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Peter McMullin Centre
on Statelessness

Oral Histories of Statelessness

Interview with Guta Goldstein

11 August 2022

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Interviewed by Jordana Silverstein, Melbourne, 11 August 2022

Q: It's the 11th of August, and I'm in Melbourne with Guta Goldstein. And Guta, tell me, where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Poland in the city of Lodz, 1930.

Q: Tell me about your family.

A: Before the war?

Q: Before the war.

A: Well, I had grandparents, my mother's parents – I had a grandmother who, when I was three, left for Palestine at the time, to Jerusalem, because one of my aunts lived there. She went to marry in 1924 I think it was – I saw my grandmother when she was widowed – so in 1933 she and her youngest daughter went too, and they lived there. My grandmother – my mother's mum – passed away when I was six, and she was my favourite grandmother. And my grandfather unfortunately died in the Lodz Ghetto. And my mother had a sister who also died – I don't know where she died. I think they took her away, because she was in the ghetto but then they took her, and she had a little baby boy who was born just before the war, and of course they took him away. So they killed all these people. So that was my very closest closest family.

My mother passed away when I was seven – so that was before the war – and my father remarried, and as I always say, contrary to all the bad stepmothers, I had a wonderful stepmother. I liked her very much and we got on very well, very well. And of course she also perished. And my father died in the ghetto, so everybody died. I had a lovely little sister who was four years younger than I was, and she also died in the ghetto, and so I'm the only one actually that – I had a lot of aunts and uncles. I had an aunt that looked after me after my father died in the ghetto, and we went together to Auschwitz, and they took her away. I'm the only one, and two of my cousins survived with me, or I survived with them because they were older. We survived Auschwitz, the three of us. That's more or less – in very short – yes.

Q: How old were you when the war ended?

A: I was born in March and in April I was liberated. In March I turned 15, so when I got out of all this – after the war I was 15 years old, so I went through all that.

Q: So you were liberated from Auschwitz?

A: No. We were in Auschwitz for a long time – for six weeks which was very long, and then we went to, for 10 weeks we went to Bergen-Belsen which was another bit of hell, and then we were taken to Germany to a factory that produced parts to aeroplanes, and then we were liberated there by the American Army. And then we became displaced persons.

Q: Then what happened? Where did you go? Did you stay there, or they took you to a different camp?

A: We stayed there for a bit, and they looked after us, and they were very nice, and they fed us which was very important – the first thing. We wanted to go to Palestine because I had a grandmother there and two aunts, and that was family that we wanted to go to, and of course we couldn't because there was a blockade – you could not immigrate there. Immigrate or emigrate? Immigrate.

Q: Immigrate is okay.

A: Immigrate.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's two different –

Q: Yep.

A: We decided, we were told that if we make our way to Italy somehow, maybe from there we could go to – there was actually illegal immigration. So we got to Italy, and that's another big story.

Q: You were with your cousin?

A: Yeah, I was with my cousin. There were two cousins left, so this cousin that I came to Italy with was much older than I was, and the other one was four years older than I was, but she was born in Palestine before the war. Her name was Carmella. She was born on the Carmel in Haifa, and unfortunately her parents didn't like it at the time, so they wanted to come back home to where all the family was, to Poland, so she perished, and her parents perished, and her brother perished. And she didn't, she survived, and she was lucky that the family could find her birth certificate, and because of that she was a British subject, and she was allowed to go. She went to Isr – to Palestine – I think in 1946 she was already there. But we couldn't. So we went to Italy, and this is a long story – it's a very interesting story.

We got lifts. We didn't have a home. We were really nomads at the time because the Americans had to leave. Where we were in Germany became the Russian zone. Whoever wanted to return to Poland could have, I suppose, but there was nothing there. There were no relatives, no neighbours - Jewish neighbours, and my school friends were all perished. There was nothing to go back to, and besides the Poles didn't want us. We had to leave that little place – it was a small township in East Germany – it was called Mehltheuer – so we got a lift with the American Army to the west, then they left us somewhere in the middle of the street and that was that. We didn't know where to sleep, so then we had to go to the town hall, and went to the German office, and they were obliged to help out.

They found us a place somewhere with a German woman whose husband was away at war still, so we slept there for a few days – I can't remember, maybe a week – and then we had to go somewhere else, so we got another lift with one of those big – I don't know what they're called – camions they were called – with another American soldier. There were a few of us.

We were off to Augsburg – somewhere we stayed again in the middle of the – but then there was some Jewish organisation there started. I don't know how that happened exactly because I was a child you know, so my cousin was the one that was arranging things, and we then were told to go to a certain place to meet, and the whole of the Jewish people met there, and we were taken by camions in the middle of the night, no, during the day.

Some went to Austria, over the border from Italy to Austria – the place was called Mittenwald – what a beautiful place in the mountains in Austria – and there we slept a night on stretchers. We were all in the dark. If you want to, you can take this out, but it was illegal. It was all in the dark, we were fed some sandwiches in the dark, and they had stretchers, and we slept a night, and very early in the morning we were taken to a train. It wasn't a passenger train; it was one of those – what do they call it? Not commercial –

Q: Yeah, with goods and –

A: A goods train, except that this time the doors were open, they weren't shut – it wasn't like the Auschwitz one. And it turned out that a lot of it was taken up by Italian returned soldiers going home, and they were lovely. The Italians sing. They were joy. It was really – anyway - we got as far as Bologna – that's a great story. We got as far as Bologna, and the train stopped in Bologna, so everybody went out to see what's happening. It turned out there was something wrong with the train or the lines or whatever it was. By that time my cousin already had a male friend, and there was another couple of two men from Romania – Jewish men, and we all decided to go for a little walk and see what Bologna was like, instead of standing there waiting for a train to go, because they told us it would take a while. Well, we got back, and the train was gone, and we didn't have a penny to our name – we didn't have anything. We didn't have clothes, not much –

Q: Just what you were wearing?

A: Yes. The two Romanian men somehow had a little bit of money – I don't know where they got that from – they came from somewhere else, so I don't know their experiences, must have had – so they bought me an ice-cream, and that's all we had. Came night and we knocked on just a door – just knocked and we were desperate, and this wonderful Italian lady opened the door and she let us in. She said, "You can sleep on the floor," because she was bombed out. She showed us one room was full of rubble, but she let us in, and she let us sleep on the floor at night. In the morning she was very sweet because my hair – when we got to Auschwitz they shaved us, and my hair grew a little bit already and it was a bit messy, and of course I didn't have anything, so she came and she brought me a comb, and she brought me a mirror, and she told me the name of what a mirror is in Italian. That's the first word I ever learned in Italian, and that's lo specchio.

She showed me what I looked like, and she gave me the comb and she gave me – didn't give it to me, but she, and then we left to the station to see where we could go. We wanted to go to Rome actually, because that's where the train was supposed to be going. So there was nothing, there was nothing all day, and so we stayed at the station all day and the night. I laid down on the concrete floor just like that – you put your hand down instead of a pillow and fell asleep, and suddenly in the middle of the night there was a train coming. You know, it was amazing. We were like vagabonds in a way you know – we didn't know what we were

doing but we had to go to Rome. It was also a goods train, so we hopped on it and slept a bit I think, and when the sun came out, the train stopped in a place.

Ah, it said, somewhere on the train it said Firenze which we didn't know what that meant, so we thought we'd get a bit further towards – it was going towards Rome at least, but it was stopping in Firenze – we didn't know what that was – so then we got there, and the sun was shining – it was beautiful – and we were stopped in this piazza, the Stazione, and we got out, and we stood there on the station. We didn't know what to do. Well, Jewish people have this thing - as I said the two of them were a bit older than I was – quite a bit, 12 years which is a lot – so my cousin said, "Let's go to the synagogue. There must be a synagogue, and there must be some Jewish people somewhere." So they did and it was a Saturday actually, that's why – yes, we arrived on a Saturday – so then they did – we were the first people that came, first survivors that came, so they weren't prepared at all, but they had, I was told later that it you know, I think it was where they prepared the people that died.

It was at the house, the funeral, but there was a room, so they put mattresses on the floor, and they left it like this. And that's where we stayed for four and a half years. Not in that room, but eventually the Jewish community paid our – because other people were coming from Russia – Russian and Ukraine and partisan Jewish, and they came from there, so they needed the space. After a while, we went private – they paid for us, and that was very nice, but we were capped. We didn't have any money. One day we didn't have anything to eat because – the little bit of money they gave us, and we wanted to buy some bread and – because I couldn't understand Italian. I made a mess of when the bread is available, because with the black market you couldn't get – because they still had the coupons for food, it was right after the war. It was something, I tell you what.

It wasn't great, but eventually there was a villa that belonged to a Jewish person who ran away from Italy to Switzerland, but he let The Joint have this villa, and so we lived there. There was a whole lot of families – not a whole lot of families, but I can't remember – I wrote it down in my book of how many families there were – and eventually the ones that came from Russia – the partisans, some of the ladies were pregnant – their wives – because they were liberated much earlier than we were, so one way or another there was a whole lot of families. Eventually children were born, and my cousin also had one, and we stayed there for four and a half years trying to get to Israel. By that time it was already '48. No, '46 we arrived there, '48 we had a big celebration about when Israel became Israel – their independence – and that was fantastic.

It was something just you know, to think that we were the first in thousands of years to live to have a country for the Jewish people. It was wonderful. Yes, we stayed there. Our Italian neighbours were wonderful, and I had a very nice time. I met an Italian girlfriend, and because I was a teenager then, I enjoyed everything, and I learned the language very quickly, and I had those friends, and we sang and it was all very nice, but we still didn't know what was going to happen. We still - we got a ration once a month. We were not in charge of our lives, that's actually, that's actually what it was. We were kept by the UNRRA. UNRRA they say it in English, but it's the UNRRA. They gave us a certain amount of money per month – very little – but you could just buy, maybe, a bit of butter for the baby, or something like – a little bit – and a ration, and The Joint helped also.

The Joint paid, I think, for the villa where we lived or the rent or whatever – I'm not quite sure what they – but yes, anything you wanted, you had to go to The Joint in Rome. And we were in Florence. That was Florence, by the way, Firenze.

Q: Yes.

A: As far as that was concerned, I had a wonderful time; I was free, I had friends, I could walk out, and we met friends – a Polish lady who was the secretary of – I was told there was a Polish Association for Poles who lived in Italy, and she was the secretary, and she had a lot of Polish books, and I was an avid reader, so I went there just about every day for another new book. They befriended me, those people, and they were wonderful to me, and eventually she paid for my English lessons. So I learned – because I didn't go to school – I didn't have any schooling. And she paid for my English lessons. She found me a teacher, and the teacher was wonderful, and then the teacher died, and her daughter took over. And they all befriended me. They were very lovely people and they all liked me, so that was my private experience.

Of course the people that were already older than I was, it was very hard for them because they already had babies. They didn't even get around to understand what happened to them and get over it, and they were still grieving, like we all did, and then suddenly they all had children. I can imagine it must have been – they never talked about it, but horrible worry seeing that all of the children were taken away from them. You still lived it. People didn't know where they were going to go, so we couldn't go to Israel. Couldn't go to Israel. And so the Joint had lists – every country – because yes, this is very important to say, that after all that we, the Jewish people went through and had really no home to go to, they were not allowed to go to Israel at the time before it was Israel. Once Israel was established there was a war, so people with children didn't want to go to another war. I didn't want to go by myself because I was the only one left and I was only 15, but those days 15-year-old children were not like today.

Q: Yeah, it's very young.

A: I was very young, and I didn't want to go by myself. Besides, I don't think anybody asked me.

Q: So nobody asked you where you wanted to go?

A: No. People asked you – not me, but my cousin was the big person –

Q: Yeah, she was making the decisions.

A: - so it was, straight away, "Do you want to go here, or do you want to go there?" My late husband, he wanted to go to America, so there was a big quota for Jewish people, "You can come in." Australia also had a quota. All countries – some of them – didn't want any Jewish people, and there was a list to go to Brazil. South American countries, there was some that took people in, but it was a big waiting list and there was quotas everywhere. So every now and again my cousin and her husband went to The Joint in Rome, and by that time they had another child, and I minded the kids, and they went to put our names on all different lists.

And it took five years. I don't know the year that they put our name on the Australian one, but it took a long time, but eventually Australia came good in 1949, and we came to Australia.

10 years exactly since the war started – September, and in September we came to Australia. Ten years, so six years then and four and a half years in Italy. So that's where we were, and it was really – we were free and nobody hurt us and it was okay, but we still did not know what our future – you know like I missed school! Because in Italy you had to pay for school, and I missed my school because during the war you weren't allowed to have it, and after the war there was no way – that lady – that secretary of the Polish Association – she said, "Learn English." She said, "It doesn't matter what country we will end up in, you will need it."

Q: It will be useful.

A: And it was true, I came to Australia and got a job straight away in an office. That's the story, now if you want to ask me questions, do.

Q: I have so many questions.

A: Okay.

Q: So you registered with The Joint and with the UN, did you have documents? Did they give you identity documents?

A: Yes, I have one. What are we doing?

Q: The UNRRA, or the –

A: I had a thing from the UNRRA – a little document. I've got it somewhere and my husband did one – you know, the rations they gave us and that we are –

Q: Stateless?

A: - stateless. Stateless people. I have those documents.

Q: What did it mean - when did you start to know yourself as stateless, and when did you –

A: I don't know what it was called. You know. We were homeless!

Q: You were homeless, yeah.

A: We were just homeless, this is what it was, but stateless is more than homeless because you don't have a – not only a home, but not where the home is going to be, so you didn't have a home either. You didn't have a home, and you didn't have a country, and you didn't know where you were going, and you didn't, you went, you couldn't work. In Italy, let's say, you couldn't work because it was unemployment there anyhow. The Italian immigrants also came to Australia – men, a ship full. When we came to Australia on the ship, it was a ship full in second class or the third class or whatever – we were the third class – I said there was second class, whatever. There were lots of Italian men – just men, and I remember years ago

when we went overseas and we had a taxi driver, many years later of course, and we told him we spoke Italian – so we spoke to him – and he says, “When you get to Australia, say hello to all those poor Italian men that went away from their home country for bread.”

I remember that – it was very sad – it makes me cry even today, but they did all very well here and brought their families back. But they had a country they left, and they left their families there, but we couldn't go anywhere even. If you wanted to go somewhere, you couldn't. Where would you go? You couldn't go anywhere because you couldn't. It was, really it was a tragedy, but we were looked after. I must say we weren't left in the street – we didn't sleep in the street, except the time on the station once or twice, but otherwise we had a roof over our heads. Sometimes we lived two families in a very small room, and then one day somebody got to America, and we were so pleased, and then there was an extra room so we –

Q: You got the room.

A: - get it, but that's how it was.

Q: What was it like seeing other people go and find somewhere to live?

A: Oh, yes, it was fantastic.

Q: You were happy for them, or you were –

A: Yes, we were very, very happy for them, but then it was also people became political – Jewish people. There were Zionists, and there were people that had friends and relatives in America, and they wanted to go to America. And they suddenly started – in the villa – the Americans and the Israelis.

Q: They would argue?

A: They argued. They quarrelled.

Q: What were they arguing about? Which place was better?

A: The Zionist people were wanting to support Israel; the other ones wanted to go to their families. Look, it was – but I remember that it was – but we were very happy when people started – but then we still didn't stay to the end. I think it was at the end of '48 they shifted us – The Joint – I think he wanted his villa back or something, and we went to Rome, and again we stayed in a villa – in Italy everything and a house –

Q: Everything is a villa.

A: - is called a villa – and we stayed in a place where there were already other people from Rome. It wasn't in Rome, it was 50kms from Rome, but it was the most beautiful little place, and it was on the sea, and it was gorgeous. It was a lovely lovely place – it was called Ladispoli – so we stayed there, and from there we eventually left for Australia, it was great.

Q: Did you learn Italian there? Did you have classes, or you just picked it up?

A: No, I picked it up. I pick up languages. I pick up languages, I do. Actually, English is the only – Polish of course is Polish, but English is the one that I had a proper teacher and a proper structured way of learning the language, but the rest of them, no. Italian I spoke very well – I still do. As a matter of fact, I have a funny radio that changes its stations as it wants, and I found an Italian station, so I just said, “I’m going to listen to that one,” so every morning I listen now to the Italian news, just to keep my thinking.

Q: And you speak Yiddish as well?

A: Yes.

Q: And any other languages?

A: German.

Q: And you spoke that before the war, or you picked that up during the war?

A: German?

Q: German.

A: German during the war – picked it up -

Q: Picked it up! Sorry, that’s a weird way to say it.

A: but really, I spoke it very very well, very very well, but now I just haven’t spoken it for ages. I went once on a cruise and we stopped in Germany, and I went to a shop, and I spoke in German, and they gave me all these wonderful complements – how good my German was. So it pops up. Once you hear it, it comes out of your mouth, so I learned that. The Yiddish, I don’t speak it very often, so I’m not very – I suppose if I started – not that I don’t understand it, I can translate something, but to speak it I have to think because I think in English now. It’s the language of my grandparents in a way, and the older people in my – so after I lost my family – in the ghetto people used to speak – when we were working in these factories, people used to speak Yiddish too but a lot of Polish, so we were the Polish speakers, but I understood and I spoke it at the time, but after Auschwitz I didn’t talk to anybody anymore in Yiddish.

People spoke, and then here when we came there was also some people who were in a hostel here – in Jewish Welfare, so there were people speaking Yiddish in the hostel, so we spoke to them, but it wasn’t something that I was –

Q: So your family spoke Polish?

A: We spoke Polish. The grandparents –

Q: The grandparents spoke Yiddish?

A: Yes, but it must have been that that generation of my parents most probably all decided to assimilate very well and the children –

Q: They were –

A: Assimilate – not religiously or anything – their traditions and everything. That was the way it was, but yes, their children and the schooling.

Q: So you didn't go to a Jewish school before the war, you went to a Polish school?

A: No, not to a private school, but it was a Jewish - separated, so it was a public school but Jewish children and Jewish teachers, but it was Polish. I had a wonderful teacher – I loved her. Oh she was nice.

Q: So you took this boat to Australia, tell me about the boat trip.

A: The boat trip?

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh that was great. First of all it was interesting because imagine a 15-year-old that hasn't been out anywhere except in a ghetto, and in a camp, and doesn't know life at all any other way, and there was a ship – for a start, I was on a ship. When I saw it, it was white. It was a Greek ship – it was called Cyrenia. It was huge thing. It was like a big – not a city, but a big house – huge – and it was beautiful, and then we stopped in places like Ceylon, and where else we stopped on the way? And it was just, you know. In Ceylon I remember we went off, and I made friends with some young people, and a whole lot of young ones of us went down – by that time I was 19, I must tell you, because it was time passed, so we went down there and there were rickshaws. I couldn't believe it. I read about it – because I read a lot – but there was these men that was running like a horse, and I thought, "My God."

I was actually quite perplexed because I was thinking, "He looks like a slave," and we were free already, and I said, "Why does he do that? That's his country," but I couldn't do it – I couldn't go on, and the boys did. There were some boys with us on the ship and they went on, and I said, "No, I'm not going," and then they said, "This man works for his living. He needs the money." I didn't have much money – I think the boys paid – so I went for just a little bit. I watched him and I told him to stop. He was very cross, but I told him to stop, and I got off. I couldn't do it. I just could not do it – just going on a rickshaw driven by a man. At the time, I didn't have a camera, I didn't have anything anything anything, I hardly had any luggage, but I was thinking now, his skin was like leather, he had no shoes on, and he was running.

He was skin and bones – you could see every bone in his body – and he was running fast, and even today I'm glad I got off. He was very cross with me, but I did get off, and I didn't – a part of that which was very shocking, actually. I enjoyed this trip on the boat; there were dances and there were people, a lot of us Jewish people from all over. Some were on Aryan papers during the war, some came from the partisans, and some came from Germany, and all stateless people from wherever they were chased out of. It was wonderful. It was four weeks, and they had three records, just three records of Greek music, and it was playing forever, the same thing. Everything was new! And the food. And bananas! I still have a banana every day. Ever since – I've been here for 73 years – I still didn't miss one banana. People didn't like them – some of them – so they left it on the table – I had it.

Q: That was your first time eating bananas?

A: I remember I had a banana – I don't know whether one or two or how many bananas I had before the war. Because they don't grow in Poland – they're imported – so I know that I had a banana, and I knew what it tastes like, but I don't think I had many in my life until I was nine. I might have had one or two during my life. It was a very interesting trip as far as geography and the people. I'm gifting you my book, and I want you to read it –

Q: I will read it

A: because there I really described things very well – how they did that in Arabia. It wasn't Arabia, where was it? My memory is going, I tell you what. It's got two names, Saudi Arabia, and we passed there.

Q: You stopped there?

A: Aden, that's where we –

Q: Yes.

A: They were all wearing white clothes, and we were on the ship – we weren't allowed to come off because there was a war in Israel at that time still so we couldn't get off the boat, but we were on the boat, and they came with boats, and it was fascinating. Not to you I know that you research it, but it was fascinating how they traded. People threw them money in a bit of paper, it fell in the water, little boys got into the water – they had little boats – and they went to retrieve it, and they sent through whatever you bought onto the boat. It was interesting just to see them. I couldn't buy anything – I didn't have any money and I didn't care. There was little elephants – not elephants, but little shmonzes or something – I don't know what they would buy, but it was all together very interesting, as far as my education of the world. It was fantastic. I found it fascinating. I was just so, you know!

Q: That's incredible. Do you remember what your travel documents were? Did you have to get special travel documents to come to Australia? Do you remember?

A: Yes, we got – I can't remember – but I've got all the documents. There weren't many. We were stateless, and when we came to Australia we were picked up by people from Jewish Welfare.

Q: So they were waiting at the boat for you?

A: Yes.

Q: Was there a whole lot of you that they were waiting for?

A: Yes, quite a few, but mostly people had relatives also here. There was some people that came just before the war and managed to bring their families back, or all kinds of people – people that had friends knew that they lived in Australia, asked them could they sponsor them and they did, but we came –

Q: But you weren't sponsored?

A: We were sponsored by the Jewish community of Australia. It was Arthur Calwell who was the Minister for Immigration, and Mr Fink, Leo Fink who started that campaign that we have to get these people out somehow. So that was those lists, and they were our sponsors. There was a hostel in Camberwell, and we went to the hostel, and once we were here I had a job in a week's time, and I could go buy my own chocolate, and oh and I'm rich, it was fantastic. It was just the most fantastic thing. As I said, being stateless in Italy or anywhere, the thought of it that you don't know what your tomorrow will bring you, where you are going to be, and if you're ever going to be anywhere or finish off being on charity all your life, that was very scary, but I was lucky in as much that I was young. I lost my childhood, but I had still my youth, whereas the older people, that was harder for them. They lost their youth, really.

My cousin was 21 when the war started, and she had a fiancé and he perished, so all together they already knew, understood about human - nastiness. I did too, but I wasn't philosophising about it, I wasn't, you know, I just took it away. I was a good girl; I did what I was told. If I had stand there, I stood there, and sit there, I sat there. I didn't rock the boat sort of thing, but older people had much more – they understood what it is to be homeless much better than I did. I did too because I knew that I couldn't do – like I have this Italian girlfriend, and they went on holidays, and she had a new dress, but I didn't. I had a charity dress – either it fitted, or it didn't, and all that – so it was hard but it was in comparison, it was a wonderful life, do you know what I mean?

Q: Sure.

A: It was good and bad. Only if you saw your future or of your tomorrows, but if you didn't think about it and you took each day as it was, it was wonderful, do you know?

Q: Yes, but it would have been hard too. When you don't know what tomorrow will bring, it would have been so hard for you.

A: Exactly, you don't know, and you wanted to go to school and you so wanted to go to school, and eventually I came here – I was 19 – what was I going to go to school? I couldn't start university without anything, and I couldn't go to school with the little children. Thank goodness I was always with older people than I am, and they were intelligent people, and my cousin was. She used to whisper, and during the war in the camp – not in Auschwitz we didn't, but in the last camp we were on bunks, and at night she used to whisper, and she would tell us the films she saw, and the books she read – all stories she used to tell us. A few girls that were around our bunks were all listening, so you learn things a little bit like that. I read – there I didn't during the war of course – that year away from –

In the ghetto I did a lot, and of course I lived with my aunt, and my cousin, and my other cousin Carmella, and her brother who perished also with us in Auschwitz – he came with us, and my aunty went, so we sang, and we read books, and we told stories. In the factory while you were working people were telling stories. In the ghetto it was awful – the hunger was unbelievable – but people were talking to each other, and telling stories, and listening, and all kinds of things. I knew about life, a whole lot of things – stories that people were telling, it

was wonderful. In a way I had an education more of life, even other people's, so here I am. So that's that. I wanted to tell you also about my husband because he's not alive. I wrote his story in that book also.

That train, I didn't know that we were on the same train, but now, lately, I just worked it out. He was on that same train to Italy too, but there were lots of people there, and all those people they got to Rome, and they stayed two nights apparently in Civitavecchia – his friend was telling me that – and in the Italian film house where they were making films. They had them there sleeping the night, then they went to Santa Maria di Bagni, which is at the heel of Italy, in Puglia, and there was a lot of people that were there – Jewish people that came from there to Australia, and they were friends with us later, and he knew them from there. From there, a lot of people went to Israel – some of them illegally some of them legally later – so that train, if I didn't go, I would have finished also, whether I would have met him there, I don't know.

Q: Where did you meet him?

A: Here. That story I won't tell you, that's in my book. My second book is a happy book. So you can read it and you can draw your conclusion. He made friends –

Q: You met here?

A: - because he also is the only one like me – also the only one left, but he had very good friends. He was a very very sociable person, very lovely, very loved by everybody, and he was lovely. So anyhow a friend of his had a brother in Melbourne from before the war, and a brother brought him out here – this brother was in Santa Maria – and when he settled he made a permit for my husband and his friend, and quite a few people. People were doing that, you know, brought their friends over.

Q: But so you didn't know anyone in Australia when you arrived?

A: Not a soul. Not a soul, not a soul.

Q: What was the job that you got? What were you doing? Who was it with?

A: I was, Jewish Welfare, they were my sponsors. I got there and I was interviewed – got there for another reason altogether which you'll read in my book – and he said to me – spoke Polish – he was the manager. There was a manager, there was a secretary, and there was the accountant – there was three men, and this one – I was talking to him, and he asked me where I came from and all that, and we were talking in Polish, and then eventually I mentioned that I can speak English, “Oh really?” Anyhow, I was at Camberwell Hostel, so I went home and that was that, and as I got in my cousin says, “Oh, I just talked to Mrs,” oh what was her name? Thank God I wrote a book, because I would have -

Q: oh that's all right.

A: Wexler, Mrs Wexler – her and her husband were managing the hostel. “Mrs Wexler wants to talk to you,” so I went to Mrs Wexler, and she says, “Jewish Welfare just rang. They want to talk to you. Ring them right back,” so I rang them right back and he said, “look, I know

you haven't got a job yet," and I was there for about six days or something and the job was fictitious because I said I was a furrier – I didn't have a clue because I had to write down something, but I did learn to do the overlocking, because I had, my Italian friend's father was a furrier and he taught me how to sew together these bits of fur, so I knew how to do that. I wasn't cheating but I didn't get a job yet – I just came – and he said, "I know you haven't got a job yet, we could give you a job for a few days. We need a lot of filing to do, would you like to do that?" So I went and I got a job.

I got filing and I did it very well, and I did it in no time – immediately, so the job was finished. It ran out in a week, "I'm done." The accountant was German-Jewish. We got on very well in the end. He was a very nice person. Everybody was nice to me really, I must say. So he says, "Look, there's a girl that works for me now, and she's going to Israel, you know on aliyah." Her name was Tikvah, Tikvah Feiglin, I still remember. I wouldn't recognise her for anything, but I remember that was her name. And he said, "I need someone. Would you like to work for me? I'm the accountant." I said, "oh no, I couldn't" I couldn't because my maths wasn't very good at school – I had two classes, "I don't think my maths is good enough," and I had no schooling. I'm still very - sometimes when I'm in a crowd where there are university students with big discussions, I never take part. I'm not good. I am really very – but anyhow.

So I said, "Yes, I would like to," and he said, "You wouldn't like to work for me?" I said, "I would but I'm not good at maths," and he said, "Don't worry about that. I'll teach you. I'll tell you what to do." I said, "But I'll make mistakes," and he said, "Don't worry, I will fix them." And I worked for him, I worked there for about six years or more, until my children were born, and then I worked part-time when I had already two children, and I was his secretary. And then also because I spoke English and all those other languages, I eventually, whenever there was a boat coming with Jewish migrants, I used to go with them to the boat and I used to translate. Oh it was great. It was a very good job, really. That was my only job I had in Australia, actually.

Q: Just for those six years?

A: Yes, and then I had children, and I went back, then, unfortunately, we had to buy a milk bar which we did, so then I got out of that and then I didn't work anymore.

Q: Why did you have to buy a milk bar?

A: Because we were poor, we didn't have family, we didn't have anybody, we didn't, and wages at the time. When I first started, £4 was my wages, and then when I got to be 21, I got £10 and my husband got £10, so £20, and we had two children eventually, and we didn't have any – and also we had debts because you had to pay key money for a place. We had a miserable flat, and mind you we made it very pretty, but it was an old thing in Barkly Street, St Kilda, and it was dark during the day, because there was a new flat right in front of it, but we bought ourselves some nice – went to Myers and got a whole lot of things on – what do you call it?

Q: Laybuy?

A: No, it was called something else. You paid it off – it was in three years, so much of it – so for one £10 a week we lived, one £10 a week. We were children. We were really stupid. So £10 we had to pay whatever the key money – we had to pay that off, and we had to pay off the furniture because we bought ourselves some very nice furniture too [laughs].

Q: You deserve it.

A: So we started, and slowly slowly my husband started a factory – a friend of his taught him knitting so he did knitting, and then eventually there was a bit of a recession in the 50s – 60s it was, and then we bought a house. We bought a house, that was already in the 1960s, and we had it for about a year, and then my husband broke his leg, and he went into real estate because he was very good with people. But then there was another recession in 60s, so we decided to go and buy a milk bar and borrowed all the money for it from friends. Everybody lent us a little bit – whatever they could – and we eventually paid the money, but that money, we didn't use any because we had food and accommodation. We didn't have to spend our money, and once we paid it off, that money was ours. And so then we went all right and my husband went back to real estate, and bought a business, and it was okay. Yes it took a long time.

Now you hear children say – 22 or 23 they are, “I can't buy a house!” We bought our first house – the first one we couldn't keep – and the second one, this one, thank goodness, it was 1970, we were already - just before we were grandparents. Yes. When my daughter got married in 1981, we were still living in another little place, but a better one than the very first one. And then we bought this one in 1982, and my daughter was very upset because she said, “I would have liked to have lived in that house too,” but she didn't, she wanted to get married. She's gorgeous, and she's got seven children, and yes they're wonderful grandchildren, and now I've great-grandchildren so all together it's a happy ending, except that I lost my husband which is terrible. It's very sad. It's going to be 20 years next January.

Q: That's very hard.

A: Yes, very hard, very hard, it's hard to - especially because we had very good friends because Holocaust survivors were like family. We were like family, really – all more or less the same age, the boys and the girls. We were all looking after each other. The kids are still coming to visit me – the ones, their children but they were a little bit older than I was, and they're all gone now, except Irma – Irma is still here – and that other girl is still here, and me, and we're all born in 1930 so we're all the same age, but everybody is already – Irma is not as well and the other one is not as well.

Q: It's very hard.

A: It's hard. It's hard when you don't - it's wonderful when you can talk to people your own age, and you can't because there aren't any, there aren't any. And especially survivors. If you had survivors and your own age, then you can still –

Q: Yeah, you share an experience.

A: Yeah, but look it's all right. I'm doing okay. People seem to be all right with me so it's okay. Sorry, am I talking too much?

Q: Not at all, no no no. I just have so many questions. I'm just trying to think of what to ask next.

A: So sorry.

Q: No no no, I'm loving listening to you. Your story is so important and I'm so glad to hear it. So you lived in St Kilda and in Camberwell, did you spend time in Carlton as well?

A: Yes. It was like this; we came on the ship, and we went to Camberwell because Camberwell was where you slept. It was an old mansion. It's gone now.

Q: Have you gone back –

A: Yes.

Q: - or it's gone?

A: We went back a few years ago – my grandchildren and my children decided they want to go – and we had a little bus and took all the family all around Melbourne where we lived, so some places were gone already. The one in Camberwell had two ballrooms – like huge – so they separated the men and the women. They didn't have enough space, so we slept on stretchers, but that was only – what is it called? Transit, but four weeks or six weeks I think, and that was it. Then they put you to – then Jewish Welfare had two houses, one in 885 Drummond Street, Carlton, and one in 912 Drummond Street, Carlton, and that's where the people went, so you got a little room there until you got a job, and when you got a job, you went and looked for a house or for a flat, but it was very hard to get then. That was very hard, but that's another story in my book.

Q: So you lived on Drummond Street?

A: We lived on Drummond Street a little bit, yes, and I had a very good friend that I met, and she was a very good friend. She introduced me to my husband. She was lovely. She lived not far so it was neighbourly. The minute I put my foot in this country – touch wood – it was good.

Q: Do you think being stateless – did that affect what kinds of jobs you could get, or how did being stateless affect your life when you came to Australia?

A: Nothing.

Q: Nothing?

A: Nothing. It was something to get over with, like a sickness. If we got, not over it – the war – you will never get over it, but you keep going. You've got a life to live, and you've got opportunities to take so you do. So no, that didn't, because once that was resolved, it was resolved, and you didn't lose any family with it. There was no you know, there was no war

where nothing was the same anymore, and actually, it was something – like yeah, you got over it, it wasn't too bad, it's actually quite normal. You weren't less normal than other people. Also inside you you had your memories and all that, and the Italian people were wonderful where we lived, and it was very pleasant. You were not hungry. You were not dirty, you were not – I mean, we lived two families to a room for a little bit and that was very upsetting because not, there were people there all together – different people.

If you live with somebody that is not up to your – it's not snobbish, it's just something that they are. It was very hard. There was a family with a child, and my cousin had hers, and so I was there, so I'm in the middle of them. We had half a room, and they had half a room, and this one eh, and she wanted the window closed, and we wanted the window open because there wasn't enough air. Do you know Yiddish?

Q: Only a little bit.

A: She was a funny woman, and she had a sickly child. Many years later I found out that this child had a hole in the heart – they didn't know – but she was always sick this little girl, and we had the window open, and she said, "hm. You have to be intelligente," which means – it's not intelligent, it's not, it's like, sort of – there is a word for it, I can't think of it at the moment in English.

Q: That's okay.

A: Better educated, better person, and needs to open the window, because now her child, she wanted the window shut because the child doesn't get sick, and it was very hard. It wasn't pleasant to live in that, but later they shifted out to another room, so that was much better, so we fixed it up, and there was only a bulb, and we found some old hat, and we made a hole in it – a straw hat – and put it up there. Mind you, when I think about it today, the straw could have caught fire – I never thought of it – but things like that you know, it makes life interesting!

Q: So all of your friends at that time were stateless? Was that something you talked about amongst your friends?

A: We didn't. They weren't my friends.

Q: You didn't talk about?

A: They weren't my friends. They were all older than me. There were all children. I was just a little girl there that everybody sort of, you know – I was the novelty, and I also had my cousin with the children. But, they were all stateless. They were all like that because they came from the Ukraine. The Ukraine was Polish at the time still, and the Germans got it during the war, but before the war it was Poland, so they also had a bad time with the Ukrainians, and they came out. All Jewish people just about in Europe were stateless, except the ones that maybe – I think the Jews of Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia was not antisemitic – the Czech Republic – and the other one were very much so – Slovakia – by the time it was one country still, but I know there were some people that were deported from Czechoslovakia to the Lodz Ghetto.

And so in our camp, I met a girl and her mother – they were from Czechoslovakia – they went back – and the neighbours didn't take all their stuff. They had the key, they went back home, they went back to normal, and they stayed in Czechoslovakia. So they were not stateless, they went back home. You know. So they had their experiences – bad ones – but they went back home, whereas we did not go back home. Our troubles did not finish. They were different troubles, but they were –

Q: When did you become a citizen in Australia?

A: 1950- I was pregnant with Jessica. Jessica was born in '57. '56, at the Olympics. I think at that time.

Q: During the Olympics was the – around the time?

A: Not during, at that time – the Olympics, and my pregnancy, and Jessica was born. All together it's –

Q: Sure, at the same time.

A: Yeah, and the citizenship were sort of all together in my memory like that.

Q: Do you remember the process of applying to be a citizen and what that was like?

A: No I think it was automatic. I think you got a letter, and then we were in St Kilda Town Hall.

Q: Do you remember filling out forms to apply to be a citizen, or you don't remember any of that?

A: I don't remember that – I really do not, but I've got my certificate, and it's huge.

Q: You got a certificate?

A: My citizenship, yes.

Q: And there was a ceremony?

A: Yes, there was, yes yes. I think the mayor was speaking, and it was somewhere in a big hall – I think at the St Kilda Town Hall, because we lived at the time still in Barkly Street, St Kilda, where now is the Coles Supermarket, and my husband's cousin who came from Poland much later than we did, so when they came they used to live there, and he lives now in St Kilda, and whenever he has a joke he says, "That's where your bedroom used to be," because Coles is there at the corner of Barkly and Acland – two streets into Barkly Street. There used to be a market next door and it was lovely – it was nice. Lots of Jewish people were living there because St Kilda has a lot of flat houses and that's where people couldn't afford houses. They lived in flats.

Q: You said being stateless felt like being homeless –

A: Yes.

Q: - did Australia feel like home?

A: Yes. Very much. Australia felt permanent, it felt safe, very safe. Also, the people, you didn't hear anybody calling you names like Jews or whatever, which was fantastic. Australian people are very nice I really think. And yes, it was. Certain things were strange of course – there was lots of things that were strange.

Q: Like what?

A: When I started working at Jewish Welfare – just those few days where I was doing the filing, I started and then suddenly, I started and then I think on the Friday, on the Monday, and on Monday they said, “You don't come tomorrow,” or maybe it was more than two days – a few days, “You don't come tomorrow.” Tomorrow was a Tuesday, and I said, “oh, I've lost the job,” so I said, “oh, okay,” because I'm a good girl and I didn't argue. And then there was a gentleman that worked there, he was in Shanghai – he was also an Austrian-Jewish man, and then he says, “Oh, you're not coming tomorrow because it's Show Day,” and I say, “What's Show Day?” He couldn't make me understand what Show Day was. He said, “There are cows and there's sheep,” and I'm thinking, “What kind of a funny holiday is that?” and I'm thinking, “What a fantastic country.” You know. It was wonderful! It was good. It was strange. I said, “Well, I'm not arguing with that.”

Q: That would be so strange having come from where you've come from, and we get a holiday to go to a show.

A: Exactly, and then of course Cup Day – horses. Certain things were very strange, but mostly it was lovely. Mostly, it was - you could do what you wanted to do. It was your life. You got your life back again. It was yours – your decision when you went to work, and – I mean, if you got a job. But at least it was your decision to get a job, and you could get a job when you decide to have it. Maybe not exactly what you wanted – not everybody could get what – if somebody was a doctor, he couldn't get it. Because you couldn't, or if you were a lawyer, you couldn't. But if people couldn't do this, they did something else. They adapted. Holocaust survivors are very adaptable people. Nothing was strange. You could do whatever you wanted to do. You were not dependent on where you – I mean, you were still dependent where you want to live – if you wanted to live in Toorak and you couldn't afford it, you couldn't. That goes even if you're not stateless, right?

Q: Yes.

A: But wherever you've got a flat, and that's why some people lived in Camberwell, some people lived in Ivanhoe, some people – wherever they got – because it was very hard to get accommodation. At the time it was very, very hard, and people didn't want people with children – that was true – and sometimes you could get an advertising – those days it was all advertised in The Age, and it was advertised Christian family only, or no children, or things like that, but it was their choice, you know. But if you got somewhere – like friends of ours got a beautiful flat somewhere near Hawthorn I think it was, they just looked it up and they got it. Sometimes you looked it up and somebody else got it before you, well too bad, you know?

Q: Yeah.

A: Things like that, but this was normal living. That was nothing that impacted on your religion as far as those bits of things, but mainly it was not because – you eventually got where you needed to be, what you could afford to be.

Q: Getting citizenship, did that feel different, or it was just –

A: Oh it felt pride. You've a sense of belonging, very much so. It was, "Now I'm a citizen of Australia," and that meant a lot. Having a passport meant a lot because in those days in Germany when they took all the passports away and they were stateless, the German people – that was still before the war – it would just be when Hitler got there, so there was a lot of things that – once you came to Australia your life began anew. Really anew anew. Because I was young, I still had enough time to assimilate properly, you know, and it made all the difference. We used to go out, and we used to go to the theatre, and we used to go to the pictures every Saturday night like everybody else, and we used to go dancing. We just lived it up. We lived it up. We couldn't afford very much, but we did. Whatever we could, that we could.

Q: Were you involved in any politics or anything like that?

A: No. I'm still not involved in politics. All I know is you do what you can, but you really can't do very much. By now, I for sure know it.

Q: But you were involved in other parts - you weren't just in the Jewish community, you were outside?

A: At the time I was just in the Jewish community. My friends were all Jewish, we lived in a Jewish area. So it was just - people helped each other, but still you were out in the world, and you were allowed, but not the community were otherwise not. We still were not, my husband already understood the politics more – he understood how it works, how the system works, the British democracy. He already knew what was Parliament and what's the – na-na, na-na, nah. He was older four years, and it made the difference.

Q: Did you talk about being stateless with your friends? Was that something you would talk about at all?

A: Yeah, we'd talk with our friends. Holocaust survivors talked always about those things, and during the war, and who we lost, and after the war when we were in Italy, we always talked very, we always liked to talk about that bit because we liked it. And we liked the Italian people, and when Tito Schipa, the very well-known tenor came to Melbourne, we all went to listen to him. We were connected to Italy for the good times, you know?

Q: Yep. You tell your story about during the war quite a bit –

A: I do.

Q: - but do you talk much about your story after the war? Have you told many people these stories about being stateless?

A: That's my second book, that's why I want you to read it. That's my second book, and I said, "That has to be told, how we were liberated." My first book is from my birth, my pre-war birth, and my family, and what happened what happened what happened until the war, and then until the war ended. Just liberation is the last – my last poem is *There Will be Tomorrow*, and that's the title of my book. And the second one is liberation day, and what happened, and how it happened, and when it happened, and what we saw, and what we thought, what we thought after liberation. Once we had our fill a little bit and we weren't so hungry anymore, suddenly we were still in Germany, and we said, "What's happening to us? Where are we going to go? What's going to happen to us?" We didn't even think at the time of Palestine. We did know that we had a grandmother and we wanted to go there, but what's going to happen to us now? What's going to happen?

Suddenly it hit you that haven't got a soul in the whole wide world except there, those few people – they don't even know me because – my grandmother knew me when I was three and she left, so there was nobody that you had that you – it's just the three of us, we were there together, and the girls that we, we had 200 Jewish girls liberated. Actually, 350, the others were Hungarian. It was in another camp – they came a bit later to the same building where we were. A lot of them went back to Hungary, but some of them also wanted to go – Don't know what I was, I was going to make a point of something, but I can't remember what it was.

Q: That's ok. I was asking about telling your story, but what made you write these books?

A: Ah, that's another story. I have a lot of stories.

Q: I know, I love your stories.

A: I have a lot of stories. My book – well as I told you, I was very – as much as I don't even want to think about the Germans in all this – but what they did to my family and to my life, but on top of it, what I really have very much against them, and they didn't want to acknowledge it when I claimed it, that they did me out of my education. And I didn't know what I was capable of – what I couldn't do – all I knew that I couldn't do anything because I hadn't gone to school. And I didn't have, and I didn't really - because I was only little and in Poland you started school at seven, so I could read when I was five because my mother insisted on it and she taught me. And I could read – not read Hebrew, but I knew the Hebrew alphabet because my grandmother and my grandparents insisted. So I was five, I knew a bit, but I didn't know anything, and I felt always very inferior about that.

Anyhow, still, I learnt here. I was never talking – now I talk, but I was never talking. I was always listening, I was always listening, and I can remember any little stupid thing that somebody said because whatever went I just – like a computer you know. I computed it all because I wanted to learn anything of anything. When my daughter got married in 1982 we were already in this house – no, when she got married we were still in the other house in Narong Road – not far, two streets from here – and I decided I want a job, so I said, "The only thing I know is languages, I will be an interpreter." So I was sick one day – I don't know what happened to me, I think I had shingles – I was in bed, and at the time *The Age* was such a big newspaper, and they had all advertisements, so I'm reading the advertising and it said – it was interesting really that things sometimes happen without you – actually, in my case,

things happened all the time. I'm very lucky, all the years, things happened to me. I didn't do much about anything.

So I was in bed, and I was reading, and the advertisement said they want an interpreter in – I think it was Italian – the Alfred Hospital. I said, "Right." I'm sitting in bed and I'm ringing up, "Are you accredited?" That was so many years later. When I started, I could have got a job in the Immigration Department. There was a gentleman there that always wanted me to come in and work for them because, but I was loyal to Jewish Welfare because they gave me my first job. So I said, "What do you mean?" "No, you have to go to school now." So one day, there was something somewhere, and some professor somewhere – I think it was the university, I can't even remember, but I know there was a professor in Italian, and something to do with nursing, and something to do with sick people, and you had to write an essay, and there was an exam.

I have never sat an exam in my life, and I went, and I did it. There were two topics, and I remember something to do with nursing, and I wrote my Italian one, and then there was my English one. I started and I had a look at my watch, and I said, "You won't manage unless" – suddenly I just died more or less, and I stopped, and that was that, so I never wrote an essay. As a matter of fact, the professor rang me two or three days afterwards, "Would I still like to come?" and I had such cold feet that I said, "No," and I should have said, "Yes." So I didn't. Then I had a look at adult education, and there was, I think, essay writing, so I said, "I would like to do that," so I went and did that, and this lady, who is still a friend now, 45 years afterwards – the first lesson was would you write something – just a little thing – of what happened to you – anything.

I've still got the story. I wrote a little story about how I went to the Victoria Market, and it was raining with my friend, and I described the whole thing. And she came up to me with it and she said, "Are you sure you want to do essay writing?" She said, "Do you need a job?" I said, "No, I just wanted to know how to write an essay," and she said, "Look, I'm just starting a new class called Writing With Inspiration Plus, and I think you'd be perfect for it." I said, "Okay," so I started this class, and there was nice Australian women, and every week she used to give you a topic, like write about your school, and about your church, and about this and that, so I wrote what I knew about it, about whatever, and I started writing these little stories. I went to another one in the adult education, and he was reading out all my stories, but then I don't know what happened, and I didn't continue – because he said something that sounded a bit antisemitic, so I didn't like to go. Anyhow, forget this one, okay?

Q: No, that's okay.

A: At the next lesson – she used to go and correct it – people used to read out their stories, so she made me read out my stories every week, and the girls all loved it because it was different than anybody else's, and after two or three years or more she said, "Guta, I think you've got a book here," and that's how it – I wasn't going to write a book. But, it wasn't finished yet because I stopped writing. I didn't because I needed to write the bad things about my father and my sisters and that was very hard, and I couldn't, and I couldn't, and I couldn't, and I didn't, and one day we were sitting here on the furniture, and Jessica was here – my daughter – and my husband, "It's about time you finished that book." Makor started the

– so I come home once and my children left me here two advertising on my bench, and I said, “Okay.”

So I went there, and I wrote, and she was impressed so then I nearly had a book, but those two chapters I could not – so when they started, she said, “You’ve got to finish the book. You’ve got to finish the book.” I said, “I don’t know.” I said, “Maybe I should go away by myself somewhere.” They booked me in into the Dandenongs in a place called – I’ve got it written down thank goodness – and I had a room, and I turned around the furniture and made myself a desk, and I cried, and I wrote, and I cried, and then I rang my husband every few hours, and I come back, and I finished it. I finished it when my grandson was bar mitzvah. Just before yontif I remember I finished it, and it’s doing very well. I self-published it, because Makor is rubbish. They didn’t do any –

My book was the first three, and my book was the best of the three. Leonie Fleishig is in my book club now, and she always said, “Yours was the best one,” and it is. It’s very well written. So now I did the other one, and the other one I also self-published because I thought, “I haven’t got enough time to wait for somebody who is going to do it.” It’s not doing well because nobody knows about it. But I’m not a good pusher, so there’s nobody that’s going to take it on, which is a pity, but it’s a good book. Alex Skovron who is – so rang me when he read my book, and he says, “Guta, this is a real real writer’s book,” the second one.

Q: Yeah, I’m sure. I look forward to reading it.

A: So that’s how I wrote a book – not that I was pushing myself, it just happened. To me, in my life, everything just happened, and when you read it, really, everything just happened, happened, happened. Nothing that I pushed or shoved – nothing – or hurt anybody to do it.

Q: At the start of that story you were talking about your mum and your grandmother teaching you, were they also very smart, and knowledgeable, and intelligent women?

A: I think so. I knew my grandmother – I was six when she died, so I knew her – pure love. I don’t know about her intellect. She used to like to sing to me, and she used to always tell me – because they were religious people – “You’re going to go to Bais Ya’akov school.” I didn’t know what Bais Ya’akov school was, and I said, “Okay.” Today I wouldn’t.

Q: Sure.

A: Anyhow, I was always on her knees. I wrote a very lovely poem about my grandmother that I’ll show you.

Q: Wow, that’s wonderful.

A: That’s what I know about my grandmother, she was lovely. My grandparents insisted on paying for a teacher to teach me the Hebrew alphabet. I think now that they most probably needed me to be – what’s the word now – well-learned in the Hebrew, so that I can do the prayer book, I suppose, but I didn’t actually – there was teacher, she looked very peculiar, and I thought she was a witch, and I didn’t like her at all, and I learned it very quickly, and then she’s gone. I didn’t like it, but I learned it. I know how to write it, and I know how to

sign my – the writing, I can't write. In the ghetto there was a little bit of schooling about Hebrew, so I know how to write a bit, but I only know how to write my first name and my maiden name in Hebrew – I know how to sign it, that's all I know.

My mother was a very - my mother also did not go to high school, but she was very intelligent and very ambitious for me. And as I said she taught me to read. She also did subscriptions for me – there was a children's magazine – at the time I was five. There was a magazine for bigger children, and this one for the little children, and I remember there was something about a butterfly, and I used to read these little poems and little things. I remember when my mother went to enrol me in the school that wasn't very far from where we lived, and it had a very good name, and especially the head mistress was very well respected, and my mother took me, and she insisted I need to go to that school, and we had an interview, and my mother was beaming – she was very pleased – and they took me to the school, and that head mistress looks like she had something nice to say about me.

You wouldn't believe it, that was about a few months before my mother died, so I never got to that school because when my mother died we shifted. I lived one year with my uncle and aunt because my father was on his own with the children, the little ones – I was seven and she was three. So we stayed with my aunt and uncle, and I went to school with my cousins over there, so it wasn't the same school my mother wished I went to. I loved this teacher also, and that was wonderful, and I was a very good pupil, and I was always called upon, which was nice, but that didn't last very long either.

Q: Have you been back to Poland at all, ever?

A: Yes.

Q: With your family or by yourself?

A: Two granddaughters went once – twice I went. And Jessica, my oldest daughter, we went once. Just about 20 years ago – not quite 20 years ago, when my husband passed away, I felt funny – I just wanted to go and visit my mother's grave, because I never did since I was – I said, "I need my mother now." I had a cousin in Israel – you know those aunties and the cousin – and I said, "Shoshana, will you go to Poland with me?" She said, "With you, I'll go anywhere," so I said, "Okay." So we went to Poland, and she was Israeli, and we went to the cemetery – that's where we went and found all the graves and all that, and I made a matzeva for my father who passed away in the ghetto. I couldn't find the grave of my little sister – nothing, there's no sign of anything. She died in a hospital in the ghetto, and God knows what they've done with her, I don't know, I don't know.

But I went. So I went and found my mother's grave, and the second time I went – so I ordered a matzeva – that's another story but I'm not going to bother you with it – and Jessica is named after my mum. She is named after my father, not my mum, because you had so many to fill. So she found the grave, because I couldn't find it, I couldn't find it, suddenly I found it. So I went with Jessica for the - it so happened that that year was commemoration the 60th, I think, commemoration of the Lodz Ghetto liquidation, so Jessica came with me to Poland, and we had already the matzeva, so she said a prayer. So we went. With Shoshana I went again a few times to fix up our grandparents things, but that's all. I only went to the

cemetery. I had no business there, really – no sentiment whatsoever, nothing. Memories, I’ve got in my head. <telephone ringing>. If this is my doctor – excuse me –

Q: Absolutely. No, go for it.

A: - and if it’s not my doctor – that is Jessica, I’ll just –

Q: Absolutely.

A: Hi, I’m being interviewed at the moment. <Jessica: “Okay, I thought it would be finished already.”> No. <Jessica: “Okay, I’ll talk to you later. Bye.”>. Bye.

Q: Sorry, we have been going a while. I won’t keep you much longer.

A: It’s my fault. I’m keeping you.

Q: No, not your fault at all. I’m so glad to hear your stories, but I’m worried I’m tiring you out.

A: No no no no no, you go as long as you need to.

Q: Do you feel connected to Poland?

A: No. The language, yes. Some people are like, “redt nisht Polish,” but no. Yes I do, I like it. I read Polish, I read Italian, but my English now I read a lot, I read a lot, but that’s something that I loved doing since I was little, really. My mother instilled that in me somehow very early, and also my cousin. I call her my sister now because we were like sisters right through, and she died 103 in here. She lost her children. Anyhow, that’s another story. She was an avid reader, and she was also directing my – still in Italy – so that was okay. What was I saying?

Q: I was asking about feeling connected to Poland.

A: No. To my memories, yes, and I can see them in my mind – I have a photographic memory. I can see things when I tell you this, so that’s all. So not –

Q: But not to the country, and not to the place now, and not to Lodz?

A: There’s nothing there. The people that I loved or even my little girlfriends and the neighbours we knew and all this, it’s gone now – it’s gone straight after the war. I don’t think anybody would care a hoot. This is the way it was, so we don’t think that they would suddenly change, and there wasn’t anybody, and I was too young to have such close connections with grownups. I didn’t exactly know all my parents’ friends or my grandparents’ friends, and there were aunts and uncles, they’re all gone. There’s cousins. There was nothing really. There was no life left for me there. There was nothing here either, but I started anew, whereas there I would have had to pick it up somewhere, and there was nowhere to pick it up, and because there was nothing really there otherwise but bad memories, you don’t want to, you didn’t – besides, as I said, with the pogroms and all that, they didn’t want us anyway – they still don’t.

Q: Being stateless and having the experiences you've had, do you think they made you see the world in a particular way, or gave you a certain understanding of the world, or people, or countries, or citizenship?

A: Yeah. I tell you what, I see things from the perspective of being Jewish, rather than just stateless, and I saw the world that, in a way, nobody really cares you know. It's unfortunate, yet I have been helped by many people, in Italy especially, and I thought the Italian people were wonderful. They were wonderful – not Jewish, but wonderful wonderful people, and – but mostly what happened to me, I was always helped by the Jewish people. Even after the war being stateless – mind you the UNRRA was international, and they help everybody – they still do apparently – but I think if the world cared, it wouldn't have happened, and it's now happening again unfortunately – you can hear it – and it's – like now I picked up the Jewish News, did you see it?

Q: Yeah.

A: One way or another you understood, and even as you child you understand that – but one thing that I did understand was that I am not like them – that it's not my fault that I am like that like what they do to me, it's because they are bad, and I haven't done a thing to deserve it. And that I understood as a child during the war. It's nothing to do with me that have done something wrong, or I'm not as good as anybody else. But, yes, as far as that is concerned about my Jewishness, I always – even now the children when I speak to them, and “Did you lose your faith?” I said, “No, I didn't. I was always what I was. That didn't interfere with me not wanting to be” – people who changed their identity did it only for survival, but after the war they came back, so it had nothing to do with us, it's just to do with the people that want to be nasty, or bad, or need to blame somebody else for their – whatever, I don't know, so this is the way I've looked - Maybe I'm an optimist, I don't know.

Q: Do you think you're an optimist?

A: I think so, yeah, I am an optimist. As far as the war, I was, always, always. I never thought that I won't make it. Only once for two minutes in Auschwitz, when I was in a selection and I thought that was the end of my life, but once I got through that one, I always said, “When the war finishes. When the war finishes.” And it finished for me. I still think whatever - I don't see anything black, like it's bad. No, I don't think so, I think I am an optimist.

Q: So your Jewishness is important to you?

A: Very much so. Very much so. My Jewishness is my identity. I am not religious, but I am culturally involved, even the holidays. Not religious, but this is part of what I am, and that's how I was brought up, and I still remember all these holidays, and I loved what my grandmother used to because it was the atmosphere in the house. It was such a beautiful atmosphere before the holidays, it was fantastic. In the beginning I didn't do very much after the war, didn't, because there was no, being homeless and stateless there was nothing that you could do very much about it, at least I couldn't. When I got married I also didn't do very much. But when I had children I decided that I have to do it because they need to know, to enjoy what I enjoyed as a child.

It wasn't to do with – they have to be – but somehow I found it so pleasant and nice that I wanted them to have it, yeah. And so that's why we started putting candles on Friday night and all this. Now it happened that my children are religious and I'm not, but I have got a kosher home because of them – because I want them here.

Q: So you go to them for yontif now, or do they –

A: Yes, now all together, but we used to make yontif here when my husband was alive, and I was still doing a little bit for a while, and then Michelle started doing hers.

Q: Would you have the same dishes that you would cook for yontif every year?

A: Oh my gosh, this is my Pesach cupboard.

Q: Ah yep.

A: The traditions, I do them.

Q: And the food that you would make, would you make the same food?

A: The same food, yes the same food and the ones that I like, and the ones that I don't like, I never cook. I still do what I like. It's just like that.

Q: Just thinking about statelessness, does the label statelessness feel meaningful to you? Is that something –

A: That's a terrible thing. If you're stateless you have no home –you don't belong. We belonged to this – it was called a kibbutz, that villa in Florence, because they eventually were going to go, but other people were also stateless, and they're not Jewish. Stateless is stateless. If you have nowhere and no home to go to, it's a terrible thing. It's a terrible thing, because you have no rights for a start – you don't have rights. You have no - There was something not so long ago on – I listen a lot to the news on the radio, and there was somebody that was born – a young man, and he was deported from Australia for some reason – I can't remember exactly – but I was so sorry for this person, I said, "What happens to a person like that?" It's like being somewhere on an island and a sea. I don't know. There's nothing - What do you do? Where do you go?

I can't even explain it even now. Unless you have people helping you, you are absolutely - you can just lie down and die, because there's nothing else you can – you're neither here nor there nor anywhere.

Q: Yeah, it was people helping you that got you through.

A: It's people helping that you eventually get somewhere, but if you can't, what do you do? You can't have children, and if you have children your children are stateless, and then it's a whole, a tragedy. It's a terrible tragedy, and that, as far as I am concerned – the shame of that after we went through the Holocaust and everything, and countries not even wanted to let you in here, there, or anywhere – didn't still want you, which means that they sort of believed exactly what the people that perpetuated the Holocaust – other people thought like that too.

They didn't want you. Sometimes it's a misunderstanding that people do it, sometimes they do it because they mean it, which is there, and yes, I really think – but it's a terrible, terrible, terrible thing.

Q: Did you know before you came to Australia that there were quotas on Jews coming to Australia?

A: I didn't. I didn't, I didn't, I didn't. And look that was also, that was ignorance, and apparently there was an Australian person that – I think it was before the war when they voted with the others about Jews.

Q: Yeah, before the war – the conference before the war.

A: And now Australians wouldn't do that. You know. It's bad education, or it's brainwashing, or sometimes a person or somebody said something or did something and the whole Jewish people are at fault, or like Hitler said, "If there weren't any Jews, you would have to invent them because they have to hate somebody." There are some people that need to hate other people in order to whitewash themselves – I don't know – so there is a little bit of that. I think, for my age, I am allowed to say that – that I think that's what I found out during my life, but I still think that there's a lot of wonderful people in this world who help each other, and that's the people you should care about, and the other ones have to be educated, but they don't want to.

Q: How old are you?

A: 92.

Q: 92, that's amazing, and you still live a very active life, yeah?

A: Fairly – not as active as I used to. I must tell you that I never felt old, until the third lockdown. The third lockdown did me in somehow. I don't know - I stopped going to the, you stopped going to the theatre, you stopped going to the pictures, you stopped – stopped visiting people, you weren't allowed to visit people in hospital. Now there is one girl that I was in camp with – she is four years older than I am and she's now sick, and I want to visit her. We were liberated together, and we met in Australia again, and I can't go there because it's lockdown, so it's frustrating.

Q: It's very hard.

A: Can I make you a cup of coffee?

Q: I'm all right.

A: Are you sure?

Q: We've been speaking for two hours, so I - but is there anything else you think that I should know? Anything else you want to tell me?

A: Not at the moment. Unless you ask me, it will pop into my head, but I always thought that I already wrote everything down, and I don't - but if you ask questions –

Q: Yeah, things come.

A: - they come. I don't know. Do you think it makes sense, what I'm saying?

Q: Absolutely, yeah.

A: You think so?

Q: Yeah, these are really important stories, that I think are good to hear.

A: So that's all I have to say – that it was really – and it was very lucky that we made it, and that other people made it wherever they went, and they have a place, to be. And I would never move anywhere. Some people, "We want to live here. We want to live there." Well, if you have a choice, good luck to you, but I – once you've got a home, I'm stuck put. I appreciate it. You see it's the appreciation of not having it that you do appreciate it, and a wonderful country. I think, between you and me and everybody else, I think Australia is the best country in the world so far if it's not going to be spoiled. People are very tolerant, very caring, mostly. Mostly, I mean -

Q: Should we leave it there?

A: Are you happy to leave it there?

Q: I'm happy.

A: Okay.

Q: Is there anyone else you think I should talk to? Is there anyone else that you know of that I should talk to – who I should interview?

A: I don't know, because those two girls – like Irma – they had a different experience. They weren't displaced, I think, because she was in Germany and then she came here, I think. I don't know, but I don't have people anymore. If you asked me about two years ago or three –

Q: Yeah, there were more people.

A: - there was still a few that I could, but people – you know?

Q: Yeah.

A: Anybody is older than I am –

Q: Yeah, you were young at the end of the war.

A: - and I always was the youngest child everywhere. In Italy and in here even, I was always the youngest, and I resented it sometimes because everybody said, "my my".

Q: And you had to do all the babysitting.

A: Yeah, and my cousin, she always knew better anyway – let her rest in peace.

Q: And she lived in Melbourne as well after the –

A: Yes, she had two wonderful girls and they died.

Q: Did you stay close for your whole life?

A: Yes, I lived with them until I got married. I was going to show you a photo about something, and I can't remember what it was. What was it?

Q: I wanted to see a photo from when you came to Australia, and also, if you have your documents, I would love to see them.

A: The documents now I can't show you because they're put away I have –

Q: Of course.

A: - but I will look for them if you want me to.

Q: Only if you want. Only if it's not too much.

A: I've got them somewhere.

Q: Shall we stop the recording while you're –

A: I'm so sorry –

Q: No.

A: - I just wanted to show you - when I came to Australia. That's when I came to Australia.

Q: Wow.

A: I was 19.

Q: Look how beautiful – you're still beautiful, but –

A: Nah, now I'm an old woman. I always said – I coloured my hair, and then with covid I let it grow out, and I said, "Who's this woman in the mirror?"

Q: So it was only in the last couple of years you stopped colouring?

A: Yes, I did. I'm not quite sure where that –

Q: This is beautiful.

A: That's my 90th birthday that the children made, but there is no – that's my husband and I.

Q: What a beautiful photo.

A: I have better photos in the other book. I must get it for you.

Q: Okay.

A: Did you want to switch that off?

Q: Sure.

A: I will just get that because there are photos over there and you can – and I want to give it to you because this is going to be exactly what I was saying.

Q: Should I come with you?

A: Could you?

Q: Yes.

A: Because maybe you could give me the –