

EAT, PRAY, NACHES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Waverley Council, NSW

RUTH LEISER, Oral History Transcript

Interviewee: Ruth Leiser

Interviewer: Ashley Roan

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Interviewer: Okay, so Ruth, when were you born, and in which country were you born?

Ruth Leiser: I was born on the 28th of April 1935 in a country which in my time was part of Poland, but it is now Lithuania, so my first language was Polish. Second language, Yiddish. We spoke Polish and Yiddish at home and we lived on a very large farm. My father, who came from another town, and after he met my mother and her family were farmers and he like the life on the land much better than what he was doing. He was a city man so after my parents were married a couple of years and my mother didn't like it in his hometown, my father decided to go on the land and this may have been Providence, that we survived because of that.

A very large farm was found about 28 kilometres from a town called Vilna which is now Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, but at that time it was part of Poland as I said. It used to belong to the Polish gentry, a very large estate and so he became the boss there. He must have done a lot of very good deeds in the entire district because it was very predominantly a farming area there and because most of the people who were our neighbours saved our life during the war. They settled there a couple of years before I was even born so when I was born, we were already there. My mother assured me that I was born in a fine clinic in the city but I am really a country bumpkin.

Until the age of six, from 1935 to 1941, we lived on the estate which my mother used to say, it was living in paradise because my memories from the estate are very hazy because at the age of six, we were suddenly cut off from there. It's only from telling and retelling the family stories that I know as much as I do, and so this ended the life of like in paradise and the next three years, 1941 to 1944, we were under the Hitler domination and the extermination of the Jews was total in our region because the city and its suburbs had 80,000 Jews. A very large and very old community from the fifteenth century even, and by this, from the 21st of June when the German tanks rolled into the city till December, 60,000 of this 80,000 were killed, and the rest were put in a sort of a ghetto ... but we were in the country completely cut off from any kind of information, what was happening anywhere.

My father was warned very early in the days of the occupation, he was warned to run, to flee, but it was too late. There was no way of outrunning the German tanks. We didn't even have our horses because my father used to breed horses. He loved them, and one of my vague, vague kind of visions from when I was under six was all the herd of horses being led away when Germany attacked Poland. It [the German army] was very mechanised and the Polish army, although they are very valiant, they fought very valiantly, they fought with horses against tanks so our horses went then. We didn't even have decent horses to get in a cart and run, so we were more or less trapped there and we had no choice but to leave our home at night when nobody would see us and vanish into the night to a neighbour here, a neighbour there where over a period of three very dangerous life threatening years, we did survive as a family. One of the very, very rare ones from that region.

In the entire district, everyone wanted to know what happened to Katz. That's my father, Katz, and my father asked some friendly coalition friends to spread a rumour that they had been seen to be taken away [inaudible] because he was quite a personality in the district there. I haven't got time to tell our three-year saga of survival because it was beyond human endurance that my parents went through and they had no option of leaving the children somewhere. It was not an option. We'll stay together. My father said, "We live or we die together."

That was probably very foolish also because without the two children, it would have been easier for them, but with the two children, their hands were tied. However, it was meant, it was that we should live and that the conditions of the three years were unbelievable, you could not believe it if you were told even in every detail. Mainly our hiding places were underground, literally underground, in bunkers of every sort. My brother and I spent three years of silence, and in darkness. We were never in a daylight and so it boggles the mind now how can you keep two children down like that, but there you have it. My father had such a power, I think.

One look from him and you were silent and after a while, it became part of our life. My brother and I, to him being in one bunker or another bunker or in the forest. We spent time in the forest, in the fields of wheat when it was summer, all kinds of places, and so this became our life, I think. Anyway, in July 1944, when my parents were almost at the end of their endurance physically, emotionally, mentally, in every way, we were liberated by the Russian army. They were our saviors. They liberated us and our liberation was very simple.

We were in a godforsaken forest somewhere near a farmhouse, an isolated farmhouse barn when two Czechs came out from the forest and my parents' instinct was to hide, but somehow they didn't have even the strength for that, and when they came closer, they realised they were two Russian soldiers. They got separated from their unit or whatever, and they asked my parents which way to Berlin. They were in a godforsaken forest in Lithuania and they were saying which way to Berlin and they took off, and that was our ... More or less, we never saw a German soldier after that. My parents considered in the beginning to go back to our estate which was called [Godulling].

To this [unclear], it's called [Godulling], but it's nowhere near the brilliant estate that it was then, and somehow or other they decided not to go and we started on foot to walk to the city about 30 kilometres away, to walk to the city and by then, maybe a week had passed and other survivors similar to us that were a man here, a woman there survived, no children. They trickled back into town and more or less stayed close together for security because it so happened that after liberation even, we were liberated from the Germans, but the local population was not happy to see a few Jews who survived, and especially in the provincial areas where there were little towns, where Jews lived before the war.

If anyone showed up, they thought that he would come to claim their house or something and they started to murder every Jew that surfaced from somewhere. The locals killed them. It was safe in the very beginning to stay together in the town, and we happened to strike the piece of town that was bombed and ruined so there was hardly even a house that had four walls and a roof, but anyway, so that was how we came into town and I don't remember exactly where we stayed. [We eventually] found somewhere, a building that had a little apartment with four walls and a roof and ... Can I take a little break?

Interviewer: What we might do now is skip forward a little bit to how did you leave and who helped you get to Australia?

Ruth Leiser: That's from '44 to '51, so immediately after our liberation, we were stuck behind the Iron Curtain. I don't know how many people here, young people know that that was an immediate Iron Curtain between the Soviet side and the other side which was Poland and so my father got a job with one of the army hospitals there because he had a history. My father had a history of bread

baking. He was one of six sons in a family of ... They had the biggest bakery in their town in Poland somewhere and all the six sons had to learn the trade before they were allowed to move out into their chosen professions, and only the youngest one stayed with the business until Germany took over their town.

My father's specialty was fermentation and at that time, when the Front was still going on. This was July '44. The war didn't end until May '45, so everything in the army there, it was all geared for the front lines and the hospitals so my father got this job in the Russian bakery that provided bread for the army and the army hospitals and so on, because there were wounded everywhere and because he was a specialist in fermentation. They had to provide, the management provided the control, how much bread he had to make out of so much yeast they were given. So much flour they were given and then the yeast, it was from America apparently, like [unclear], it was.

My father didn't physically do the baking, he was just the manager there, and he started to produce much above the quota that they gave him which in the end didn't do us any good because by about September, October, an edit came out from the government that Polish citizens could repatriate legally into Poland and my father came from Poland originally. They only settled in this region because of my mother and so my father was eligible. He gave some papers and even when he asked the bakery for a release, they declined because he was necessary for the army, for the bread.

It's a very long story how my mother was ... She was quite educated, brilliant in four languages and she had a talented hand. It's a gift. She had a gift of writing and so she, my mother, trembling, had to forge my father's release from the bakery, and then my father, by trick somehow, got the stamp and so on. In any case, all of these necessary papers were handed in, and by about December or early January, I don't remember because it was winter so I'm only saying it must have been early January of '45.

We boarded on this freight train, the freight train also that was used for people and we were brought into Poland legally because if you were caught crossing the border from Vilna into the other side, it was all forest and if you were caught which happened very often, you were sent to Siberia for another five years and it was a friend of my mother, a lady. They risked it and they were caught on the border and they were sent to Siberia for another five years into separate camps, men and women, in other gulags. Anyway, so we came legally and then I don't have many recollections of how and how, and we reached my father's hometown because there was no transport of any kind.

Poland was, it was in ruins. There were no trains, no buses. If you could catch a freight train that was going somewhere or sometimes the military gave us lifts in trucks, the military trucks if they were passing by. It took, I don't know how long, weeks, before we came to my father's hometown because he was one of 12 siblings and his parents were younger than I am now and he was the only one left out of his entire family so there was no-one left. This, my father's town was 50 kilometers from Auschwitz, from the camp and we're in the township, not long, a matter of days before Auschwitz was liberated on the 27th of January '45 by the Russian army.

Sooner, within a short time, the people who survived there, some survived in the camp, they started to trickle into their hometowns wherever just to see if anybody was alive from their families, and so my parents waited a few weeks to see maybe someone and eventually four girls showed up. There were two sisters of my father's two sisters, two daughters of each sister and the four nieces

and they were the only ones who survived from this entire huge, huge family. You can imagine, there were 11 of his siblings living in the region. There were, some of them were already grandparents so that was ...

They were the only ones that were left ... four nieces who they were the only ones who survived from this entire huge, huge family. My parents considered maybe staying and making a life there because they were there for generations and generations. Jewish people lived in this regions and if it wasn't for these wild pogroms that started then in 1945 and they went right into 1946. It was no longer safe for the survivors to stay in Poland and so, my parents, we moved to a town called Zabrze. It's still called Zabrze and in German they called it Hindenburg but in Polish it was Zabrze. It was not very far, maybe 50 kilometers away, and I thought maybe we'll will start to do something, start making a living and so on, and my mother put me and my brother to school.

Don't forget, we hadn't been to school and this was, I was already 10 and my brother was two and a half years behind me, so my mother booked us into the local Polish school and in the end we had to leave because they were throwing stones at us. We were the only two Jewish children and no matter how quiet and retiring we were, especially my brother copped it. He was only a little boy and they used to throw stones and once it was so bad that he came home with nearly a cracked head, and my mother never took us back to that. From that period of time, I have a recollection of some lady that used to come in and teach me Polish history. I just have this recollection, because my mother was worried about my education especially because I was older.

She thought I would remain totally ignorant so wherever we went, even for a short time, she was looking around for a teacher, somebody to teach me anything at all. We stayed there for less than a year, I think, till July 1945 and by then, the pogroms, the killings of Jews were so practically brazen. These bands of youths used to, they used to board trains and look around, pick out someone who might look Jewish, throw them off the train, beat them up, even kill them, and the local police and so on, they closed their eyes to that and it reached a stage where wherever we lived there, my parents used to bolt the door at night.

Sometimes there was even banging and then in Poland, there was a major, major, major pogrom where they attacked a building in which maybe 100 survivors lived and they only, young people. They only lived there, they only came there to rest and to prepare to go maybe legally to Palestine in those days. They had no intention of staying in that town. There was a libel. Somebody spread a rumor that they, or not a rumor, a boy of 10 or 12 came and he said that these people in that house had him in a cellar, hidden, and so a total lie, and so they stood up, this community there and they came with axes and with hammers and with sticks and with whatever weapons they had and they stormed that building room by room by room. 42 people were killed and how many wounded, and this made international news, and international press so ...

Interviewer: Was it around about this time that your parents were thinking ...

Ruth Leiser: Of leaving.

Interviewer: "We need to leave."

Ruth Leiser: No, it was a decision. My parents decided overnight just about, "It's time to run," so it was again at night. By then we had a few possessions, maybe some clothing and a couple of

suitcases and so everything was packed very quickly and at night, we went on foot to sneak out to the train station and a lot of Jewish people had the same idea as to go into Czechoslovakia at that time because Czechoslovakia was considered a more civilized country anyway at any time. They were a bit kinder to the Jews at that time, so we went, we got on the train at night that went towards Czechoslovakia. Keep in mind that we lived practically in Silesia which is practically on the border of Czechoslovakia and so we went, took a train to this little township on the border.

The border was just a stretch of forest, that's all, and we joined a group of other people in the same condition and eventually after a few weeks, there were locals who for a fee would take us across the border and they said to us that they're on the Czech soil now and the border police, or the border guard used to cruise around there. They will pick you up and take you to a holding station with other people, and this is exactly what happened. The Czech, I don't [know if they are] police. They are just border police. They picked out this group. I don't know how many we were, 20 people maybe, and took us to a town called, it just slips my mind now. It's a Czech town, not Brno. It'll come to me, not that it matters.

The only thing that I remember and I was already 10, don't forget, I remember someone lifting my collar and pouring some white powder, so whatever that was. I don't know whether it was for lice or whatever it was, but they did it to everybody so that's my memory from that, and I don't know how long we stayed there. Already in the holding center, and by then, of course, the war was finished and the Jewish Welfare organisations from America had stepped in already, providing food and clothing and whatever.

Throughout Czechoslovakia, Austria and West Germany and throughout the areas taken by Americans and so we were provided already food and taken with a intention to take us into Western Germany that was under the American zone because as you may know, Berlin, or Germany rather, was cut into four sections. The US, Russia and England had a small part and France a small part, but the main part was the American zone because nobody wanted to go to the Russian zone. This odyssey started there and we were told by the leaders, whoever organised this train that we have to pass through Vienna and Vienna was also in four sections, and if we were going to be stopped by the Russian control to say that we are Turks going home from somewhere, but of course it never happened.

All this, it's fear. All the time, you're in fear. I'm talking about my parents. Anyway, we went with this train into Austria, into a town called Linz, the most beautiful place and it was winter so it must have been snow because I remember the mountains and the snow and this was something was so new to me. I'd seen snow until the age of six because where we come from, it was very cold winters but that was like a lifetime away already for me and so we stayed in a DP camp. They were organising DP camps, right, DP meaning Displaced Persons, and there were all sorts of DP camps and there were for Jews and for non-Jews because half of Europe was on the move.

All kinds of people were on the move from one country to another. It was before it stabilised a little bit later, so the American, the Jewish welfare organisations already provided as I said food and just the basic needs that people needed. We stayed there several months as far as I know, and then we had to cross yet another illegal border but not that legal illegal, and that was from Austria into Germany, into Bavaria just which is over the mountains. Again we were put in these huge army trucks and on the sly taken across into Bavaria and in Bavaria, soon after I think, I'm not ...

As soon as we arrived, they took us to a town called Traunstein and Traunstein was only maybe an hour by train from a place called [Bavarianhull] which was a resort like a health resort which is even now a health resort because I know that place. I was not well for a while. I don't know. There was something wrong with my lungs or something and I remember my mother taking me to [Bavarianhull] and she left me in the hospital for a month, I was there, and then she came and got me. I was all right after that and so in Traunstein they're organising this very big DP camp for Jews only of course and it was under the management of the American forces so I've written about this actually. It's something which is not clear to me now even.

There were about 3,000 Jews in this camp, from every country in Europe and even [though] you get a bunch of Jews together in peacetime, they will not always agree like the Hungarians and the Poles. The Hungarian and the Polish Jews didn't get on. The Polish Jews were looked down upon by the Hungarians and then there were many people that came from Russia which came on the same type of amnesty that we got out but they were in the depth of Russia during the war. Romania and Hungary, every country in Europe that had Jews except France. The French and the West Europeans, they went back to France, not here.

Interviewer: Ruth, when did the subject of Australia come up and why was it decided ... that you would move to Australia?

Ruth Leiser: I have no idea to this day how my father got a job with the American authorities. I have a fantastic ... but it's in pieces now ... a letter that they gave him when we left. He became the manager of this 3,000 plus DP camp to keep peace and to manage it and I don't know who pointed him out but he did an excellent job and he was very respected by everybody; and so we stayed four years or three and a half years in that DP camp. In 1947, when Israel started to become the destination for all survivors, but [inaudible] illegal destination and a lot made it illegally as did my four cousins.

Those four girls that [they left], they nearly all went there. My parents, my mother, didn't want to go to Palestine and even when it became in 1948, when it became Israel like now, when it was legal, because in 1946, '47 until May '48, it was under the British and it was illegal. You couldn't go there unless you got smuggled in illegally because this was from the days of the real Exodus, that ship Exodus and others like that and my mother was too tired. She said she's too tired, she wants to go somewhere where that she could live out her years in peace and she said, not only that but being selfish, she said the children are growing. There's always going to be wars there and my father was a great Zionist.

He would give his right hand to go but my mother didn't want to go and he didn't want to fight her on that, and so they started to look where else to go. For America and Canada, you needed sponsors. You needed someone to sponsor you that they guarantee employment and somewhere to live and so on and we had no-one to sponsor us, in America or Canada or anywhere like that. My parents still applied, filled out documentation and documentation and year after year because eventually they let a few people in without sponsors and by about 1950, they were still not sure if they could go to America and somebody said to my parents, to my father, "You know Australia?" He said, "Australia? I have to have a look on the map." He said, "There's a man in Sydney called Mr [Ziegler]."

He was posthumously given the Australia Order for what he did. A poor glazier, he made his living replacing windows and he lost a wife and 10 children in the Carpathian Mountains there and he survived [this], was all alone in the world. He made it his business to send visas or whatever papers were necessary, dozens and dozens, and 95% all the Hungarians that came to Sydney went through Mr Ziegler and so this person in the camp said to my father, "Write to Ziegler in Sydney. Here's the address." You know that by return mail we had papers.

It took a month or two or whatever and my father didn't know Mr. Ziegler but everybody knew my father because he was the administrator and everybody knew once again in his life he did good things, that he was respected and honoured by all. This Mr Ziegler sent us the papers and as it turned out that we were waiting only for the final visa to go to Australia and to go to America and my parents decided that since 1941, since we left our home and freedom forever and we only survived by one miracle and another miracle and a chance. Sometimes if we were here and not half a meter away or less, these bombs were falling because to go back to 1944, we were right in the frontline then between the Germans and the Russians, so we were right in the frontline and bombs were falling near us and so my father would move us and a bomb would fall there.

It was like we were shielded by something and so they said whichever visa comes first, that's where we go and the Australian visa came first and so we came here on the 31st of March 1951 and we landed by an Italian ... It was not a liner, it was some sort of little military boat that they converted for passengers where there was a big dormitory for the men and a big one for the women. Can you imagine a ship like that? I was 16 then and I can remember. From then on of course, I can remember a lot and it was mangiare. One of the attendants would come along with a bell, "Mangiare," it means, "Eat. Time to go to eat, to the dining room," so this was our first experience of pasta because every meal was pasta.

Anyway, it took us six weeks and we came here and when we [inaudible] the ship stopped at Woolloomooloo, I think. We didn't know if anybody was waiting for us. Now what do you do? You get off the ship with two children. We were not children anymore, 16 and 14 and where do you go from there? No language. Actually, I spoke language or I spoke English already, not as well as I do today but I was taught in Germany. My mother with her education. She found a way to educate me and one of the things was English because they realised that wherever we go, it would be useful, but lo and behold, there was Mr Ziegler and he knew my father.

My father didn't know him and he was waving madly and he had this broken-down little truck like a little utility but really it must have [inaudible], it must have been 20 years old and so I remember there was room for I think my mother and my father in the front and my brother and I were sitting in [that] open back. He had booked a room for us in a boarding hut, sort of a bed and breakfast in Bennett Street, Bondi at four guineas a head. Do you know what four guineas was? A man's wage at that time or wages anyway. I don't want to speak badly of people, but they were Hungarian.

Now some of my good friends are Hungarian but at the time, we were Polish, they were Hungarian, but they really used people, four guineas a head. Anyway, we stayed there for a few months until my father had to see what can we do for a living. They came to Australia with £1,000 which was quite a nice little sum because over the four and a half years my father was employed by the American Military Authority he got wages and some people made fortunes on the black market

and my father, he was the good guy working, looking after people. Even with £1,000, you could do something here. You could buy a house. You could pay a deposit on a house, so at first I didn't know what to do, what not to do. You could buy a little house somewhere in Marrickville or Auburn or somewhere there. That's where agents were taking us.

What do we live on? They came to the conclusion that maybe we should ... maybe my father should do something like a little shop of some kind and having been in the bread business, there was already a bakery here that was making challahs. That's the bread for Friday night, the twisted rolls, and so my father [unclear], introduced himself to him and he asked him to come and work a couple of days and because ... It's not that I'm saying it but nobody but nobody could plait a six piece challah like my father could.

It was pure art and after working for this man for a couple of days, my father said, "I can't do it. All my life, I'm self-employed. I was the employer," and he said, "I don't know what to do but I've got to do something." A disaster happened in our family at that time. While we were still in the boarding house, my mother who was 41 at the time, she fell somehow and she broke her hip and in 1951 to break a hip is not like it is today. She was taken to hospital, to St Vincent's, and she was there for weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks, and she was brought to this place we lived at that time already because my father then dragged me everywhere to translate and I must say that the first entry into Sydney as much as I love it now was a very unhappy one for me because there I was 16.

We lived in four guineas a bed in this room, and then my mother breaks her leg and my father dragged me everywhere. I didn't go willingly. I went with him to translate for him and I can't even remember now where the places we went to, but my parents had enough time to go along the streets like the shopping centres, just look in the shops and so on. Then what caught their eye was these cake shops. That, in 1951, was not like today, the cake shops. You had your sponge, you had your cupcakes, not rolls, and maybe some other things, but nothing like now, and so they ... My father looked in the window and he said, "Do you think I could make those cupcakes?" He never, never saw one in his life even, but somehow because of his ...

Interviewer: Ruth, I think we were talking about your father looking for a location ...

Ruth Leiser: Yes.

Interviewer: ... and maybe starting up his own cake shop.

Ruth Leiser: Yes.

Interviewer: I'm guessing that that might be the reason why your family settled in the Bondi area?

Ruth Leiser: No. I can't remember exactly whether my parents decided to go into the cake business, right, because my father ... He was a specialist in the bread fermentation but you can learn things. You do other things, so everything with yeast and with doughs and that sort of thing, he was very good but not the cakes, so finally, I don't know for how long they looked. He decided to get this little cake shop in Newtown. Newtown in 1951 was a very, very Australian, a workers kind of suburb

and there were lovely people because they were our first friends in Australia was this family who lived next door to us. Australian workers, lovely.

I found that throughout the years that the real [inaudible] Australians were nicer to us than our own Jews from before because when we stood out a bit as being refugees just come and a lot of our own Jews that were already settled from pre-war and Anglo Saxon, we were a bit of an embarrassment to them and they have Australian people who don't even speak the same language because I was still the only one that spoke English, to be so friendly. Anyway that's another story.

My mother was in St Vincent's Hospital during which time my father decided to take this little shop in Newtown, King Street, Newtown with a so-called residence upstairs. It was one big kind of big room and it had another kind of little room at the top of the stairs, quite an open room. Then you went to the right and there was a little kitchen, very old-fashioned and the toilets were outside. They were [still] from that era, so anyway so my father decided and the owner of the cake shop who was a very kind, also Australian, who didn't have to do it and he said he would stay with my father for three months just to teach him how to make a sponge, how to make this and that and the other thing and I always had to be translating and in time, my father started to learn English.

He'd catch a word here and a word there and so I remember vividly how my mother was brought from hospital and she was taken on a stretcher up this kind of very narrow winding staircase upstairs because what my father had to do without my mother is, with me in tow, is to buy some furniture on time payment. They had to buy beds and they had to buy some wardrobes because they didn't have any belongings at that time and some sort of a dressing table and a sofa which, that big room was then divided in half by a curtain and I slept, it was a bed or a sofa, I don't remember, behind one curtain and the main bedroom sort of thing was behind the other side of the curtain. My brother slept in the ...

They put a bed in that room that was on the other side. Very basic, very primitive, but for people who came out of three years of our wartime experience and even the years after that, it was ours then, ours, a home. This was our first home in Australia and my father started to bake, learned to bake this and I was put in the shop, a little shop like that and I hated it. I didn't like it at all but in Hebrew-cum-Yiddish, you say, ein brera. It means that there is no alternative. That's what had to be done. It was a very quiet and very small little cake shop and I started to cream sponges, to ice the cakes. I'd never done these things before either so it was altogether very basic.

It wouldn't pass today and so people would come in, buy something. I would, I knew English enough to be able to get the money and so on and if it was quiet periods, I used to sit behind the counter and read a book because that's what I really wanted to do. I wanted to read and my father used to go by and he says, "Make out like you're doing something," and so in time, my mother used to ... She graduated to stretchers, not stretchers, the what do you call them, yeah, stretchers.

Interviewer: Crutches.

Ruth Leiser: Crutches, crutches, yes. My mother graduated to crutches so she used to make her way down those winding staircase on crutches and she used to start helping little things like ice the cake if you showed her how or some little thing. She wanted to help. My father worked very hard, beyond human, in a time like this. He used to get up at the crack of dawn, maybe two in the morning

or three in the morning and in the afternoon, he'd get a couple of hours' sleep and then do something else. They were very hard times.

One day, he burned his face because there were gas ovens at that time. The baking ovens were gas and he must have left it for a moment on and next moment he was going to light it and then it hit him in the face so he ran to the hospital which was not far away there. [unclear], we were just working and so we were there for three years, so it's to finish '51, '52 and '53 and in that time, they managed to start making some friends. For instance, across the road from us was a shoemaker, repairing shoes, but they spoke Yiddish, right, so already they had a contact and this shoemaker's daughter who was studying medicine already and she used to come by on her way to the Sydney University and so we started to get to know people and in time, we discovered Nielsen Park and we used to take a lunch basket and we'd take the trams.

There were trams in those days. We'd take the tram to the ferries and take the ferry to Nielsen Park and there at that time, the Holocaust survivors used to congregate there on a Sunday because everyone worked so hard in, it's almost in sweatshop conditions, and even those that worked for themselves, the tailors and whatever, a lot in the garment trade at that time,. So on Sundays they used to go to Nielsen Park, have a bit of fresh air and so they got to know people. It's with those people that they talked about the survival because they were all survivors from one place to another and it's because we couldn't talk about it. Nobody else wanted to hear, nobody wanted to hear, and I was at that time, say, 17, 18, 19. I still went with my parents everywhere. I didn't have a friend. On Saturday afternoon, we got 10 shillings.

This was like a dollar or something now, and there was a picture house directly opposite us. My brother and I used to go to the pictures and sometimes the two of us used to go for a walk down King Street to Broadway just to walk and come back. That was all the outings we did, and of course, I was in the shop helping my father, but my brother went to school. He went, he started in the Newtown High School which at that time was a very rough and ready school.

Then after three years that we ... No, my parents, we didn't go anywhere. We didn't spend any money on anything so even that little bit of takings we had from the cake shop, after paying rent and whatever, they still managed to save, have some savings because we were very good savers. If you don't spend, it stays there and however little you earn, if you add it and you add it, it accumulates. After three years, my father decided that it's time to move from there and by then, they made some acquaintances in Nielsen Park and most of these people lived around the Eastern Suburbs, although quite a lot of the Jewish population at that time lived in Marrickville and Burwood and Strathfield and all those areas.

What I didn't tell you is what made the little cake shop thrive in the end is my father started to make challahs, that he was a specialist at because there was nobody, you couldn't buy a challah, except for this fellow in Bondi, and he let it be known. I don't know how, but he let it be known to the Jewish people that lived in all the areas there, Strathfield, Burwood, Marrickville, Enmore, all of those, and in no time at all, he was busy making challahs and this is where they did a little bit of saving because they were the best, beautiful, and so the cakes became a secondary thing then.

After three years, as I said, [they] decided to move on, go a bit higher. The people that my father made friends with all lived around Bondi and it so happened at that time, you couldn't rent a

flat for anything and you had to pay key money to get a flat, to rent a flat. You had to get key money to the landlord and then he would let you move in and pay him rent. This was quite common and so for £800, which was a lot of money, my parents paid £800 for a flat in Francis Street, walking distance to the beach, [it was], a building that had one entrance in Francis Street and one entrance in Edward Street and so we moved in there and then my father decided he didn't want to retire yet.

He's got nothing to retire on but he was in the position then to get a bigger cake shop so he started to look around with agents and so on and they found one in Manly that appealed to my father then because he could see the crowds in Manly at that time more than now and so that it came to pass that he decided to settle on one cake shop. It was on the corner of the Corso and a little street – Number One, the Corso. As you came off the ferries, you had your Council Chambers on the left, a huge building or maybe it was a hotel and the first shop, a corner shop like that was our cake shop. It was called [Jesper's] Cake Shop.

They didn't change the name of it and the former owner of [Jesper's] used to close at 12:00 on Saturday and he was closed on Sundays and my father could see the potential here for the weekends, so he started to open on all day Saturday until maybe 5:00 pm and Sundays. Can you imagine how hard we worked then? Yes, we employed two pastry cooks there. My father didn't make any more with his own hands. He was just buying the materials, the produce that they needed and all that, so he had two pastry cook that became so loyal to my father that after he ... They used to visit us here long after we'd gone from the cake shop, and so this must have been late 1964, I don't know the date. We had the two pastry cooks and the finisher. A finisher was a girl that did all the icings and so on and so on and so on.

We didn't make birthday cakes or wedding cakes or anything like that, but the turnover was tremendous because you're in a main position there and on a Sunday, and so eventually we used to leave home at two in the morning on Saturday because by about seven in the morning, you had already people coming in to buy and I was the only one until the first of the three or four girls that we had serving would come around 8:30 am or thereabouts.

By 8:30, I had everything packed like all the windows, where you put the stuff in the windows, all the trays and display nicely and I became really good at it. Really, I became really, that no-one could do what I did. Because our life [depended] on that and I was young. I was young and I was strong and I was healthy and I was probably not ... Probably I was reasonably good at other things as well, but creating these windows where you could sell from the windows.

Interviewer: Ruth, when your family first moved from Newtown ...

Ruth Leiser: Newtown.

Interviewer: ... over the cake shop into Bondi, what were your first impressions of the area?

Ruth Leiser: Oh look. Bondi was beautiful. After a while, it was just beautiful. This is where I really started to like Australia if you like, because you could walk down to Bondi Beach and by then, after, I was getting a little bit older, maybe 20, 21, 22 and I used to walk down to the beach. I read in the email I got, [that this they call the Jerusalem Beach or something. I didn't know that because all the young Jewish people used to congregate around there in my time too, and needless to say, I used to roast myself like everyone else, but this is where I started to meet some people my age.

Basically I didn't relate to my peers because I was always with adults, always with my parents and so I was a late bloomer sort of thing. This became our home and after that I wouldn't move anywhere at all. Bondi was the best place for me and my parents too and they used to walk, go down. My mother remained a semi-invalid all those years but they used to go down to Bondi Beach, sit on the grass, beautiful. That is something that was so beautiful that we thought it would never, ever happen during the war, that we'd never ever have such a life, and so one month goes after another and one year goes after the other, and so this is where I grew up then. I was already about 19 or 20 when we moved to Bondi but I really grew up from then on.

Interviewer: How do you think the Jewish community has shaped the area?

Ruth Leiser: I think it's been a good influence. It may ... not [everybody] might say that but I think that the Jewish people are generally, they are not bad element, [they are] a good element of people. They work hard and they're family-orientated and it's very rare that you, over the years, that you find any criminal elements. They are not ... Jewish people are builders, they're not destroyers. [Unclear] and who can refuse to live in such districts like near the beach or all of Dover Heights and Vaucluse. And so in time, people who used to live out in the other suburbs started to move back here and this is why it became a little bit more inhabited by Jewish people.

On the whole, they added to the scene. Then they didn't [detract from] it. They beautified ... maybe not all but I've certainly never come across any bad people in the Jewish community and so what happens is you found some more population growth. Then you build another synagogue that you might need or then you open another business that supplies kosher or whatever and that is how it all grew to this day now.

Interviewer: How do you think the Jewish community has shaped you as an individual?

Ruth Leiser: Me as an individual, it didn't shape me. It was my parents who shaped me that from my parents I learned to be honest and honorable and decent, all of those things that came from home. I never had a lot to do with the community anyway. A few friends. I had a few friends and in time, there were different functions for young people, where young people could meet and dances and that sort of thing. I never really moved after Manly. All the friends I had were Jewish and it's only later in my life that I made friends with non-Jewish people who were above and beyond, far above anything that a Jewish friend would do for me, so it didn't shape me, but I fitted in somehow in later years.

We went ... As a matter of fact, my parents went to the synagogue only for the High Holydays and for many, many years, as long as my father could drive, they used to support the synagogue in Newtown, because there is a synagogue in Newtown, one of the oldest in Sydney. I believe that it's had a revival in the last few years but this is where we went when we were in Newtown and my parents continued to go there from Bondi to support them. They never went to the big Central Synagogue or anything like that here.

Interviewer: How do you think your sense of culture and lifestyle has changed through living in Australia?

Ruth Leiser: In my case, having been ripped from my normal life except that I was with my parents, but having been ripped from my normal life as it would have been if it had gone on as I was

growing, I can't really answer that because from the age of six, we were refugees. We were without a country, without a home to call your own and they were bad years. They were sad years, so they had no ...

Lucky for me that I came out of it without any hang-ups or handicaps or anything like that and that's because I had parents and they were, the parents were extraordinary to the end for the children and so I was a very ... In the end I had a very isolated upbringing even though there were people around. I only was with with my family so I really don't know how to answer that. If I was a bit older and if I was already grown up before the war, I could have known more.

Interviewer: That's okay. What we might do now is we might move on to our first, our main section which of course is central around Jewish food because it is a ...

First up, why you don't tell us about how your dad used to make challahs?

Ruth Leiser: I'm only sorry that I didn't learn because to this day, I believe that you cannot put an old head on young shoulders and so ... but I just know that all those in Newtown when we had the cake shop and my father started making the challahs and after we left Newtown, he never ever had the opportunity to make challahs but he was always ... I remember them of course and they were ... He was a master in the fermentation that even the dough was just right.

It wasn't heavy, it wasn't too light. It was just perfect and he used to plait his challahs out of six strips and I remember he used to part them in the middle, go there, there, there, there, there and then it became with a top and it was like an oval. It was like an oval and so he used to ... This is practically what put us on our feet financially a little bit in this first cake shop and my mother used to make quite nice cakes at home, recipes that I still use to this day and ...

Interviewer: Why don't you tell us a little bit about those cakes, your memories of those cakes?

Ruth Leiser: Which, the Newtown?

Interviewer: Yeah, what your mother used to make.

Ruth Leiser: Oh, what my mother used to make. Not many because don't forget, she was a semi-invalid, but in the end she had a hip replacement. My mother's specialties, not only Jewish but most Europeans used to make a cake called babka and babka is one that's in a ring tin with little things so when it comes out, it has grooves. My mother used to make a simple one and it was the best of all and to tell you the truth, that over the years, I have made her recipe and it never came out like that. I don't know why. It just never came out like my mother used to make, and in those days, she was a simple cook.

All the six years that we were in Manly that my father [had] the cake shop, my mother used to, number one, keep house and number two, she used to do my father's books, all the accounting and all of that and so she used to cook simple foods but in retrospect they were all so delicious. In our case, maybe because we were deprived for three years and four years, three years totally in the war time, deprived of any sort of food and this was lovely things that she made, whatever she made was beautiful and so, but very simple. She learned how to grill a steak because these were all unknowns to us, how to grill a steak and she would ...

Interviewer: Ruth, what did you think of Australian food when you first arrived and how do you think that's changed across the years?

Ruth Leiser: Oh, it's changed tremendously. In the 1950s, early 1950s, I don't know, I can only recall one occasion where the food was marvelous because where did I eat Australian food? In those days, we didn't even go to restaurants to eat because we were refugees trying to build up a life, you see. I had a girlfriend at that time who she was Jewish but she was friends with a non-Jewish family and they invited her to come with a friend for a Christmas dinner and that was the most amazing dinner. To this day, I remember it. Everything was so beautiful. There was the baked dinner and the pudding.

It's the only time that I had a real proper Australian Christmas pudding with a brandy sauce and everything. I left that house very, very full and happy. It was a lovely beautiful baked dinner Australian style because my mother also cooked, baked, put a chicken in the oven or so on but they were not done the same way and this was a real ... A sort of an elderly couple and the lady was so hospitable and so lovely and I don't know even if today the young generation Australians cook dinners like that, so that was a very important memory for me. Australian food, you could buy lamb. This is where, we Europeans didn't know lamb so since then, after in our early years, and we started to eat lamb and so that's about the only experience I have of having dinner in an Australian house.

Interviewer: How do you think your migration wave has influenced food in the local area?

Ruth Leiser: Oh, it has completely transformed it because in those days, in the '50s, I don't know if you had a Chinese shop somewhere. I'm sure there was, but all of these nationalities that have come and they certainly improved the scene of the culinary scene. There's no question about it, because in those days, in the '50s and '60s, you had to go for miles to find a Vietnamese or other Chinese restaurants but there were nightclubs ... but when did I ever go to a nightclub?

I think once I've been to Chequers, it was called in those days, it was a nightclub. I remember it because Shirley Bassey was on the floor. Shirley Bassey was performing and someone took me to this nightclub, very nice dancing so those occasions were not very often and of course I never ... I was a little bit shy and I never knew what to order from a menu. All of those things. Still it was my upbringing from home that I really didn't know the restaurant scene very much.

Interviewer: Okay, so Ruth, tell me about special foods that you prepare or eat during family get-togethers or Jewish holydays?

Ruth Leiser: We have quite a few festivals. It's not like Christmas and Easter. We have maybe six holydays and festivals a year where each one has got its traditional foods. It's not that you can't eat anything else, but these little specialties ... Now for instance, yesterday, no sorry, it's next week. No, I think it was yesterday. It's called Shavuot, the holyday of Shavuot where you eat mainly dairy in memory of such and such and such that happened in the Bible. It's supposed to be when God handed Moses the Torah. That's what is written in the prayers and so you traditionally have cheesecake for dessert or cheese blintzes.

Have you ever heard or, [no, no], and you can't really buy any ... My mother used to make very good cheese blintzes. They are basically, you make very paper-thin crepes and you make a mixture of cheese. The cheeses change. When my mother used to make them, you could only get

the farm cheese. We used to have to make it soft and put a little something in, so you'd mix it up, yeah, ready for filling, and you put it in the middle of the crepe and you wrap it up like an envelope and then you fry it lightly on both sides and they're delicious.

They're absolutely delicious but you've got to make the crepes paper thin and not a lot of ... none of my friends make [them] paper thin. So then you have Chanukah which is that's called the Jewish Christmas and that is to commemorate the freedom from the Greeks in the Holy Land and the renewal of the Temple. That's why we have it for eight days because after the temple was cleaned up which was destroyed by the Greeks, after the temple was cleaned up, they only found one ...

Interviewer: The essence of Judaism is in its rituals and observances and in this section, we would love to hear about mitzvahs and traditions, how it shaped your identity and passing down from generation to generation. How did your religious practices now compare to before you migrated?

Ruth Leiser: Both my parents come from very religious backgrounds, not the same because you have the Chasidim which are the ultra religious. They have the ringlets and the black coats and all of that, so my father comes from that kind of a family. Not ultra, ultra but religious. And my mother, the Lithuanian Jews are a different sect, almost, which this sect goes back 150 years, so much so that [if] they considered [inaudible] intermarrying, they didn't allow it and they're very, very worldly religious.

My mother's father, my grandfather, he was highly educated. He went to one of the great Yeshivas out there. That's the college for religious learning in Lithuania, world-famous. It produced rabbis and so on; so he went to that Yeshiva before he became a farmer at age 18 or something and he was a very learned man and very religious but normal and so that was my mother's side. Now with my parents they were not either nor. They used to go to the synagogue on the High Holydays. Don't forget that we lived on a farm 28 kilometers from the city so I think they went, they either went to my grandparents and stayed for the whole holyday or there was a little synagogue in a little township nearby and from the age of six ...

Before I was six, I don't remember, and after that, my whole world was destroyed. I am sure that during the War while we were in hiding and in total starvation, if my father was given a piece of bacon or something, he would take it and would give it to the children, but even that was very scarce. After the war, we were displaced people. We were going from place to place to place. If the High Holydays would come up, the main ones which are Rosh Hashanah, the New Year and Yom Kippur which is the Day of Atonement, they found a way somewhere to join a group of people to pray.

After we came to Sydney and this is our permanent home from then on, so they attached themselves to a synagogue and they also only went on the High Holydays, so since we came to Australia, I've always gone to one synagogue or another on the holydays. Also, we have five dates on the Jewish calendar that they say memorial prayers after the departed, officially and then the congregation is asked [unclear]. They always go, even if, people who don't go to the synagogue often go to say, Kaddish, they say, prayers after the dead and everybody's got somebody, a parent or somebody so we observe that and the other holydays are festivals.

It's only the two High Holydays and at Easter of course, the Passover, and the other, like there's where you eat cheesecake and on Chanukah, you eat anything which is fried in oil. It's very, very common for women to make potato pancakes or doughnuts which are fried in oil to commemorate the fact that when the Temple was cleaned up, they only could find one container of that pure oil with which they could sanctify again to renew the Temple ; it is supposed to last for 24 hours. [but] it lasted for eight days, this one, and so then they sent out emissaries to the whole [known world] at that time that it's been, that the rabbis made a ruling that this should be remembered forever more as the Festival of Light where we light eight candles, one each day. That's the Menorah because the Menorah is the oldest Jewish symbol of all, the eight candle Menorah. These are happy, these are festivals of ... Nearly every festival is to commemorate a miracle that saved the Jewish community somewhere and it's been ordained, not ordained, but it was pronounced to be remembered forever [unclear].

Interviewer: Ruth, what learning's, beliefs and traditions do you feel are most important or that you're most passionate about?

Ruth Leiser: I'm not really passionate about general ... I'm not passionate but I believe that people should observe their rituals or customs or whatever they do in their own religion but I can't say that I'm really passionate anymore. Even after the war, my parents both came from such religious families. My mother was educated and she knew how to read the prayer books in the original. She understood them, and even they occasionally said, "Where was God?" You still, when you're born a Jew, you die a Jew.

Interviewer: How does it feel to belong to a group of people with their common history and traditions?

Ruth Leiser: It's familiar to me and I like it. For instance, we have a group here in Sydney, which we call ourselves Child Survivors. There is no-one there under 70, mostly early 80s or thereabouts but they were children in the War time and we have a mailing list of about 100 people. We get together eight times a year and we are brothers and sisters because we all went through, in one form or another, we went through the war where we were hunted down to be killed and yet we survived and we reached an older age that if we had died as children, we wouldn't be here. Mainly now half of my friends are from that group and half of them are born in Australia, Jewish people but born in Australia or came here long before.

Interviewer: Are there any traditions that you're passing on to your son or to your grandchildren?

Ruth Leiser: I would like to. My son is married to a non-Jewish girl. She's a lovely girl and I'm very happy with her, but she's from Pennsylvania and they are fairly churchgoing people, but I think early when they first got married, they've been married nearly 21 years, when they got married, they decided to not have any one religion, just see what happens. Her family are, as I said, churchgoers but not fanatic and the children know that they are half and half, but so far they didn't go into religion at all. Early in the piece, my son said to me, "She is not asking me to convert and I don't ask her to convert." The children are lovely. I think they go to church when they go for Christmas and Easter to their other grandparents. That's fine. There's some kind of American denomination where it's a pastor, not a Catholic, so that's about it.

Interviewer: What do you think the best thing is about being Jewish in the Waverley region?

Ruth Leiser: The Waverley [area] ... it's only because in my case living here right in the middle of Bondi Junction and living alone and I'm a people person. I like people, always did and so I can't go into any supermarket or anywhere at all before I meet someone I know, and very often it ends up to sit down and have a coffee somewhere and generally this has been home to me all these years, since 1954. I lived for 30 years in my other flat in Bondi Road and I've been here now 14 years. This is my home and I love it. I wouldn't like to live anywhere else.

Interviewer: That's good to hear. Do you think that Bondi has become a bit of a melting pot for different cultures ...

Ruth Leiser: Well ...

Interviewer: ... and do you think that this has influenced the character of the local area?

Ruth Leiser: It could, yes, it is, but it is true that if you go out into the Westfield somewhere, you hear every language spoken and quite a lot of them I understand because I was very good with the languages. I still understand all of Polish and of course I speak German and Yiddish and English, and you'd be surprised how often I hear Yiddish in the street. I said, "I don't believe this." Older people, usually.

Yes, it's a very cosmopolitan feeling around here and with the new towers which are three new 22 stories of building right in front of me and this is going to bring in even a lot more young people because they're aiming at young people so it's not very nice if you can't drive out of your own building sometimes, but I like people, and it's very cosmopolitan, definitely. Every possible language that you can't go and ... not so much, not represented a great deal by the oriental communities, not around Bondi I think. I hear a lot of German, Polish, Dutch, whatever, languages being spoken by people that would go around so it's nice.

Interviewer: Okay, so every Jewish person wants some naches in their life and naches can also be seen as success and learning and giving back to the community. What does the word naches mean to you and does it have a special significance?

Ruth Leiser: Naches is something that's not easy. It's not always easy and not everybody's blessed with it, but I have one son who is, always since the day he was born, he's been [my] life and now he has two daughters which are marvelous. I never thought I would have grandchildren. As long as they are healthy and they are lovely girls and my son is well and he's a very good son. This is my naches. I'm very close to one of my nieces, the one with the Indian husband and I go there every Friday night for dinner.

She comes and picks me up lately so that's very nice, but my main naches is from my son and my grandchildren so I never knew it, to tell you the truth, that it can relate to general things. It's always like, for instance, if you're a grandmother and you go to your grandchild's presentation of some kind, this is the greatest joy because as you get older, you've lived a lifetime and that's your icing on the cake which not everybody has, so you're very lucky if you have something in your family that you can have naches.

Interviewer: How do you think you would describe the term naches to someone who doesn't know what it means?

Ruth Leiser: Exactly what I told you. It's great joy, it's something that comes from within the heart. It's a feeling of the heart, that it's a great achievement for instance if you've a grandchild or a great-grandchild becomes a concert pianist or something. It doesn't matter what, as long as they are good people. It's joy, it's pure joy. Without being jealous or anything like that from other people but when you have naches, you have joy.

Interviewer: What do you hope for your son and grandchildren?

Ruth Leiser: [Good health is] the main thing and they shaping up very well. They're girls of 12 and 10. They're shaping up very well. My son left when he was 22 or so. It was an affair of the heart. He went to Europe on his first trip and he met this girl and she was the only one for him so he came back home with the thought of going there. It's a long story but he said to me that we will see each other three times a year and that was 22 years ago, and he has kept his word. He has come here or I've gone there sometimes.

We have seen each other, quality time, three times a year, like for instance, since the girls were born say, 12 years ago, I've been going there for a month. They come here for a month and once we used to meet in Honolulu for two weeks, three times a year. We've really continued with that to this day. I've actually been in Honolulu early in May. I've been ... No, April, I was there in April, so we spent 10 days there. It was lovely.

Interviewer: That's lovely, that's lovely.

Ruth Leiser: My 12-year-old granddaughter is a head taller than I am now.

Interviewer: Did you know your grandparents?

Ruth Leiser: No. No, my father's grandparents. I was six when everybody, when we went underground and my grandparents ... My mother's entire, entire family was killed within the first few weeks of the German occupation. They were taken to a forest and shot. I only know my grandparents from my mother telling me. My mother used to tell me how my grandfather, my mother's father, what kind of a man he was. It makes me want to cry every time. She used to tell me apparently I had whooping cough when I was three weeks old so he came down and he took charge of the baby into ...

[They harnessed] horses, [we'd go] for a drive in the country for the air and my mother used to tell me how if during the night, the baby peeped [inaudible], you couldn't get to it quick enough ... he was already there. These are my sort of related memories of my grandfather. I don't remember him at all. I must have been about five the last time I saw him, and my father's family ... My father's I did know because they were from Poland. I know only about them but I've never met them.

Interviewer: We'll now move on to what do you think is your biggest achievement in life and why?

Ruth Leiser: The achievement is, I suppose, that I'm still here after everything I went through in life and my son, he's the one and only and now I have the granddaughters. I have a nice home, I'm

happy living here and through all that hard work from my parents and my own hard work later, I'm able to live comfortable. What else did I achieve? I don't consider my radio work and all of that. I suppose in many ways it was an achievement because I wasn't used to speaking into a microphone and being confident and reading poetry and reading and compiling news and all of that so I suppose that would be the one achievement in my senior years already because I only started when I was 52 with the radio.

Interviewer: Oh, I'd have to agree. That is a serious achievement, certainly not for everybody.

Ruth Leiser: Yeah.

Interviewer: What activities do you think you'd be involved with in the wider community that also brings you naches?

Ruth Leiser: Nothing at the moment because especially the last year and a half, I've been unwell which will [be] culminating with this operation here but I am very involved with the Jewish Museum all of those years since its inception, even before that. I've been a volunteer guide once or twice a week sometimes and I relate to children because my story is when I was a child so they always put me with younger children and telling the story. I went to Brisbane and to other schools and over the years get invited to speak here and there and I have a little circle of friends. After all, at my age, what should I expect? I think I'm still doing all right.

Since about three years ago, I've been invited to take part in this Project Heritage run by the Jewish Board of Education and that went quite well. Year Six nearly every year and I've done it in two schools in the Eastern Suburbs, Rose Bay Public and Woollahra, I think, and that was very interesting. The children relate very well to this story and I have also taken part in other Living Historian programs for all the years, even all these years with other schools and with ...

I've often, I've been invited once to speak at the Christadelphians and we published a book, the Child Survivors published a book with 30 stories in it so I've been quite involved over the years. And so I said we have this Child Survivors group and I've been a founding member and I've been on the committee to this day. We have eight meetings a year plus we have a Chanukah party at the end of the year. You know Caroline Jones? She's one of our friends. She comes to our meeting, not every meeting but she met one or two members of this group 25 years ago. She interviewed them on the program that she had once, something, The Meaning of Life or something like that, so she interviewed three of my friends. I didn't know her then, and that's how it started, this relationship with Caroline Jones. Basically that's all I do.

Interviewer: Now that's great. That's great, so we've only got one more question now. That is, how do you feel about your place in not just the Jewish community but the community overall?

Ruth Leiser: I'm comfortable. I like ... what shall I say, I'm very comfortable here. I like people. I don't contribute a lot to the community as such because what do I contribute? I pay my rates but basically that's all I can tell you really. I'm just one in the crowd, one person in the crowd.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about before we end the interview?

Ruth Leiser: I would have liked to talk a little bit more about the War years because that's my thing. Perhaps I'd better not. It might spoil me for the rest of the day, spoil my ... Because I get memories. The older I get now, the more I remember and it's clear. It's clear like crystal, and I think to myself, "I can't believe that this happened to us. I cannot believe it and that we survived." When a child of, I must have been about maybe seven and a half because my mother had to leave us, me and my brother, she had to leave us for about maybe a week or two weeks, because during the War years, my mother discovered that she was having a baby and this was a disaster because we were hiding in the forest here, there, in [inaudible] so she had to voluntarily enter the ghetto.

There was still a ghetto there and there was supposed to have been a doctor there just to, and of course she had ... That's when she left us and that's the only time that we were separated and of course the baby was born healthy. It's unbelievable and she never saw him again. It was a boy. Can you imagine that it was illegal to be pregnant and it was illegal to deliver a baby? Now how can you have a child in such circumstances, so I remember that during that time, and I haven't quite pinpointed, I must have been seven and a half maybe by then, or seven, that I used to wake up in despair.

Okay, can you imagine a child like that waking up in despair and this was the thing that I find it very hard now [01:48:00]. It's so long ago and at the drop of a hat, I could start crying and lots of other episodes during that War that are just unbelievable. Yet it was my father really who was instrumental in our survival. His strength. His strength. Thoughts like that come in and out of my mind all the time, and do I need it at my time of life, rather than go and enjoy myself, meet people for lunch and so on, such thoughts come into my mind, but you can't help that. That's why ... You know the Spielberg project? You know how long I was talking? For four hours. They cut it down to about one and a half.