. He was responsible, not the country. So he worked in a Jewish factory. He was making Formica. Mr. Blumenfelt worked there,.

Michael

That was Langhaus?

Helen

Langhaus's brother in-law. Yes, he worked there, so he got a job and then there was the recession and they laid off Joe. He was the last one.

Ruth

So immediately Joe had a job to be able to support the family. So what year did you come, 1951?

Helen

1951. I think it was June

Ruth

June 1951, okay. So did you go to the temple right away?

Helen

Well, you know, they happened to sponsor us, so sure.

Ruth

This is where I am not clear. When you say "they", who is they?

Helen

The temple. The temple.

Ruth

Who at the temple? Who?

Helen

Well at that time I remember Ackerman, because he was there when we had our citizenship. He was, you know, had to be there and sign it or something like that. Ackerman and there was another woman, very nice, and she worked for the synagogue.

Michael

Herten Gutenberg?

Helen

No, I don't think she was Gutenberg. No, she is much older. She was a young woman yes, very much. The Board had been really doing a lot for us, and the synagogue. Ackerman a lot, yes. When we came it was just the Rabbi, what's his name?

Ruth

Horsman?

Helen

Yes, but a week later, or two days later we met another Rabbi.

Ruth

Galpert? Galpert came in 1952? Michael; Yes, 1952,

Helen

Was it 1952?

Ruth

Well, Galpert came in 1952.

Helen

Well, I came in 1951.

Ruth

So you probably had a few months of Horsman.

Helen

It could be.

Ruth

What was the name the Formica factory, do you remember?

Helen

_____ Langhaus would know it because he was working there for a long time, the brother in law,

Michael

Let's see. There was a name that came up. After I talked to you on Friday, I went into the transcripts to see what I could find out. There was somebody, _____ Langhaus made reference to a guy by the name of Neuman having a factory.

Helen

Neuman, I think had the factory, the factory where my husband worked. He was a Jewish man.

Ruth

Where was the factory? In Pasadena?

Helen

No, I think it was in Los Angeles, but I am not sure. I never went there.

Ruth

So how did Joe get to work?

Helen

Well in the beginning he had to go, probably he'd take a bus. He got lost a lot of times. I worried. I went once to the store and I did not know how to get back. When I went I wanted eggs, I would say it is like this, you know, I explained, I could not speak.

Ruth

So were you able to walk to the grocery store?

Helen

Yes, it was close. It was a neighborhood thing. But Joe, I think had to take a bus. I think so.

Ruth

So what year did you become a citizen?

Helen

Well I think it was four years later. I went, we had to take English special, you know, to learn about the country, you know. They asked one question, I don't remember now what, but we had to learn that.

Ruth

Did you go to PCC to learn English?

Helen

English, I went to learn, yes, but for the citizenship it was another place.

Ruth

What about Joe? Where did he learn English?

Helen

He went after work. He used to go at night.

Ruth

Also at PCC?

Helen

I don't know where. I didn't ask about this. But I was in a class, I remember thirty or more people there and I came with two little kids.

Ruth

And the other people, were they also from Europe, or other countries?

Helen

Different countries.

Ruth

So how many years did you go to PCC to learn English?

Helen

Well as long as I could do it, but then I could not do it because of kids got sick, colds or something like that, and then a tutor came but not all the time, you know, he had to quit. There were some people at PCC, you know, some people they gave time, you know.

Ruth

So on Shabbat did you go to PJTC for services?

Helen

Yeah. How did we get there, I don't know. It was not too far. We had been used to walking, you know, we did not have transportation where we lived, where we had been born, there was no cars, you walk, I could walk.

Ruth

Langhaus was already here; were there other families who also?

Helen

Yes, there are some people. There were some other one I met.

Ruth

So there was like a support group of survivors.

Helen

Yes, I had a lot of them Los Angeles, I did not know it, but in later years I got in connection with them. They had been from my city even, in Radom, but later.

Ruth

Are we talking about the 1950s when you were settling in?

Helen

Yes. And some other people. Oh, the Flusster's. I have even a picture of the Flusster family.

Michael

Oh really.

Helen

Yes.

Ruth

Henrietta Flusster?

Helen

No, I don't think so. They had well, one is a doctor even and he works for, what it called, the big insurance company...

Ruth

Kaiser?

Helen

Kaiser, yes in the Valley. And the daughter was even, what it is, not a doctor, what with the medication....

Ruth

A pharmacist?

Helen

A pharmacist, yes. And the oldest son... We were close with them. We used to meet them.

Ruth

So let's go back to the 1950s. Did you then make friends at the temple with this group?

Helen

Yes. It was a bit strange because there was no communication. But with the people that came, yes. We could speak, we could communicate, sure. Even one, I think he passed away not too long ago, he moved later. Oh my, he got married later, you know, so I used to see him very often. The name, the daughter, I met a few times...

Ruth

Also Wolman's were here.

Helen

Yes, the Wolman's, they came before us.

Ruth

Yes, but I mean, they were at the temple with you.

Helen

Yes. They had a daughter. She was older than my kids.

Ruth

So was the temple a source of Jewish life for you?

Helen

It was, it was in the beginning. I was not too happy with the Rabbi because he was a Reformed Rabbi and I thought he is not Reformed. Supposedly he had to be a Conservative and I noticed we met some place and we had been eating, and you know, he did not eat kosher. Even my Renee was friends with his daughter. Yes, she a lot of times, later years.

Ruth

So did your children go to public school in Pasadena?

Helen

Yes.

Ruth

Which one? What was the name?

Helen

Lillian is the oldest one. Renee.

Ruth

What school did Lillian go to?

Helen

Let's see, we lived... I am talking elementary, we lived later on Fairfax so she went to...

Ruth

Washington?

Helen

No, no, no,

Ruth

Cleveland?

Helen

It was Lincoln because I was not happy and especially Renee did not like it, so we moved Altadena so they went to a new school.

Ruth

What was the name of the school, is it Burbank?

Helen

No, no

Ruth

Loma Alta?

Helen

It was a new school at that time.

Ruth

Altadena Elementary? Franklin?

Helen

Maybe Franklin, yes.

Ruth

And then they went to high school also in Pasadena?

Helen

Yes in Pasadena. But in Junior High that is when we tried to move. Lillian had to go to Junior High and she would have to go to, I don't know which one, but she was not happy, she wanted here, so in beginning we did something. The Gutschein's, do you know the Gutschein's?

Ruth

Yes. That's Hy's mother in-law.

Helen

Hy's mother in-law, yes. She we registered that she was living there, but right away we made sure we moved to find a place, so we started already with our home you know and things like that. Yes.

Ruth

So Joe, after working in the Formica factory, then he was selling door to door silverware?

Helen

Ha! This is the whole story.

Ruth

Okay. We want to hear it

Helen

Helen started this, because he still was working and how this started, he was still at the factory, they had sales people that came in with different things. So one salesman came, he wanted to sell spoons and forks, you know, silver plated I think and if you buy this it is one dollar a week and you get this and you get a jewelry set for your wife free. Oh, Joe was so excited. Just 1 dollar, you know. So he bought it and he brought it home and he looked at it. He said, look at this. How these men are selling so much, I wish how we could find out a way to get this, so Helen went Los Angeles. So it was Rene, I had to put in nursery school, it was a good one, so I put Rene there and she was crying. Oh, my I was crying that I had to do that if I am going to do this. I took the bus, a few busses, and went to Los Angeles, on Los Angeles Street. Well I met a man and I asked him if he could speak Yiddish and he said yes, and he had these sets and stuff like that. I said, I don't have money, but I know I could sell it, you know, my husband could do that, if you trust me, I'll take 1, 2 sets and then I will pay you when I sell it. He trusted me. He was a Jewish man, he trusted me. I got it and I came home. Well, my husband was still is working, so I had a stroller, I put Renee in the stroller and I went in the neighborhood from door to door. I didn't know much English, you know, just what I learned, but I could say one dollar, you know, one dollar a week and that is how it started.

Ruth

Like the Avon Lady.

Helen

Yes, yes with a stroller. I had it all the time. I wasn't going to leave it, I was walking. So afterwards, you know, I was selling, I went again and the people would say it and I started to learn a little bit more English, you know, I could figure out what they are saying. I could bring some sheets, could bring some other things, and that's what I did. This man had all kinds of things there on Los Angeles Street. You had those stores then.

Ruth

Yes, yes. So you used the bus to go down there, buy the stuff and then sell it up here. How long did you do that?

Helen

I did this for a short time and then I guess my husband lost a job or something and he started doing it, yes.

Ruth

So you started it first?

Helen

Oh yes, I did. I would go from door to door. Somehow I communicated a little bit with my fingers. And then yet the store was at the house, then we had the house. Oh my, it was not so simple. You may have to go one after another one, you know. We used to live on Farris, so we gave up the garage and then later the people came, you know, we had some other stuff. We used to buy used televisions people got, so we went to Nash's. We could speak a little bit more, but not perfect. So Joe would buy those televisions. He had to find somebody who could fix it and then people would come and they would want to buy it, some that didn't have a lot of money, they came to the garage, my store. So we went to Bank of America, it used to be on Royal Branch, I don't know if you remember, I don't know when you came here, Royal and Colorado, yes. We went over there and we talked to a manager. We said, you know, we don't have credit, but we have people who don't have credit probably and they want to buy, you know, to pay on installments and if you buy the papers would have money we could buy again the merchandise. Well, this man, I used to remember his name, but no more, he is gone. This man could speak a little bit German too, yes, so there was a little bit more communication. He trusted us. He sent a representative from over there to look at the garage, what we had in it, and he accepted us. So we signed the papers. The money went to the bank, you know, they paid the bank, but the bank paid us the money, so that is what we started. It was a garage really, but then we wanted something else. Then we got the store, you know, we bought it. Do you remember Nash's? It used to be on Colorado. So, we bought it from them. For them, it was nothing. It was like a trade in. So we started all those things and later on we went into clothes. So we went again to Los Angeles, but Joe was not working at that time at the factory, and they had like left over merchandise, so they sell it for less and we took it home. So we rented a house at that time and the foundation was like this... not straight, but we had a lot of rooms and everything was bare, so we made one room like a store, we hung those clothes, those dresses and people would come in and look and find it. And we would deal in furniture. So it was in the garage early we had used furniture, you know.

Ruth

So how long did you operate this out of the garage? A few years?

Helen

Oh yes.

Ruth

And then when did Joe finally open his own store?

Helen

Oh, it was quite a few years.

Ruth

The 1960s?

Helen

I don't know, later, it wasn't overnight. He was scared a little bit to go, because he felt our English wasn't like it should be and here, a lot of people a lot of clientele is going to be, we were amongst big stores, you know, a different client. I said, don't worry, you are going to do it.

Michael

So where was the store?

Helen

It was on Raymond with all of the furniture stores.

Michael

Between Holly and Colorado?

Ruth

Like where Old Towne is now?

Helen

Yes, Old Towne. On the corner and then we moved a little farther to the other side of the corner towards Raymond, yes. It was much bigger.

Ruth

Did you work in the store also?

Helen

I did. It was very hard, but when the kids came home, I had to be at home.

Michael

So what did you do in the store?

Helen

Well you know, customers came I had to show it. Sometimes the books, you know, I had to write it down. We gave it to pay it, you know monthly, lots of little different. Years later, we lost money too.

Ruth

But you went to business school, so you had some business skills. Did Joe go to business school, too?

Helen

No, he wanted to be a doctor. He was at the University, medical.

Ruth

So Helen had the business skills.

Helen

I did not finish either.

Ruth

But the fact is, you went to business school, you had business skills.

Helen

By the short hands of God.

Ruth

So, did you keep Shabbat on High Holidays?

Helen

Oh, always. This was very important. I even kept my kids out on the holidays. They were very unhappy because other kids would not come.

Ruth

So did your children experience anti-Semitism in school from the teachers or other students?

Helen

No, no. I would say no.

Ruth

Or in your business did people come in and... ?

Helen

Well in business, some are not nice, you know. People had been very poor, not lot of money, I worried about this a lot of time because some of them would come and just sit there, all the things, mess it up, yes, young people. The kids didn't, they somehow even went to school they adjusted and had friends.

Ruth

Well that was later, but Lillian in Renee in 1960s.

Helen

No, no, no

Ruth

So what about keeping Kosher? Where did you get Kosher meals?

Helen

Oh, my. In the beginning somebody took me. I didn't drive. I went to, not Los Angeles, what was it called?

Michael

Boyle Heights?

Helen

Yes, It was alive. The fish was alive, the chicken was alive. And later, to the last minute, don't drive now. I go on _____. But now I am buying here at Trader Joe's. They have Kosher. I don't need for a big family now.

Ruth

When did you learn how to drive?

Helen

Oh, that's later. I did not do it yet. I was absorbed. I was in the business. I was raising kids. I wanted to make it so I could go to school when it was for parents, you know, stuff like this. I was involved a little bit to know about the kids and what they are doing.

Ruth

Did you and Joe learn how to drive about the same time?

Helen

No, no, no. Joe learned driving in Germany later, yes. He has an international license. I think, I am not sure, I think somebody took him. Ackerman or somebody else, I don't remember, took him to Los Angeles and in German to take the license. Yes, yes, yes, they did. I did not remember who did it, because he did that early.

Ruth

So did you and Joe get citizenship at the same time?

Helen

Oh yes.

Ruth

So that was about four years after you came?

Helen

Yes. Oh yes, we went, we took the class, yes. It was not so easy in the beginning, you know, but I never said I was sorry. Joe was sometimes unhappy. He said why did we come here, because he did not know how to speak. You know, he knew seven languages, but not English.

Ruth

So as far as the temple goes, did your children go to the religious school at the temple and have bat mitzvahs at the temple?

Helen

They did not have this. I was unhappy, very unhappy. At that time, there was nothing really like we have it now. I'm so happy I talked to the Rabbi about it. It is so important, what they have now and I am happy how we get them in more to be involved, yes.

Ruth

So in the 50s then there were no the opportunities for children?

Helen

No, no, no. I had to schlep my kids to different places.

Ruth

Where?

Helen

Well, CC, we had here a man who belonged to the temple.

Ruth

Wait, wait, wait... CC was later.

Helen

Lil even did not get a bat mitzvah. They belonged to organization we had for the kids.

Ruth

B'Nai B'rith Girls?

Helen

No something else. I think B'Nai B'rith and maybe another one they belonged and they had been active, yeah,. But Renee wanted, you know, so I used to take her Alhambra. I was driving at that time.

Ruth

Ah, interesting. Alhambra had a religious school for...

Helen

I took there, whatever, I don't know if it was a school or whatever. That is where she learned. And CC, I had heard somebody, again not at the temple, CC, I had a man and he belonged to the temple.

Michael

Roth.

Ruth

Sam?

Helen

David Roth, not Sam. Sam Roth, what's her name now, the Katz's daughter?

Ruth

Saundra Dressner?

Helen

Yes, she took it from Sam Roth the same time CC took it from the other Roth. There was a man, an older man who used to come to the temple, a member. He used to live on the street, so she went there and Louis too.

Ruth

Louis had a bar mitzvah at PJTC?

Helen

Yes, but they took it from this man and what I had... I am going to tell you the story. I never going to forget; Rabbi Galpert, he was very intelligent man, very intelligent, but the religion was not as we wanted. So, Louis took it from him and we want him to learn even more than just the bar mitzvah. So I made an arrangement and Rabbi Galpert said, No, no way, he could not do this, conduct the service, no way, because another kids they don't learn this and it would not be right. So I had to fight for this. I had to fight. I said if you now allow me inside, I am going to have it outside. I am going to have bar mitzvah and I don't know if he was here. He was at CC's bar mitzvah and I don't think Louis, Louis conducted CC's service. It was Friday night always, not Saturday or Sunday.

Ruth

Even for the boys?

Helen

I think for the boys, but I am not sure. So anyway, he wouldn't allow. And even later they wanted to cancel him. I signed it. I didn't want him to go. You know who was in charge? The Melvin's, from the insurance company. The younger Melvin not the older one, you know, he had two sons and a daughter. The younger ones. He came and I signed it.

Ruth

You signed what?

Helen

You know that the Rabbi should stay because they wanted to remove him. Even I was not happy

Ruth

Even though you were not happy you still wanted him to stay.

Helen

Right, right. He was a very intelligent man, but he did not belong in the temple I wanted. I wanted a more Yiddish guy.

Ruth

So you weren't involved in Sisterhood or any committees and Joe was not either?

Helen

No.

Ruth

But you were members.

Helen

Once I went away even.

Ruth

Where did you go?

Helen

In Palm Springs. We used to love to go there and we loved this Rabbi, I forgot his name, it was a long time at this Temple, a long time yes, and we used to go there you know, yes.

Ruth

But then you came back to...

Helen

I came back here, I came back later, yes. I felt responsibility, this was my place, you know, but I wasn't happy.

Ruth

Did you come to services on Shabbat?

Helen

Yes.

Ruth

And you heard Rabbi Galpert's sermons and lectures?

Helen

Yes. Sometimes maybe if I did not feel good, I missed it, but Joe went. The kids were very unhappy because of the holiday especially.

Ruth

Did you come to High Holidays at PJTC?

Helen

Oh, yes. Because on the holidays, no kids had been, it was middle of the week sometimes and things like this and I made... They said, Mom, why we did not move to Los Angeles? They are even saying now, why we did not move to Los Angeles.

Ruth

What is your answer?

Helen

My husband had the business. I felt those business had been opened seven days and late at night, so I said my kids are not going to see their father. He is going to leave early in the morning and come home late at night. Friday night, Joe had to come home and be at Shabbat dinner. He had to have somebody in the store,

Ruth

Was the store open on Saturday?

Helen

Yes.

Ruth

But he did not work there. He had somebody he hired who used to work on Saturday for him.

Helen

It wasn't like it should be.

Ruth

Yes, I know. I understand. He needed to make money and Saturday when people would shop.

Helen

All the furniture stores were there and we had appliances at that time. Jewish people.

Ruth

So you must have felt you were coming to a Jewish wasteland.

Helen

I still, personally, whatever it was, how much hardship, I am glad I left.

Ruth

Oh, for sure.

Helen

I hated it. Renee and Lillian were already, she went to school, not regular school, what is called?

Ruth

Pre-school?

Helen

Yes, preschool. So she was with Jewish children. I have a picture I will show you. Dancing and stuff like that. But pretty soon she is going to need to attend a school. She is going to be with the Germans. I mean, I lived amongst Germans because we did not have no apartments there. Everything was destroyed, you know. So I just hated it. Joe adjusted, some way he adjusted.

Ruth

Well, but he had a different kind of life because he was out in his business and he was successful, but you were at home with the children and you were concerned about the future of your children. I understand that.

Helen

Even here, he would say why did you want come here. He didn't know the language and he likes to talk, but you know he could not communicate. And there was hardship. He came here and couldn't find work. Before did not need to work, they had been well off. If he wanted something else, it was different, you know, yes.

Ruth

So your children when they first came here their first language was Yiddish or Polish?

Helen

Where? Here?

Ruth

No, in Europe. When your two daughters were born.

Helen

German.

Ruth

German. So, their first language was German.

Helen

Well not one. She was a baby.

Ruth

But Lillian spoke German and then they learned English when they came here. So let's move on to the 1960s. Joe already had his business and the children were going to school.

Helen

I am going to find the older pictures that what I wanted to show you. I put them away, but I didn't write it down.

Ruth

Did you go to the swimming pool at the temple?

Helen

Yes with CC.

Ruth

With CC. So that was later. Was there was a cantor when you came or when Rabbi Galpert, when you first came?

Helen

Yes, a cantor, yes.

Ruth

Cantor Green?

Helen

We had different cantors.

Ruth

But the cantors did not train the kids for bar mitzvah?

Helen

No, no. It was not like that.

Michael

They were part-time.

Helen

Yes, yes, we had different ones, but three of them I think I knew already

Michael

Blumenthal, Green.

Helen

One was in Alhambra and then he was here. This was later. But we had two, yes. And a different one, but I don't remember the name. The way they did is not like a reform.

Ruth

It was reformed, absolutely. Rabbi Galpert was a reformed Rabbi. He went to HUC

Helen

But supposedly they said...

Ruth

I know exactly what you are saying, Helen. There is a disconnect. You know what I mean? This was always a conservative, affiliated with the conservative movement, yet we had a reformed Rabbi and I would even say that the majority of the families were reformed. They did not keep Kosher, they drove on Shabbat.

Helen

I was not very happy. It was like a friend among the group.

Ruth

I know. So when there was a split with Frank Ackerman, did you want to go with his group?

Helen

Well I did not want it to move from here, you know. He went to Arcadia.

Ruth

Right. So you did not want to go?

Helen

About the few times I visit, and you know what I did, a lot of times, the holidays, some of them I had here, but I went to Los Angeles, I went to Beth Jacob and _____. I had friends, you know, so we spent a little bit different, yes. That is all when I could do it. I was driving.

Ruth

What about when after Rabbi Galpert passed away and Rabbi Cullen came?

Helen

I liked him, but I felt should it should be like we have now, a more modern Rabbi. You know, the children are different, the war is a little different, but they have to learn. I wanted them to learn, to feel like they are Jewish and to spend time, to get them more in, to include them, not like they are excluded. Even Galpert's daughter, she was a friend of Renee's.

Ruth

How about your children now? Are they leading Jewish lives now?

Helen

They are more modern. Renee used to belong to Beth David. I like that Rabbi. When I had the 50th anniversary, he conducted it.

Ruth

Rabbi Lachman?

Helen

Yes. I liked him as a person.

Ruth

Her children had bar mitzvahs at the temple Beth David?

Helen

Yes, yes, right. CC is more, she belonged to a more modern thing, but she keeps more Yiddish, she is very much involved.

Ruth

What temple does she go to?

Helen

She belongs to, again they are Reformed, the two of them, one, what is it called, the big one on Wilshire.

Ruth

Wilshire Boulevard Temple?

Helen

Yes, but it is too far. The kids don't want it. I know what she is saying, the kids want to be with their friends and that's so far to go. So she belongs I think to two temples, one closer there.

Ruth

Where about your son?

Helen

Oh, he is more. He keeps Kosher, yes.

Ruth

He is in Chicago?

Helen

Yes.

Ruth

What does he do?

Helen

What he is doing, he is a dentist.. He has his own office, yes.

Ruth

What about Lillian, where is she?

Helen

She is in Santa Monica, she is the oldest. She is a psychologist. Has her Masters. MSW. She is not married.

Ruth

Oh, Lillian is not married?

Helen

No, Lillian never married.

Ruth

Oh really?

Helen

Lillian never married, no. She had her own office, now she had somebody and shares an office and she's teaching at the university. Some people want to be like she is.

Ruth

A professional.

Helen

Yes.

Ruth

What was Joe's name in Poland? What was their family name?

Helen

It was Freidman. Not Freeman, but Freidman, he changed it because the family here changed to Freeman, so he said I am going to do it like them. I don't know why. It's the same with my brothers, you know, they lived in Los Angeles later. I got them here, all of them.

Ruth

Oh really?

Helen

Oh yes, yes, they stayed with me. I didn't have this home yet. They stayed with me slowly,

Ruth

So how many brothers came here?

Helen

Four.

Ruth

Four brothers came here?

Helen

Now have one. Three have died.

Ruth

One is still alive and he is Los Angeles.

Helen

Los Angeles in the Valley, yes right, right.

Ruth

So they changed name.

Helen

I mean they shortened it. They were Borenkrauc, now they are Boren and the kids are Boren. They are lawyers. He's a lawyer too, my nephew.

Ruth

Okay so do have family here. So your children had cousins?

Helen

Yes, yes, yes, but they are in Los Angeles and we have been here, so whenever we had the chance we would go to their home or they came here.

Ruth

Joe's family all died in Poland?

Helen

Yes, all persons, yes. But he found out later, five years later, a cousin. He was married and we visited him later. Through somebody, Joe was talking you know that he thinks he has somebody here and this person he used to

live in the same city in Radom, he came here to visit somebody. He said yes, I know it, I know it, John, he lives in New York, and that is the way he got the connection. You see, they changed the names.

Michael

Yeah I know.

Helen

You did not know how to trace it even. It is the same like my brothers, they are Boren, and if somebody wanted to trace them, I don't know why they did.

Ruth

Well I think when you come to the United States, many people changed their names, they shortened them.

Helen

They feel they could not pronounce it.

Ruth

Right. That is a common thing, that is very common.

Helen

But you know you get lost, the connection. I mean, the Freeman's, you know? Joe would not know it, who are the Freeman's, you know?

Ruth

Friedman is a very common name.

Helen

Yes, there is a lot of Friedman's.

Ruth

So, in the 60s and 70s when you were members of temple, were there other social issues that affected you like desegregation of the schools? Do you know what I am talking about? Were they said you could go to any school and ...

Helen

Well, really not. We managed because a lot of times the kids decided, like CC decided. I was not happy she had to go to Washington one year. They had to go to Washington School and it was a bad experience, but CC said no I will still going. Yes, I'm going to be there. A black boy; she was very slim, very slim, and one day she passed out. And later one kid was punished, she said no, no way, no way, I am going to be in that school no way. Yes, she had it.

Ruth

What about Israel. Have you been to Israel?

Helen

Yes.

Ruth

Did you have any family that went to Israel?

Helen

I have family in Israel and I find out later, you know. I have a cousin that came here to visit. One, he attended Cal-Tech. He was professor over there and she was a professor at the one of the universities.

Ruth

So they went from a DP camp to Palestine or to Israel?

Helen

It was mother or the father. The mother, she was a cousin of Joe's, be he even did not know it before. She went to Israel, I mean to Palestine. I remember my father talking about this; an aunt came to visit my grandparents on my father's side from Lublin. They wanted to settle there, it is a long time, I even did not know it and they went there and they took the youngest daughter, she was still not married and other ones had been married, and to settle there.

Ruth

When? What year?

Helen

Oh, that is I don't know, as much as I could know.

Ruth

1920s?

Helen

I never asked

Ruth

Before? Earlier?

Helen

Yes, but she had asthma and it was hard for her there, but the daughter she found somebody, she was grown and she got married and she remained there. I visited her later, yes. I found out. I even did not know, we have to find out, you know. Israel, it was like the other end of the world, you know.

Ruth

It is half way around the world. So one more question. Were you ever active in Hadassah or ORT, or any of those other organizations?

Helen

I loved it, but we support very much Hadassah. I even have papers what we did. Hadassah, yes, very much. We made donations, yes, yes. I support this one too, Jewish World Watch very much. My daughter too. I talk a lot. I have a lot of papers. How much it means to me, to Joe, that somehow it makes a difference. I make a difference because I get letters.

Ruth

Make a tremendous difference, not just a difference.

Helen

When I get the letters it makes me feel really good. Even it's hard, I don't drive, somebody has to drive me, you know. Sometimes I feel okay, but not so, but I as I go I go.

Ruth

So you are a docent at the museum? Do you still do this?

Helen

I used to be. The first one, for years, we both have been. We started it, really. We had to give money to start it, the Jewish Federation. I used to go every day, but when it happened, after my son's experience, I did not direct before.. Oh, yes, we did. They have a lot of things, what I brought like a _____ from Germany, it was written in Hebrew, in German. You know they burned the books, but I find it, we donated it. Then I brought a cup and a spoon from Auschwitz, so I got it there too. We used to go every date. Schools, public schools, they used bring the kids and we had to talk. It is very important.

Ruth

What about Morton Fuchs and Elona Fuchs? Were you friends with them they also?

Helen

They were members, not close friends. It's funny you know, they are Jews, but they are Hungarian. They are a little different.

Ruth

Yes, I understand. Yes.

Helen

We are friends. I like Mr. Fuchs. But they are different.

Ruth

But he was more, you know, European, old school. He came from an orthodox background.

Helen

Yes. I don't know if she was orthodox. I don't think so, because they had been more reformed I think in Hungary and Romania. I think so. Not as much like in Poland, it is already more, the marriage, I think...

Ruth

A little more progressive. Anything else you want to ask?

Michael

Well let's see. There are a couple things.

Helen

I have a lot of things to show you. This is the man...

Ruth

Yes, that's in your book. That's the man that liberated the camp. Is this at your wedding?

Helen

Yes. Where did I get my dress? It's like here where you go, clothes, old clothes. What do you call it?

Ruth

Like a resale shop? Vintage? Like Salvation Army?

Helen

Salvation Army, okay. They didn't call it Salvation Army, but I have to show you, I have to give you some books and show you more.

Ruth

This was in 1945, the first one, for the civil union?

Helen

And this dress, my sister in-law had it on too.

Michael

Joe looks the same.

Ruth

Joe looks the same. You look different, but Joe looks the same.

Helen

And this is Joe as a student, this is Joe's brother and sister

Ruth

This is in the book also. He looks the same.

Helen

Helen and Joe with the kids to The Promise Land.

Ruth

This is on the boat?

Helen

Not yet, I am in Bremer Haven, in the port, yes. This is on the boat.

Ruth

These two are yours?

Helen

Yes, two kids. This is Renee, a baby. These are different people. It is commercial tank. Joe was sick the whole time. Seasick. Not me. That is my father.

Ruth

Look at this beautiful picture. So this is Israel Borenkraut. You know you should write what it is, because you know what, your kids need to know. Write it on the back. I am giving you homework. Write it on the back. Seriously.

Helen

That is some friends. That is before. I have letters, so many letters from people from some places. This is a professor, you have to read this. We never met him, but we got the book he wrote. That's Helen right there.

Ruth

It is you?

Helen

Yes later. I wanted to give you another thing,

Ruth

You know you should write the date also, about, even if it is not exact. About how old were you?

Helen

It was after the war.

Ruth

So let's say 1950s. You should write down, you know, write down 1950s.

Helen

Yes.

Ruth

Want me to write it down? I am going to write Helen Freeman, 1950, Want me to write on this one too, your father?

Helen

Yes. This was in the ghetto.

Ruth

So this is in the 1930s, 40s, 41?

Helen

When they came, yes.

Ruth

Okay, so I am going to write Israel Borenkraut.

Michael

I have a few questions.

Helen

I have some things that are so important I wanted to show it.

Michael

When you were in Munich how come you didn't go to Israel? I mean, you know, especially after Israel was established in 1948, how come you didn't go then?

Helen

You could not go. We did not have money, we could not go. We signed up where they was going to take us. We signed up to Israel. We signed up to Austria. We wanted to get out of Germany, but we did not have money, we have nothing, you know.

Ruth

They had to take whatever opportunity was given to them.

Helen

I don't know, maybe you had to have citizenship, I don't know what. We could not, nobody could do it. We had to wait for who was going to take us. Poland was finished, so we waited. We sit and wait. Every day we want to find out who is going to take us, yes. We have to find out when to sign up too, because in the meantime the countries had got together to make it something, somebody is going to take us. So in the beginning nobody was going to take us. I think America started and got together.

Michael

When Rabbi Galpert was the rabbi, you said you went to Friday evening services. Did you go to Saturday morning services?

Helen

I used to go to. Sometimes I missed it. Joe was regular going, yes. I, not all the time, not all the time, sometimes. I was a woman, I had to straighten

the house, deal with the kids when they said I don't want to go, things like this.

Michael

Do you have any memories of... The reason I ask is apparently they were poorly attended, the Saturday morning services, not many people attended. Do you recall?

Helen

Not too many. We have more now. I find it more happy. I look forward to going. I like hearing the Rabbi talk. He explains. I really didn't learn nothing except at home what it was there, how to be Jewish, you know. I did not go to school, like here you could go and learn, you know. I always say I am so grateful that I have the opportunity to learn more, yeah.

Michael

When you came here, could you describe a little bit more what Frank Ackerman did?

Helen

I felt he was great person. I did not know, like some people say he might be selfish. He was a boss, I don't know. He wanted to do good for the temple and he did. You know it was a small little temple there, you know, it was nothing really and he really built it up. He did it, you know, he got together in some ways. I liked him. Joe liked him, too

Michael

What was his connection with you when you first came here? Did he greet you?

Helen

When I got to know him. You know, when you come to a strange place you are just overwhelmed. Lost. You are lost. Especially if you don't know the language and not everybody spoke my language. So it was hard. I had to look for people who could speak my language. My Yiddish. And I found some. I think the one, the head of the school...

Michael

Silver.

Ruth

Silver.

Helen

Yes, he spoke Yiddish, yes. He was a nice, warm person. I found him very nice, you know. Some I could communicate, but not everybody. Some came to this country, in some ways they had not been American-like. I feel they are now more like American. They are Jewish, but more American. Some of them have been still like left over from another country. Well, you had all kind of people here. Some, they didn't even have education and they left Poland because the Polish people, what they did to the Jews when they had to take the men to the Army, they killed them, they really killed them, so some of them even cut their fingers not to go the Army. Some have been

very poor, did not have education, you know. There have been nice people , you know, but a little different and I was so young, much younger.

Michael

Did Frank Ackerman speak Yiddish?

Helen

I think so. I communicate. Yes, I think,

Ruth

He was American. His parents and grandparents were here.

Helen

And his wife, she was the involved too. Yes, she was involved.

Ruth

How was she involved?

Helen

I think she was involved in maybe the Sisterhood, but I was not too close, I find him maybe more nicer.

Ruth

Did they have kids your kids' age?

Helen

I don't know about that. I don't think they had children.

Ruth

Oh!

Helen

I don't think so.

Michael

Do you know what he did for living?

Helen

He had a big position in the way I was reading. I never asked about it, but I was reading. He owned a business, he owned something else. He had a big position. He was educated it seems to me. He was a very nice person. I find him very nice.

Michael

There are some things here I just want to follow up on in light of what people in earlier oral histories said. One person said that Ralph and Bettina Sabrosky were survivors. Do those names ring a bell with you? Ralph and Bettina Sabrosky?

Ruth

No. I don't know them. We had a lot of different people, some lived even in the Valley, but used to come. Well, we came later, you know. The Blumenthal's, they had been not in camps. It was different with them.

Michael

For sponsors, some person said that David Minovitz was a sponsor and helped people.

Helen

Was this father, David?

Ruth

Yes.

Michael

Yes

Helen

Yes, he was a nice. Had a liquor business.

Michael

He helped settle people. Do you remember?

Helen

Yes, he would try to give some clothes, you know, we all came with not having a lot of things you know, so we used to go to here and Salvation and buy even for the kids clothes you know, we find out, we even did not know it, you know where, but he yes, some clothes whatever they had.

Ruth

So did the temple have a committee of people who were sponsors, like some would give clothes, some would give rides... Was there a committee?

Helen

I did not know about this. I never, you know, I was strange, I was in a new place. In some ways I was happy and some ways like lost. I could not speak and even if somebody talked to me, you know.

Michael

Let's see, Ike Langholtz said that.....

Helen

Maybe they had a different experience. They had a different experience when they came. I think they had even a baby, a little boy.

Ruth

They were younger. They weren't even married. Langholtz wasn't married.

Michael

Ike was not married, yes.

Ruth

They were younger, quite a bit. They were about 10 years old.

Helen

Ike was young, Ike was, you know, like a student, but his sister, the Blumenfelt's, they came with a family, and some of them born here. I think one son was born, I don't know if the girl was born. Yes, they really get a lot of attention. They were one of the first ones. A lot of attention, they got it. Nice people, the Blumenfelt's. I liked Mr. Blumenfelt.

Michael

Anyway, Ike said that Max Jasmine was a roofer and sheet

Helen

The father.

Michael

Apparently they helped higher survivors or?

Helen

I don't know. Probably, maybe in the beginning. When he was already a roofer, you know. He probably helped them. They got a lot of help. My husband, he wanted to me more independent if he could, you know, but he was happy he got the job, and then later he had to look at himself, you know, about the recession. They laid him off, you know. He had to do gardening. He used to tell me I had to carry up on a mountain. And then he became a roofer some place. He had to look at himself. It was a little different. The Blumenfelt's they got a lot of attention. They had been the first one. I don't know now they got it, but some way they got it and they had been helped.

Michael

Ike also said... Well, we identified the Flauster's.....

Helen

Yes, that is what I say, the Flauster's.

Michael

He also said a person by the name of Bush. Hy Vigo said that he helped people and he specifically mentioned recalling, helping, bringing, carrying suitcases for you?

Helen

I don't know. Not for me, no. It was somebody else. He was a roofer and he was active in temple too. I forgot his name.

Michael

So it wasn't Jasmine? I mean, he was described as a roofer.

Helen

Who? That was Langholtz. He was an older man who worked on the roof.

Michael

But this isn't the one who helped you.

Helen

No. Maybe he worked in this company, but I forgot. They belonged to the temple. He was active, he was a roofer, yes, and I think he picked us up from the station and brought us here. I think so, I don't know. If he say that he was there, maybe, I don't remember.

Michael

In your book you mentioned a support group of survivors.

Helen

Yes, I met later.

Michael

I want to find out about that.

Helen

Yes, I met later. They had been all in Los Angeles. We felt so bad when my kids say why we don't go Los Angeles. Some from Radom and they have been in Los Angeles. I don't know when they came, but somehow they find out that we are here. One even lived, she was married and lived in the same apartment house with her husband, but she lost him later, and she find out

that we are here and they got here and we met, so they have been a support group. We used to meet one of those places, not the garden, what do you call it? Where you go in the... The park, we go to the parks Sunday and we would cook, each one would cook. My husband would come later. He would put something in oven and bring it there, you wanted to show it, so we got together and they have children and it was a swimming pool, sometime we went to a park where you could make hot dogs, stuff like that. So they have been there, helped a lot. And then we used to meet, I forgot this place, it has now become a little city, we used to meet there later in the years and again we have been together, we cooked, each one cooked something and we got together and we talked. It helped a lot. This was the support group.

Michael

Do you recall about when... When you say the later years, I mean was it the 1970s, 1980s?

Helen

No, before. I think probably we had been here, maybe in the 1960s. We have been very happy, you know.

Michael

How long did the support group lasts?

Helen

Oh still, until they're too old and some of them died. We made like a club. We used to go this club. We supported Israel and a lot of things, for Israel mostly. We donated money, we did whatever we could to have money for Israel, yes. To each ones weddings, to the daughters weddings, birthdays. It was an extended family. This helped a lot, more than I've got it here. I was grateful they sponsored us, they got us here. You know, they spoke our language and we had memories, the same memories. Even most of them I was not friends with them in the home, but we became friends, they went through the same thing, you know. Sometimes we talked about the things, you know, but we have been the family, we have been the aunts and uncles, the grandmas and the grandpas, you know, things like this.

Michael

About how many people were in the group at its maximum?

Helen

Well, we made it like a club and then we had many clubs. This one club is still very active. The 39 Club. We go a lot.

Ruth

The 1939 Club. In your club, how many people were in your club? 20, 30?

Helen

Yes something like this and whenever somebody finds out they joined it, you know, because from Radom, you know, yes. Then a lot of them died, so we went to another club, The Lorcher Club and then the 39 Club you know, that

is all the kinds. We still are very active. We do a lot of things yet. I don't go now, but I used to attend all the time. This was a lot. This kept going.

Michael

How often did you meet?

Helen

Oh in beginning every Sunday, yes. And then when it's special, you know like birthdays, when we drove, we drove in for the birthday or wedding.

Michael

Did you ever meet out here Pasadena?

Helen

Yes, in Alhambra Park. It is a big park and you had something where you could barbeque and things like this, we did.

Ruth

So it is interesting, that was their social group, not the temple.

Helen

Yes, Oh yes. And even in the business, to make a living each helped each other, recommendations. Some have liquor business, some have stores, some whatever they could. Even when my brothers came, I had to reach out to them. You know, I felt in Pasadena there's not too much to do and over there they have more opportunity, so I reached out to my, you know, my group. Some have been in liquor business, some had a restaurant, you know different ones. Helpful, very helpful, help each other

Michael

How about the children? Did the children make life-long friendships?

Helen

Not a lot in beginning because we used to get together and then you know they would talk, but they had different friends and they went to different direction too, but some are very educated. Doctors, lawyers, but not connected. They lived over there and we lived here, you know,

Michael

Well let's see... Actually, I do want to touch on one last thing. You said that you signed a petition to keep Rabbi Galpert.

Helen

Yes, I did.

Michael

What you remember about that whole incident?

Helen

Well, I was not involved, but I was not too happy, you know. So one way I looked at it, somebody else going to come, you know, but in another way, I liked him. He was a well educated man. He already has a family here. He had two children, you know. Let him stay. It was Melvin and we used to have insurance with Melvin.

Michael

Do you remember what the issue was?

Helen

Not exactly, not exactly, not exactly. I knew it, no, but I looked at it from another standpoint. He was not the Rabbi what I really expected, yes. I don't know, they said it was conservative, so I took their word. Then when I faced it, if somebody said, if somebody would say he is not, I would not take it, I faced it. We went to a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah and I think it was at Cal-Tech, and I went too, but look, I go all the places but I don't need to eat. I find even my kids, so I noticed he ate everything, so that is, I was very disappointed at that time.

Michael

Well, I think that is it for me. Do you have any

Helen

Nothing more there.

Ruth

Well just as a follow up to that, so when Rabbi Cullen came, things changed sort of, I guess.

Helen

Yes, but I felt you know he is nice and he is very knowledgeable, but I felt he is a little old timer and I felt those kids, I worried all the time about the kids, maybe because I was a teenager or the way I was brought up, I don't know. No attention much really, no. And I was concerned even my kids had been a little older, you know, but I was concerned you know about this. Well, I took it, you know. But he is very nice person, a very nice person. I like him as a person. He is knowledgeable, but he is an old timer, you know.

Ruth

And then when Rabbi Grater came, you sort of had like a new found interest.

Helen

Yeah, I liked it. I even could speak to the Rabbi. I would say, you know, it is very important that we have to have him more to include and make more attention to them so they feel more sure we like them, we love them, teenagers, you know. And the school started growing. I am not a big donor. I don't have a lot to do it, you know, and even if I had a lot, with college sometimes you have to help a little bit too, but I do, I support little bit. I am very happy about the school. I am very happy. I don't have kids there, but I am very happy. I see it. Those are going to be different. I don't know how you feel about the new Rabbi, I don't know about you.

Ruth

We love him.

Helen

Okay.

Ruth

We love him. Are you kidding? We love him.

Helen

I miss him today even, because it is different. It is really different. You know, the cantor, I'm missing him.

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