

Missode Israel Piha Transcript

ROZ BORNSTEIN: This is Roz Bornstein, and I am meeting today with Missode Piha. And we are at Missode's room at the Kline Galland Home. And the date today is Thursday, June 28th, 2001. And Missode, do I have your permission to interview and tape you?

MISSODE PIHA: To what?

RB: Do I have your permission to interview you?

MP: Sure.

RB: Thank you very much. And can I tape you as well?

MP: Yes.

RB: Thank you very much. This is for the Weaving Women's Words Project of the Jewish Women's Archive. We're here today again to gather your oral history. And the first thing I'd like to know is where you were born.

MP: I was born in a small town by the name Tishmay.

RB: And what country was that town in?

MP: Turkish.

RB: Turkey.

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Okay. Thank you. And when were you born?

MP: I was born in 19 -- no, not -- let me see. How many years ago was that?

RB: About 1907.

MP: Seven, yeah.

RB: 1907. Okay.

MP: Right.

RB: And who were your parents?

MP: My parents?

RB: Yes.

MP: You want their names?

RB: Yes, please.

MP: My mother's name was Miriam (phonetic).

RB: Miriam (phonetic).

MP: Yeah. And my father's name was -- they used to call him -- my father was a cantor in synagogue.

RB: I see.

MP: Yeah.

RB: So he was the Hazan?

MP: Yeah, that's right, the Hazan.

RB: Was his first name Nessim.

MP: Nessim Israel.

RB: Okay. And where were they from?

MP: They're from the Island of the Rhodes.

MP: Yes.

RB: And then at some point they moved to Tishmay where you were born?

MP: Right.

RB: I see. What took them to Tishmay?

MP: Because my father's business, I mean, he was a cantor at synagogues. And they used to send him from one synagogue to another, from -- from Rhodes to Tishmay, to Milas -- he went to Milas -- because of his job.

RB: I see. And what do you remember about your father?

MP: (Laughs) I don't know what to tell you, the best father in the world! (Laughs).

RB: Is that right?

MP: Yeah. He was very smart. He was like -- I'll tell you, he was a Hazan, you know. He'd sing in the synagogue. And he was a very smart man. And I remember he used to come to my house and take a book and learn how to read English, because he never knew English. He wanted to know my language, you know, from this country.

RB: Is that so? So he taught himself English?

MP: Yes.

RB: What language did you speak in the home growing up?

MP: Ladino.

RB: Ladino, okay. And let' see, what do you remember about your mother?

MP: What is it to remember? She was a very, very lovely woman. And she used to crochet a lot.

RB: Is that right?

MP: Yeah (Laughs). And she was a very nice mother.

RB: What did she crochet for you?

MP: Dantella (marked as "unclear spelling" on word list) how you call this lace.

RB: You can say it in Ladino if you'd like, it's okay, in any language it comes, you know.

MP: La Dantella (marked as "unclear spelling" on word list) she used to crochet dantella (see previous).

RB: And was it for tablecloths or for pillowcases or what--

MP: For pillowcases, for pillowcases, yeah.

RB: I see. And how many children did she have?

MP: My mother had -- one, two, three -- four daughters, and one, two, three -- four boys.

RB: So there were eight children in all, eight brothers and sisters.

MP: Yeah.

RB: Okay. Were you among the younger part of the--

MP: I was the youngest.

RB: You were the youngest, okay. And who lived with you in Tishmay?

MP: Who lived with me? I was a single girl. I lived with my parents.

RB: Did all of your brothers and sisters live with you?

MP: No, not all the time, no. Some of my brothers used to live in South America, Brazil and Buenos Aries, you know.

RB: What made them travel to South America?

MP: Young boys, they used to go and make money, and make a life for themselves.

RB: Is that right. Did they have other relatives there?

MP: No.

RB: No?

MP: No.

RB: So they sought their fortune and adventure in South America.

MP: They go there, sure.

RB: I see.

MP: They went there.

RB: So when you were born, your mother had you, and who else lived with -- were there other brothers or sisters in Tishmay with you?

MP: My youngest brother Morris.

RB: Okay.

MP: And my sister, Diana, she was there. Yeah, but the others, two other brothers, they used to live here in America.

RB: I see. Okay. So some were in South America, and some came to America, here.

MP: Uh-huh, yes.

RB: I see. And let's see, before your family moved to Rhodes, you went to school in Milas--

MP: In Rhodes. I went to school in Rhodes.

RB: I see. Did you go to school in Tishmay, where you were born?

MP: No, no.

RB: Okay. And did you go to school at all in Turkey?

MP: In Milas. I went to school in Milas.

RB: Okay. Is Milas close to Tishmay? I don't know the geography, so you can teach me.

MP: Yeah, it's not too far. It's close.

RB: Was it a Jewish school, a Hebrew school or a general studies school?

MP: General.

RB: I see.

MP: Yeah.

RB: And who ran the school, do you know? Was it Alliance or was it--

MP: The Alliance ran it, yeah. That's where we used to (Inaudible).

RB: So you went to school there?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: What do you remember about your school experience?

MP: (Laughs) I don't remember very much.

RB: What languages did you study?

MP: French.

RB: Okay. So you spoke Ladino at home. Did you learn Hebrew as well?

MP: No.

RB: So just Ladino--

MP: Ladino and French.

RB: And French.

MP: French was my main language.

RB: I see. And what about Turkish? Did you have any use of Turkish?

MP: No, not very much.

RB: Okay. So while you were young, as a young girl, were you mostly either at home or school, one of the two places? Or did were you out in other settings?

MP: No, I was mostly at home.

RB: Uh-huh.

MP: Yeah. You know, old-fashioned parents, that's what I used to have. Very nice parents, but they were old-fashioned (Laughs).

RB: So the Sephardic girls back then, did they stay mostly at home if they were not at school?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: I see.

MP: Yes.

RB: Okay. What was it like growing up in a religious family?

MP: Well, when you are raised in a religious family, you become religious too, whether you like it or not (Laughs).

RB: And your family was--

MP: My father was a very religious man, you know. He was a chazan, he was a very religious man. And I used to be religious also.

RB: Were you Orthodox?

MP: Yeah.

RB: How did you celebrate Shabbat, for example? Did your family -- what did you do for Shabbat?

MP: Shabbat? We used to -- my father used to go to the synagogue, and then come back from the synagogue and have lunch and stay home and read. My father used to read a lot.

RB: And your mother, what was her role? Did she prepare the food?

MP: The food, she prepared the food. And she used to tell me, you sit down and do your embroidery, because I used to embroider. And you make your embroidery, and I'm going to cook lunch for you, whatever, you know.

RB: Is that right, on Shabbat, she would--

MP: No, not Shabbat.

RB: Oh, not on Shabbat, okay. What kinds of food did she prepare for Shabbat?

MP: (Laughs).

RB: What were some of your family specialties?

MP: The best food -- my mother was a very good cook anyway.

RB: I bet she was.

MP: And the best food was like stuffed tomatoes. You know, we called them tomato reyenados.

RB: Yes. And what were they stuffed with -- for people outside of Seattle?

MP: With meat.

RB: With meat. What kind of meat? Was it hamburger?

MP: Hamburger, kosher hamburger.

RB: Okay. I'm going to ask you questions like that for people outside of the Sephardic community who might not know this type of food, but are interested in learning about it. Okay?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: So she used to make stuffed tomatoes for you?

MP: Yeah.

RB: And were there special ovens? How did she cook them?

MP: We didn't have oven in homes. She -- they used to have ovens for the public.

RB: For the public, okay.

MP: And my mother used to go there and bring all the stuff and bake them there and cook them there.

RB: In the community oven?

MP: Yeah.

RB: Was it for the Jewish community?

MP: Uh-huh, right.

RB: I see. And were there other stuffed vegetables, or other vegetable dishes?

MP: Yeah, there -- my mother used to cook a lot of vegetables, yeah.

RB: But you remember the stuffed tomatoes has being the really good--

MP: Yeah.

RB: -- specialty?

MP: Yeah (Inaudible).

RB: That's wonderful. What about bread? What kind of bread did she make?

MP: Oh, she used to make homemade bread, and it was out of this world.

RB: Is that right?

MP: Yeah.

RB: What did she call it? Rosca?

MP: Rosca. Rosca, you make it different type, you know. And bread is different, you know. And she used to make rosca. She used to make bread, homemade things, you know.

RB: That's marvelous. Did she make challah?

MP: Yes.

RB: And so on Friday night, what dinner did she prepare for Friday nights? What was a typical Friday night meal?

MP: Like roast meat, you know, or fish. You know, things like that.

RB: Do you have a favorite fish dish that you prepare for Shabbat or holiday?

MP: Not me.

RB: Not you?

MP: No, not here, not now (Laughs).

RB: (Laughs) Okay.

MP: Now, whatever comes along is...

RB: Yes. Okay. But when you were younger, did you make certain fish dishes that were special, or that (Inaudible)--

MP: I didn't make them. My mother made them.

RB: What did she make? What kind of fish did she prepare?

MP: Fish with tomato sauce.

RB: Con tomat?

MP: Yeah.

RB: It's delicious.

MP: (Inaudible) It is delicious. And then she used to make fish with--

RB: Con huevo y limon? (with egg and lemon)

MP: Yeah. You know better than me, con huevo y limon (Laughs).

RB: And what about -- let's see, how about filo? Did she ever make her own filo dough, or did you?

MP: No, I never made filo dough, but I -- we buy it ready made filo, you know.

RB: I had heard that way back when you made your own filo dough, years ago, many years ago.

MP: Many years ago. Well, my mother used to make it, but it wasn't filo like the filo that we get here, you know, that we buy. It was heavier dough, you know. The filo here that we buy -- or we make it, whatever it is, it's much thinner. It's different filo.

RB: I see. How did she make it years ago? Do you remember the process, because I think people would be interesting in hearing it. Do you remember it?

MP: I don't know. She was in the kitchen doing it and I was in the other room making embroidery (Laughs), so no.

RB: Okay. All right. Did you have special songs that you would sing for Jewish holidays or events?

MP: My father used to sing very nice. He used to have good voice and good songs and everything. But I never sang in anything (Laughs).

RB: I heard that you used to love singing Ladino songs years ago, you used to enjoy it.

MP: Oh, sure, years ago, if I knew the songs, I used to enjoy it.

RB: Is that right?

MP: Sure.

RB: For what occasions would you sing? Just every day--

MP: No.

RB: -- or would it be special events?

MP: Special, yeah.

RB: Like what kinds of events would you--

MP: Like let's say my sister was getting engaged or married or my brother (Laughs).

RB: And so they would have a vishita?

MP: Yeah.

RB: And you'd sing?

MP: That's right.

RB: Do you remember any of those songs?

MP: No.

RB: No, okay. Well, if one comes to mind, we would love to hear it--

MP: (Laughs).

RB: -- if you have any.

MP: I used to have a lot of songs, but I don't remember now, anymore.

RB: Okay. All right. What about for Passover? Did you sing for Passover?

MP: Well, for Passover, my father used to do everything. He used to sing everything.

RB: So he would lead the seder? Your father would lead the service and the seder?

MP: No, he used to go to the synagogue first, and have services there, and then come home. And we'd have Passover dinner, you know, for the family.

RB: Now, another thing I'm interested in is about when you were in Turkey, you know, one hears about Turkish baths. Did you -- did your family -- you know, how did you manage that? Were there Turkish baths that you would go to, or...

MP: We didn't have too much to do with Turkish...

RB: Okay. So you mostly stayed within your community?

MP: Right, right.

RB: Okay. Were there bathing facilities, like the community oven, did you have like a community--

MP: Oven.

RB: -- bathing place, or...

MP: Yes.

RB: I see.

MP: Yes, we did.

RB: What was that like?

MP: We used to go to bath, you know, like here you go and get nude, you know, and take a bath. Over there, in Rhodes, we used to go to a big place, and every woman in a different room, and take a bath.

RB: I see. Were they steam baths, or what kinds -- was it like a mikveh, like a bano(?), or was it--

MP: Yeah, yeah. Like a mikveh bano(?), yeah.

RB: Okay. All right. What did women do in the home at that time? What kinds of jobs did they have in the home?

MP: Well, they do -- what we used to do at home, it's either bake with our mothers, help to bake and help to sew. I used to sew a lot.

RB: Is that right?

MP: Yeah. I used to sew my dresses. My mother used to say, "you go and do your embroidery or your dresses, and I'll do the cooking in the kitchen", yeah.

RB: Did you make part of a trousseau, or did you make it just for your family, or...

MP: No, no, just for me.

RB: For you, for a trousseau?

MP: Yeah.

RB: Okay.

MP: That was the main idea of my mother, that she wanted me to go sit down and make embroideries, and make whatever you're going to do, for me, for my trousseau.

RB: For your trousseau.

MP: Sure.

RB: Okay. And did most daughters work inside the home then, or did some of them go work outside of the home?

MP: Very few. I had my older sister, she used to work out of the house, you know. She used to go downtown in some shop, main(?) shop, and she used to work there.

RB: And what type of store was it, or shop, do you remember?

MP: No, I don't, huh-uh.

RB: Okay. So there were a few women that worked outside of the home?

MP: Yes, yes.

RB: And some of them I hear were maids -- not maids, but helpers in other homes. I forgot the name of it, but...

MP: Desheepas (marked as "unclear spelling" on word list).

RB: Desheepas (see previous) that's right. Thank you.

MP: That's right, they used to be desheepas (see previous) yeah.

RB: Okay. All right. Now, when did you move to Rhodes? How old were you?

MP: When I moved to Rhodes from Milas I was a very young girl. I don't remember the age, about maybe fourteen, fifteen, very young.

RB: Okay. So you were a young teenager?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Okay. And did you go to school in Rhodes?

MP: Yes.

RB: What kind of school did you go to?

MP: The school in Rhodes was only to learn French, that's all.

RB: It was a neighborhood school?

MP: It wasn't too far from my house, yeah. It was very close to my aunt's house. And I used to go to my aunt's, and from there I used to go school.

RB: Is that right. Now, so you had a lot of family in Rhodes, a lot of extended family?

MP: No. Most of my family were in South America or here in this country. I didn't have very much family in Rhodes, no.

RB: Okay. So who was in Rhodes at the time that you lived there, which family members? You had an uncle who was a rabbi, is that right?

MP: I had an uncle that -- he was a chief rabbi in -- not in Rhodes -- he was in Rhodes too, but before that -- maybe you remember.

RB: In Romania?

MP: In Romania.

RB: I see. Okay.

MP: Romania.

RB: And what was his last name?

MP: My father's?

RB: Your uncle, the rabbi.

MP: Oh, the rabbi, Israel.

RB: Okay.

MP: Yeah. His first name was Rubin, Rubin Israel, that was my uncle.

RB: Okay. And you were close to him, is that right?

MP: Very close.

RB: Okay. Do you have a story that you remember about the two of you, your relationship?

MP: What I remember is when I was getting ready to get engaged, and my husband, who was from this country, came to Rhodes, I went to see my uncle. He was sick in bed. And he said to my husband-to-be, you treat that girl real good, because if I had a son -- my uncle didn't have no children -- I was going to take her for my son. I'm going to let you have her, but I want you to treat her real good. And my husband said, don't worry, I will treat her good.

RB: Oh, isn't that something.

MP: Yeah (Laughs).

RB: So he really loved you.

MP: That I remember very, very clear. He was sick in bed, and my husband went by his bed, and he told him, "You take care of my little girl, because if it wasn't for you, I was going to take her, if I had a son." But he didn't have no children.

RB: So he loved very, very much.

MP: Very much.

RB: Yes. Now, in Rhodes you had a boyfriend, is that right? Before you met Sam, your husband, you had a boyfriend. What was his name?

MP: Nessim.

RB: And his last name?

MP: (Laughs) I forgot. He was my boyfriend.

RB: How did you meet?

MP: I met him in school in Rhodes, you know, like a boyfriend. I had a boyfriend, yeah. And then he decided to go to Africa. So he came to my house and he told my father that he was going to go to Africa to make money, because all the boys of his age, they were all going there at that time. My father said, "Well don't tell me, tell her."

So when he came and told me that he was going to go to Africa, I said, "Fine, go ahead. I don't care." But when he left, my father said, "I won't ever send my daughter to Africa. He wanted to go, let him go. But I'm not going to send you there."

RB: How come?

MP: So I never did.

RB: How come?

MP: He just didn't care for me to go to Africa. He said, "I have other daughters that are in Seattle (Inaudible) in America, I don't want to have another one in Africa."

RB: So he didn't want all of his children leaving Rhodes, he wanted some to stay.

MP: At least, he said, "Everyone I see (Inaudible) there, and I got you here, you're going to stay here." But I didn't (Laughs).

RB: (Laughs) How did you feel when Nessim went to Africa?

MP: Well, I felt very sick.

RB: Yeah.

MP: I was sick for days and days. And I cried. I went to my bedroom, and I used to cry--

RB: Oh, so it was very--

MP: -- because he was my first love.

RB: Oh, so that was a sad time, when he left, for you.

MP: Yeah, it was. It was a very bad time for me.

RB: How old were you at this time?

MP: I was very young. I was probably sixteen, fifteen, fourteen, something like that.

RB: So it was a first love for you, yes.

MP: Yeah.

RB: And what happened? What happened when he went to Africa?

MP: He went to Africa. And he used to send me letters and letters and letters. And he used to send letters to my father, "Be sure and don't give Missode to anybody else. She's mine." He wanted to make it sure that I won't get engaged or married to anybody else. But he left, he went to Africa, and what I was supposed to do, you know?

So then my husband came from here, from America, to Rhodes. And he went to my father, and he said, "You know, I saw your daughter in la calle (the street) chameens" (phonetic) broad street that we used to have in Rhodes. We used to walk back and forth. We called them the Broad Street. "And I saw your daughter, and want your permission, I want to marry her." My father said, "Well, don't ask me. Ask her. She knows what she wants."

So my husband took -- rent a car and put me inside the car and took me for a ride. And he told me in the car that he wanted me, you know (Laughs), and that was it (Laughs).

RB: Wow. So Sam came -- he was living in the United States, your husband-to-be, and he came to Rhodes to find a bride or to visit--

MP: No, just--

RB: -- or what was the--

MP: He came to see his sisters. His father and mother was already gone, but he had sisters. So he came to see his sisters. And he came with two other boys, two other friends, you know. They used to come from America to Rhodes all the time, you know.

And my father thought that being that he came from America, I'm sure he's very rich. That wasn't so. He wasn't rich. He didn't have a penny to his name (Laughs).

RB: But how were the conditions in Rhodes at the time for young men? Was it hard to make money and to find work, and were--

MP: These boys didn't come to stay in Rhodes. They just came to see their parents, to visit, and go back.

RB: To visit, I see.

MP: And it so happened that some of them found wives, like me, like mine, you know. Others just didn't do nothing (Laughs).

RB: So did you date him a little bit while he was visiting there, or how did you get to know him?

MP: Well, we know -- we knew his family. He had there brothers and family, you know. My father knew his family. And I never used to go with him a lot, no. Just like I said, rent a car, and took me in the car and he told me that he was thinking of wanting me for, like a wife, you know.

RB: How old were you at this time?

MP: I was young.

RB: You were young.

MP: I was young!

RB: And how did it feel to have this happen?

MP: I came home and I told my mother about it, and she thought I was crazy (Laughs).

RB: (Laughs) How come?

MP: She said, "You're going to marry a guy that is too old for you." And he was.

RB: How old was he when he met you?

MP: He was forty and I was twenty-two. But you know, it was forty going on twenty.

RB: Is that right? So he was very youthful?

MP: Very. That's how he was. My daughter can tell you.

RB: What attracted you to him?

MP: I just liked him. He was a very nice person, a very nice man. He used to treat me like a queen.

RB: Is that right. So he treated you very well?

MP: Very, very good. He had an aunt, a old -- very old aunt. And she used to see him how he used to treat me, and hug me and take me -- take care of me and all this. And she then(?) said to him one day, "You know, the way you're acting, it's like you never saw a woman in your life!"

RB: Oh, isn't that something.

MP: She said -- and he said to her, "You know, Auntie, I've seen a lot of women in my life, this one is different. I'm going to make this one my wife." That was it!

RB: That's wonderful.

MP: (Laughs).

RB: So tell me--

MP: (Laughs) My husband was a very smart man (Laughs). He knew what he was doing (Laughs).

RB: When you went out with him a little bit in Rhodes, did you need a chaperon?

MP: No.

RB: No. And your father--

MP: I mean, I didn't stay out very late with him, though, because my parents were very strict, yeah.

RB: Now, your father told him to ask you about marriage.

MP: Yeah.

RB: Was that common at the time?

MP: Well, my father was very modern. He was a very religious man, he was a Hazan, but he was very, very bright, very open minded.

RB: I see.

MP: Yeah.

RB: What about your mother?

MP: My mother was a little bit in the other side, you know, a little bit old-fashioned (Laughs).

RB: Okay. And so at the time of your engagement, did your parents -- was there a dowry? What was the custom for engagement? Do you remember?

MP: I won't say that it was -- that I was engaged. I got married right away, you know.

RB: I see. Were there any specific Sephardic customs? Was there a mandatha?

MP: Yeah.

RB: And can you describe that--

MP: There was, but I never had any, because he never had any mother or father that we would send mandathas, you know.

RB: I see. That's right, he was visiting there.

MP: Yeah.

RB: That's right. So although the custom was in existence at the time, you didn't have it?

MP: No, I didn't do it, no.

RB: Okay. And what about your trousseau? There's a custom of -- what is it, ashuar, is that--

MP: Ashuar, yeah, yeah. My trousseau, I took it with me when I got married.

RB: I see. Okay. All right. So really, it sounds like you decided to marry him, and then the wedding took place shortly after, is that right?

MP: Uh-huh, yeah.

RB: How soon after?

MP: We got married right away, I mean, as soon as I knew him. And he was a nice, nice person, a very nice, very warm, very -- and he used to love me so much that (Laughs) I had to go with him, you know.

RB: Tell us about your wedding.

MP: My wedding, it was very nice. We had -- in Rhodes we had what we called the mandraki.

RB: Can you say that again?

MP: The mandraki. It's like you go to another town for -- what do you call that.

RB: Like a courtyard? A courtyard? No?

MP: No. So anyway, we used to have that, and we used to go there, we all used to go to mandraki.

RB: Do you know how to spell that, mandraki? Is it a Turkish word?

MP: Yeah.

RB: Okay. All right. So it was a place where people would gather?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: And celebrate. Okay. So it's a street.

MP: It's a very broad street. And you go there and if you have a fiancé, you know, you go with your fiancé, go with your husband. It's a really beautiful place.

RB: Is that right. I'd love to go.

MP: Beautiful place. Have you been to Rhodes?

RB: I've never been, and I'd love to go.

MP: Oh, boy, you should go.

RB: (Laughs) I will. So you got married there?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: And was there a wedding party, or how did it work back then?

MP: No, we had a very small wedding, you know.

RB: Do you recall something -- and forgive me if I don't pronounce it right -- but was there something L'abramsi?

MP: Oh, yeah (Laughs).

RB: What's that? Can you tell it to us, describe it?

MP: You know what, I don't even know what it is (Laughs).

RB: A lot of women have trouble remembering it.

MP: Yeah, L'abramsi. No, I don't -- I don't remember that.

RB: Okay. All right.

MP: (Laughs).

RB: So it's a celebration -- I heard that it was a celebration at the synagogue, on the next Shabbat following a wedding. Does that ring a bell at all?

MP: Well, like I said, my father was a Hazan, and he used to do things in synagogue, you know, because of me, because of the way that--

RB: Yes.

MP: -- you know.

RB: Yes.

MP: So he used to sing, you know, just--

RB: Do you remember any wedding songs?

MP: No (Laughs).

RB: Okay. Now, how did you spend your honeymoon?

MP: My honeymoon? In some hotel, in the room in the hotel, between him and I (Laughs).

RB: (Laughs) But--

MP: And my father used to come from home to the hotel every day to visit me, to see how things were, you know, and all that (Laughs).

RB: And how long were you on your honeymoon at this hotel?

MP: We were there about a month.

RB: A month. Was that typical at the time?

MP: No, no. We were there because my husband came to Rhodes from America, and he wanted to see Rhodes, you know.

RB: And so you would stay in this hotel and you would show him -- you would go places on the island, is that it, for your honeymoon?

MP: Uh-huh, that's right.

RB: I see.

MP: And my father used to come every morning to visit me, to see how am I doing.

RB: He was very close to you. How did you feel about his visit?

MP: My father's? Oh, I felt very, very good, oh, yeah. I used to look forward to see my father come to see me, you know.

RB: Is that right. Now, at what point did you decide to leave Rhodes with Sam?

MP: Well, I didn't decide it. I married him (Laughs). He came to Rhodes with other boys to see his family, and he never had any intentions of getting married. Because, like I say, he was forty years old. He was getting old to get married. And when he saw me, he decided he wanted to get married. So like I said before, he went to talk to my father. He said, "I saw your daughter. And I didn't think I was going to get married at all, but I saw your daughter and I fell in love with her." My father said, "Well, talk to her (Laughs)."

RB: Now, but he had planned to go back to the United States, is that right?

MP: My husband?

RB: Yes.

MP: Yes! Yes! He came with the intentions of either getting married or not getting married and come back to America, oh, yeah.

RB: I see. And so how did your family feel when you told them that you were leaving?

MP: (Inaudible) felt pretty good because I knew I had a good husband with me, and he was treating me very nice, and I was very happy to come to America.

RB: How was it saying goodbye to your parents at that time? What was that like?

MP: Well, it wasn't very pleasant, you know, to leave your father and mother. But you know, the thing is that my father and mother came to America.

RB: Is that right?

MP: Sure, a few years after, they came to America.

RB: They followed you over.

MP: Yeah (Laughs).

RB: They missed you. What were the circumstances of their coming over? Why did they leave?

MP: Well, Rhodes was getting very bad for the Jewish people.

RB: I see.

MP: And my brother -- I had an older brother here, he wanted my parents to come here, so my brother brought them here.

RB: Was this before World War II?

MP: Yeah.

RB: I see.

MP: I think so, yeah.

RB: I see. So this was before the war?

MP: Yeah.

RB: Okay. So they made it out in time?

MP: Oh, yeah, yeah.

RB: They were fortunate.

MP: They were here, and they were very happy.

RB: Okay. And you came to Atlanta, is that right?

MP: Well, when I first came to America when I got married, we went to Atlanta, because my husband's sister used to live there, and my husband was from there too. He used to live in Atlanta. He lived in New York, he lived in Atlanta. So we went to Atlanta first. And I stayed there for about four years.

RB: Four years, okay.

MP: I had two children, then I came here.

RB: What year did you go to Atlanta, do you remember?

MP: No, no I don't.

RB: Was it approximately 1928, about 1928?

MP: Probably.

RB: Okay. So you were about twenty-one at the time?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Okay. And what was it like traveling over? Did you travel by boat across -- you took a ship from -- where did you take the ship?

MP: From Athens.

RB: From Athens, okay. And how long, about, did the trip take?

MP: Well, it took a long time. And my husband got very sick in the boat.

RB: He did.

MP: Yeah.

RB: What was the illness?

MP: Well, he had the flu. He got the flu from Athens. There was some kind of flu going in Athens, and he got it.

RB: And what was that like for you to be, you know, traveling--

MP: Well, it wasn't very pleasant, because I didn't like to leave my parents there, you know, and me come here. But being that he was treating me like a queen, I couldn't insist on not coming (Laughs).

RB: And so was he cared for on the boat? Was there a doctor that took care of him? Was he--

MP: Well, he was sick and he had a very high fever. And I was with him in the room all the time. And yeah, we called doctors, sure. Then he got better, and he used to go outside and sit down, in the boat, you know.

RB: And so did you travel to New York first, is that--

MP: No, we stopped in New York, but we didn't stay there. We stopped in New York, and then we took a boat -- or it was a--

RB: A train or--

MP: A train or something, to come to Atlanta.

RB: I see. What did you think of Atlanta?

MP: I used to love it.

RB: How so? What did you love about it?

MP: People are very friendly. Very, very close people. Of course, I had my sister-in-law there, and I was happy in Atlanta, very happy.

RB: And did you live within in the Sephardic community in Atlanta?

MP: Yes, yes.

RB: And what did you do while you were in Atlanta?

MP: Well, I used to be with friends, went to synagogue or have meetings. And I used to entertain a lot. I had a very good time when I was in Atlanta.

RB: And you had two children, is that right, two of your children?

MP: Yes. I had Stella and my oldest boy.

RB: And what is his name?

MP: Jack.

RB: And how far apart are they in age?

MP: Between Stella and Jack?

RB: About two years, approximately, or--

MP: Stella?

RB: Two years and two months.

MP: Oh, she's not here?

RB: So you started to raise your family in Atlanta?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Okay. And did you have any help? Did you take care of the children mostly, or how did it work?

MP: In Atlanta, you don't work yourself, you got help. You got a colored woman, colored people. They work for you. And I used to have them around the home all the time, take care of my kids. She used to come downtown with me. I wanted to downtown and do shopping, and she used to come with me and take one of my kids with her, you know.

RB: And so she helped out as a childcare person? Did she do other work in your home?

MP: Oh, yeah. She did everything. She did my housework and...

RB: And what about cooking or--

MP: No, cooking, I used to do it.

RB: I see, okay. And what did your husband do at the time?

MP: You mean that lady?

RB: No, your husband, Sam?

MP: Oh, my husband. Oh, yeah, he used to be a tailor.

RB: So he was working as a tailor in Atlanta?

MP: Yeah.

RB: So you were there for about four years.

MP: Uh-huh. I had two children, then I came here. When I came here to Seattle, I had another two children, I had a boy and a girl. You know what I told my husband? "Don't move from here, because I'm not going to have any more children."

RB: (Laughs).

MP: I said, this is not even funny! I had two children in Atlanta, I had two children here, I'm not moving anymore! (Laughs).

RB: And what were their names? The children born in Seattle, what are their names?

MP: Stella and Jack.

RB: Those were the two in Atlanta, and then you had two in Seattle.

MP: The two in here was Leon and Rachel.

RB: Leon and Rachel, okay. Why did you move to Seattle?

MP: That's a good question. People used to tell me, "Why go to Seattle?" And I said, "Well, I have my children there, you know, my family."

RB: Did you have family here?

MP: Well, my children were here.

RB: But before you moved from Atlanta, why did you and your husband decide to move to Seattle?

MP: Oh, my husband used to live in New York. And he didn't care so much to stay in New York, so he wanted to go to Atlanta because his sister was there. And he used to love to be in Atlanta. Yeah, we moved because he wanted to.

RB: But what brought you so Seattle?

MP: My husband brought me to Seattle. He wanted to come here (Laughs).

RB: I see. For work or for family?

MP: No, just to come here.

RB: How did you hear about Seattle?

MP: I heard about Seattle because my sisters used to live here.

RB: Oh.

MP: I had family here.

RB: I see. So you had family.

MP: My sisters, my brothers, they used to live in Seattle.

RB: Okay. I see. So you had other family here first?

MP: Yeah.

RB: Okay. And what year did you come to Seattle, approximately? Was it 1932, something like that?

MP: Probably.

RB: Okay. What did you think of Seattle when you came here?

MP: I thought it was a very nice place. It was very nice.

RB: How did it differ from--

MP: But I had a hard time getting used to it.

RB: How so?

MP: Because I was used to Atlanta. I had friends there. I had to so much going on with me and my community and everything. When I came here, I was lost, until I got used to it, of course.

RB: It takes time, doesn't it?

MP: Oh, yeah, sure it takes time.

RB: What synagogue did you belong to in Atlanta?

MP: I forgot the name. Ahvath Shalom, something like that. I don't know.

RB: So it was a Sephardic synagogue?

MP: Yeah.

RB: Okay. And where did you become a member at, which synagogue in Seattle?

MP: Here? Ezra Bessaroth.

RB: Ezra Bessaroth, which is, for people outside of Seattle, it's an Orthodox Sephardic synagogue.

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: And where did you live when you first moved here?

MP: I rent(?) a home. First I live with my older sister, for a little while, for a few weeks. Then I rent a house.

RB: And do you remember the address, the streets?

MP: No.

RB: Do you remember the neighborhood?

MP: No.

RB: No, okay. The reason why I'm asking is because there's people outside of Seattle around the country who want to learn more about the Jewish community in Seattle--

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: -- and the neighborhoods where Jews lived.

MP: Yeah.

RB: So it was mostly -- did you live near Ezra Bessaroth?

MP: Yeah.

RB: Okay. All right.

MP: Yeah. I'm still a member of the Ezra Bessaroth.

RB: That's wonderful. It's a wonderful congregation. Okay. I had heard that you lived on 28th Avenue when you first came?

MP: I think it was 28th.

RB: And when you moved here, you had two more children. So it must have been busy raising four kids.

MP: Well, the two older ones, they were already raised (Laughs).

RB: Is that right? (Laughs) Were they were school at the time?

MP: Yeah, sure.

RB: Okay. But I bet you were busy--

MP: Yeah.

RB: -- with four children?

MP: Yeah, I was busy.

RB: Were you mostly working at home raising children?

MP: Always at home.

RB: Always. Did you work outside of the home ever?

MP: (No verbal response).

RB: No. Okay. And what about volunteer work? Did you volunteer?

MP: No -- well, I -- in my synagogue, I used to do some volunteer, at the Ezra Bessaroth.

RB: I heard that you were a wonderful volunteer at your children's school and at the synagogue.

MP: I used to, yeah, I was. I thought I was (Laughs).

RB: What did you do at the synagogue? What kinds of work?

MP: I don't know. What do you do at the synagogue? You go daily, you help the people, you become a member, you know, you find things to do.

RB: Did you do any baking?

MP: Yes, a lot of baking.

RB: What did you make? We're curious to know the Sephardic foods.

MP: We used to make bulemas, boyos. You know what boyos is?

RB: Could you describe it?

MP: With spinach, boyos with spinach.

RB: And is it spinach wrapped up in a dough?

MP: Yeah, uh-huh.

RB: How do you make a boyo?

MP: Oh, it's -- I'd have to show you. I don't know how to tell you.

RB: (Laughs) They're delicious, aren't they?

MP: Yeah.

RB: Yeah. So it's--

MP: Since I've been here, I don't do nothing, and I don't know how do it anymore.

RB: How long have you lived here? You're at the Kline Galland Home in Seattle.

MP: At the Kline Galland Home, I've been four years.

RB: Four years?

MP: Sure.

RB: Okay. And how has it been here at the Kline Galland Home for you?

MP: Fine, very nice.

RB: Okay. Do you miss your baking?

MP: It's not -- I miss everything, because this is not like your own home. This is a very nice place, very clean, they treat you fine. It's not home! It's not your house!

RB: So it's a hard transition going--

MP: Very.

RB: -- from your house.

MP: Very.

RB: Lots of changes.

MP: Yeah.

RB: Yeah.

MP: Oh, well (sighs).

RB: How are you doing? Are you getting tired, or are you okay?

MP: I'm all right. I get tired very easy.

RB: Yes. If you'd like, we can take a break. Would you like to take a break, or should we keep going?

MP: Well, you got more to ask me?

RB: I do.

MP: You do, huh.

RB: But I'm happy to stop now and take a break. What do you think?

MP: I think so.

RB: Okay. All right. Thank you so much for your time today. I appreciate it.

MP: Oh, you're very welcome.

CD NUMBER ONE/TWO ENDS

CD NUMBER TWO/TWO BEGINS:

RB: This is Roz Bornstein, and the date today is September 6th, 2001. And I am meeting with Missode Piha at the Kline Galland Home in Seattle, Washington. Missode, do I have your permission to interview and tape you?

MP: Sure.

RB: Thank you very much. This is tape two of our oral history interview. And Missode, today I'd like to ask you some questions about life in Seattle once you and your husband moved to Seattle.

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: And I believe you moved to Seattle from Atlanta in 1932. Does that sound about right?

MP: Probably, yeah.

RB: Okay. And where did you live when you moved to Seattle, what neighborhood?

MP: Very close to -- Ezra Bessaroth (Inaudible) I don't remember. Was it Yesler?

MP: Yeah.

RB: Does that sound--

MP: Uh-huh, yeah.

RB: Okay. And you were near Garfield High School?

MP: Not too close, no. The kids used to go back and forth -- they used to walk.

RB: Is that right?

MP: Yeah, to go to Garfield School.

RB: So you were within walking distance to Garfield?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Okay. Great. So you lived in the central area of Seattle, is that right?

MP: Right.

RB: Okay. And what languages did you speak at home?

MP: What language?

RB: Yeah.

MP: At home I used to speak Spanish -- and French, most of it.

RB: Is that right?

MP: Uh-huh, because that's what I learn in school, French.

RB: I see. Which school did you learn French in?

MP: In Rhodes, the school in Rhodes where I used to live.

RB: Okay. And so did you speak Spanish and French to your children?

MP: No, to my children only Spanish.

RB: I see. Was that Ladino?

MP: Yeah.

RB: And with your husband, did you speak French or Spanish?

MP: No, Spanish most of it.

RB: I see. So when would you speak French? To who would you speak French?

MP: With some of my friends. I had some friends that knew French, and I used to talk to them in French.

RB: That's wonderful. So how did you learn English then?

MP: That's a good question. Somebody else asked me the same thing when I came here -- did you learn English in Rhodes? I said, "No, I learned here." I don't know how, but that's how I does. I used to have a lady work for me, and I had no other choice but to

speaking English with her.

RB: Is that right?

MP: Yeah.

RB: So in your day-to-day contact with this woman that worked for you--

MP: Yeah.

RB: -- you gradually learned English?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: And what did this woman do for you in the home?

MP: She used to do housework.

RB: She would help you with housework?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: And was this also helping with child care, or did you mostly do the child care?

MP: No, I -- I took care of my children, but she used to take care of the house.

RB: Okay. That's great. And what about cooking? What--

MP: I did the cooking.

RB: Okay. So your primary jobs were cooking and childcare?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: I see. And you had two more children when you came to Seattle, is that right?

MP: Yes, uh-huh.

RB: Okay. So your first two were born in Atlanta, and two more--

MP: And two more here. And then I used to tease my husband, "Don't move any other place because I'm not going to have any more children."

RB: (Laughs) So how far apart were your third and fourth child in age?

MP: My third and fourth child -- gosh, I don't know. Stella, maybe you know better.

RB: So they're about three years from the time -- when Stella was about three years old you had your third child, is that right?

MP: Yeah, something like that.

RB: Okay. And so when Stella was approximately ten years old, you had your fourth child?

MP: Right.

RB: Okay. Do you have any good pregnancy or childbirth stories for us?

MP: My pregnancy was fine, and I never had any problem with childbirth.

RB: Where were your children born?

MP: You mean, which hospital?

RB: Were they all born in the hospital?

MP: Yeah, uh-huh.

RB: Okay. So you didn't have any home deliveries?

MP: No, no.

RB: Okay. And how long did you stay in the hospital after the birth of your children?

MP: I didn't stay very long, not very long.

RB: Okay. So you had a fair--

MP: I had my children there, and I was feel all right, and I came home.

RB: Is that right? So you had fairly easy deliveries?

MP: Easy deliveries, yeah.

RB: That's wonderful. And when you brought your children home, did you nurse or bottle feed your children?

MP: Bottle. I tried to nurse them, not very much. I didn't have enough milk.

RB: And so at the time women were bottle feeding their babies?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: I see, okay. And did most women take care of their children, or did they have other women come in to help out?

MP: Not everybody had other people come and take care (Inaudible), no.

RB: Okay. So you--

MP: I mean, I always had help.

RB: So your husband worked outside of the home, and the two of you hired some help so that you could raise your four children--

MP: Right.

RB: -- and focus on your children?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: That's wonderful. Can you tell us a little bit about your home? Did your family keep kosher?

MP: Of course, oh, yes. My father was a kaijes (phonetic), not a rabbi. But I had an uncle that was a rabbi. And oh, yeah, we all kept kosher.

RB: So your house was a very Jewish home?

MP: A very Jewish home, yeah.

RB: Okay. How did you celebrate Shabbat?

MP: How?

RB: Yeah.

MP: My father used to go to the synagogue and then come home and have lunch, Shabbat lunch, that my mother prepared, and that's how it was.

RB: And when you married, did you also prepare a Shabbat dinner and a Shabbat lunch for your family?

MP: Not necessarily, no.

RB: It was a little bit different?

MP: Yeah, yeah.

RB: Okay. What did you do for Shabbat?

MP: What do you do for Shabbat? You just cook and eat and sit down and have friends over and (Laughs).

RB: (Laughs) So did you have friends on many Shabbats, or just--

MP: Yeah, I had some friends, yeah.

RB: So people would come visit on Shabbat afternoons?

MP: Yeah, uh-huh.

RB: That's wonderful. Oh, and did you invite guests for Friday night dinners? Did you have family for Friday night dinners?

MP: Sometimes, not always.

RB: Okay. What did you like to cook or bake for Shabbat?

MP: For Shabbat, well, you bake -- you cook -- who remembers now? (Laughs).

RB: It's been a long time?

MP: Oh, God, yes.

RB: Yes. Do you remember what the women used to make for -- did they prepare boyos or borekas?

MP: Oh, of course. This is very normal.

RB: That was normal, that was the traditional (Laughs)... And what about for Friday night, though? Was it chicken or fish? What types of--

MP: Friday night, fish, most of it.

RB: Okay. What were your favorite fish recipes?

MP: Fried fish.

RB: You used to like fried fish, wonderful, wonderful.

MP: (Laughs).

RB: Was there a certain type of fish that you would buy?

MP: Anything that was in the market.

RB: Okay. Did you buy from the Pike Place Market, or did your husband bring it home from the market?

MP: My husband used to bring it.

RB: I see. Did he do most of the shopping, or did you?

MP: No -- we each -- he did and I did, both of us did.

RB: Okay. So you kind of shared the shopping?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Okay. And what other holidays besides Shabbat did you celebrate with your family in Seattle?

MP: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, all the Jewish holidays.

RB: All the Jewish holidays.

MP: Oh, yeah.

RB: And did you have a special tradition for Rosh Hashanah? What -- I know that some Sephardic families have a very special beautiful seder the first and second nights of Rosh Hashanah, where they bless different foods. Did you do that?

MP: I don't think so, no.

RB: I'm trying to remember some of the foods to jog your memory. I wonder -- pumpkin -- did you ever make the pumpkin triangles?

MP: Oh, yeah, of course.

RB: Okay. And what did you call those?

MP: Not borekas -- I don't know the name.

RB: Were they filo triangles or--

MP: Something like that, yeah.

RB: Okay. Calavaza? (pumpkin)

MP: Yeah.

RB: Okay. And what about spinach? Did you have anything on the table with spinach or...

MP: Oh, we had that boyos, the spinach.

RB: Right, right. So that was -- but for Rosh Hashanah, what about dates? Did you ever say blessings over dates or pumpkin? Pumpkin we mentioned. Any other foods you remembered?

MP: With dates, I think.

RB: With dates. Black-eyed peas?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Okay. And applesauce?

MP: Right.

RB: Okay. Did you have a special applesauce recipe that you'd make?

MP: No, nothing special, whatever I thought I knew how to do it, I did it.

RB: Well, it may not seem special to you, but for people outside of Seattle it may be very interesting to them. Do you remember what you would put in your applesauce?

MP: (No verbal response).

RB: No? Was it plain apples and--

MP: Apples, that's all.

RB: Okay. All right. And any other traditions or customs for Rosh Hashanah that you can remember?

MP: We used to go over my grandma's for dinner, my mother's mother. We used to spend the time there. And she knew how to bake and to cook all those things. Yeah, I remember that.

RB: Do you have a special story or memory that you can share with us about Rosh Hashanah?

MP: Another Jewish holiday (Laughs).

RB: (Laughs). What about Passover? What did you do for Passover?

MP: What we do all the time, don't eat bread (Laughs).

RB: (Laughs). So you grew up in an Orthodox home--

MP: Oh, yes.

RB: -- and community.

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Okay. Were there special Sephardic foods that you liked on Passover?

MP: Nothing special. I like all the food.

RB: For people that aren't Sephardic from Rhodes, what do people from Rhodes make for Passover?

MP: I don't know what they make, whatever they know how to make (Laughs).

RB: Okay. All right. Did you make a lot of sweets or desserts?

MP: I used to make sweets, yeah.

RB: What kind did you make?

MP: I made marzipan. I made all kinds of sweets.

RB: What is marzipan?

MP: It's nothing but almonds.

RB: Okay. Can you describe it a little bit for us?

MP: Marzipan is just almonds, that's all. You use almonds. That's all I know.

RB: Oh, so it's all strictly almonds ground up?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: How, I didn't know that. Very interesting.

MP: Yeah, it's called marzipan.

RB: Is there any sugar in it?

MP: Sure.

RB: Okay. So there's almonds and sugar. And did you shape it a certain way or cut it a certain way?

MP: Not different kind, no, just -- I don't remember, I just cut it, that's all.

RB: I've seen it in diamond shapes, cut up in tiny diamond shapes with--

MP: Probably.

RB: -- either -- it looked like something silver in the middle or like a clove or something silver put in to hold it?

MP: Oh, yeah. They put a little silver -- oh, what do they call that? I don't know.

RB: I don't know either (Laughs). I wonder what the word is for that. But it's a little silver decoration.

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Is that right?

MP: Yeah.

RB: And is it edible? Can you eat that?

MP: It is edible, but it's very hard to eat.

RB: Okay. All right. What about baklava? Did you make that?

MP: I never made baklava, but I had somebody else who used to make it for me.

RB: I see. What about filo dough?

MP: Filo dough, it's another dough, now, instead of hard dough, it's loose.

RB: And I've heard some fun stories about stretching filo dough out on the over furniture in living rooms, and when people made it.

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: How did you make yours?

MP: Gosh, I don't remember that.

RB: Did you start in the basement and the friends would work to pull it over tables? Or how did you do it?

MP: Well, I had a basement and I had tables in the basement, but I always used to do it in my kitchen.

RB: So you would make it in the kitchen?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: And did you have a friend make it with you?

MP: Sometimes I used to have friends, sometimes I did it by myself.

RB: Wow, because it's hard to do, I hear, by yourself. And you stretch it out, is that how it works?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: And then what happens after you stretch it?

MP: Well, you stretch it so far and that's all, as far as you can go. And then it's dough, that's all.

RB: I see. Okay. Sometimes I hear that the women would sometimes sing afterwards or while they're preparing it, that--

MP: What did they do?

RB: They would sing. They would be so happy when it was over, they would sit down and have coffee and sing.

MP: (Laughs).

RB: (Laughs) Do you remember that at all?

MP: No, I don't.

RB: (Laughs) Okay. Different families, huh? Different--

MP: Yeah, different habits.

RB: Different habits, there you go. What was your favorite holiday?

MP: All the holidays were my favorite (Laughs).

RB: Did you have one you liked more than the others, though?

MP: No.

RB: No. Okay. How about birthdays? How were birthdays celebrated?

MP: We didn't even know when was the birthdays.

RB: What do you mean?

MP: Birthdays wasn't that special in my time, in Rhodes. Nobody knew when your birthday was.

RB: So growing up, people didn't say, oh, today's my birthday or--

MP: No.

RB: -- there wasn't a party?

MP: No.

RB: Very interesting. So when you were raising your children, did you take on that more American custom of having birthday parties?

MP: Oh, yeah.

RB: Very interesting.

MP: Because I knew that my children would go to school and they would hear from other children, you know, today's my birthday, today's my birthday, today's my birthday.

RB: Yes. So did you make sweets, then, like cake or cupcakes for them?

MP: Yeah, oh, yeah.

RB: Okay. What about the other holidays, like Christmas or Easter, what did your family make of those holidays?

MP: I don't think we made very much of them.

RB: Okay. So they weren't really important in your family?

MP: No, huh-uh.

RB: Okay. All right. Did the women do most of the holiday preparation in your family, or did the men too?

MP: The woman.

RB: The women did most of the work at home?

MP: Sure.

RB: What did the women do?

MP: All the preparations were made by the woman.

RB: So the cooking--

MP: Yeah.

RB: -- the cleaning--

MP: Sure.

RB: -- setting the table.

MP: Well, the cleaning sometimes we used to hire some lady to come and clean the house.

RB: Okay. What about Thanksgiving as a holiday? Did you celebrate Thanksgiving?

MP: Well(?), no.

RB: You don't remember it as that significant. Okay. Let's see, did you go to the synagogue much when you were in Seattle?

MP: Not very much, no.

RB: How come?

MP: I don't know (Laughs), I guess I wasn't very Jewish (Laughs).

RB: Were you home preparing for when family came home from synagogue?

MP: Sure, yeah, sure.

RB: Okay. Because I know sometimes women would stay home to prepare--

MP: To prepare, sure, uh-huh.

RB: Yes. Or if they had young children. What synagogue did you belong to when you moved here?

MP: Here?

RB: Yeah.

MP: The regular synagogue. Only one synagogue here.

RB: Ezra Bessaroth.

MP: Ezra Bessaroth, okay. And all of your family belonged there?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Okay. Did you participate in other customs, such as the mikveh, or did you go to the mikveh ever?

MP: Sometimes, but not always.

RB: In Seattle?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: And what was that like? What do you remember about that?

MP: I don't remember nothing about it.

RB: Okay. All right. Did many women of your age go to the mikveh, when -- you know, the time you were going?

MP: Sometimes, yeah, I think they used to.

RB: Was it talked about much--

MP: No.

RB: -- or was it more private?

MP: More private.

RB: More private, okay. What about other family celebrations and life cycle events, like bar and bat mitzvah? Did your sons have bar mitzvah?

MP: Yeah, sure they did, uh-huh.

RB: And how did you celebrate that with them?

MP: We invited all his friends over, over to the house. And we had lunch for the boys. And they enjoyed it. That's how it was.

RB: So you had a family party at your home--

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: -- afterwards?

MP: For the boys, yeah.

RB: For the boys, that's marvelous. And were there certain foods that you prepared or music or--

MP: Well, whatever, he used to like it, fine, I used to prepare it (Laughs).

RB: That's wonderful. So you would prepare what they especially liked, huh?

MP: Sure.

RB: And was there music played or dancing?

MP: No.

RB: No, okay. Did you have a piano in your home?

MP: Yes, I did.

RB: And who played piano?

MP: The girls used to.

RB: So your girls learned piano, learned how to play piano?

MP: Well, I had a man(?) teacher used to come home and give lessons.

RB: Is that right?

MP: Yeah.

RB: What about for girls? Did the girls have a bat mitzvah?

MP: No.

RB: Okay. So while they were growing up--

MP: That wasn't the style for the girls to have bat mitzvah.

RB: Okay. And what about -- now, I know at Ezra Bessaroth the men and women sit separately. Was it always like that from--

MP: Well, we used to sit on the -- ladies upstairs and the men downstairs.

RB: What did you think of that?

MP: Well, I didn't think it was very smart, but they did it anyway (Laughs).

RB: You weren't that crazy about the idea, huh?

MP: Yeah.

RB: What would you have preferred?

MP: Sit down all together.

RB: Yeah. In Rhodes, did the men and women sit separately?

MP: Yes.

RB: I see. So that custom really carried over--

MP: Yeah.

RB: -- to Seattle.

MP: Yeah.

RB: Okay. Did the songs and prayers -- were they the same at Ezra Bessaroth as the ones you heard growing up in Rhodes?

MP: They were the same, sure.

RB: The same.

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Did you have any favorites?

MP: My father used to be a very good cantor, he used to sing a lot. And I enjoyed his singing.

RB: I hear that you were once a very good singer as well.

MP: I lost my voice (Laughs).

RB: Do you remember any of the melodies or tunes?

MP: No.

RB: Any songs that were your favorites? No?

MP: I don't remember now.

RB: You don't remember now. When did you like to sing?

MP: Right now I don't like to sing at all.

RB: (Laughs) But when you liked to sing when you were younger, what would you be doing when you sang? Were you partying? Were you working? What were you--

MP: No, when I had a party, I had some girls over, over at my house, we used to sing.

RB: So is this when you were married?

MP: No, when I was single.

RB: Before you were married?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: So you would have younger girls come over?

MP: That's right.

RB: I see. And was this for -- what kind of a visit was it, a party? What was the occasion?

MP: I don't remember having occasion, just get together with my friends (Laughs).

RB: What kinds of songs did you sing with your girlfriends?

MP: Oh, gosh, who remembers them?

RB: You're doing a great job remembering. Were they love songs? Were they ballads?

MP: Well, very old songs that our mothers used to sing, and we learned from them, you know.

RB: Boy, it would be wonderful to hear some of those songs.

MP: Yeah.

RB: How old were you when you did this?

MP: How old was I when?

RB: When you would sing with your friends.

MP: (Laughs) I don't remember how old I was.

RB: You don't remember. Were you a teenager?

MP: Yeah, I was a young girl.

RB: A young girl, okay. And to you would get together and play and sing as you were--

MP: And sing, sure.

RB: I see, okay. Did any of those songs come over to Seattle? Did you ever--

(INTERRUPTION IN RECORDING)

RB: Let's see. There's a beautiful custom that I've heard about where sweets were put on a tray and passed around to company with spoons and ice water.

MP: Well, that's what it was, the custom was to pass sweets around. Here you don't do that. You don't pass sweets around. You just give the sweets just one time (Inaudible). Yeah, you're right.

RB: It's a beautiful custom. Do you remember the name of it?

MP: No.

RB: Okay. And did you put sweets on a tray and pass the tray?

MP: Sure, yeah.

RB: What did you like to put on the tray?

MP: All kinds of sweets. Like I said, you put marzipan, you put all kinds of sweets!

RB: Okay. Did you ever make bimbrio?

MP: Bimbrio? Yeah, sure.

RB: Can you describe for people that aren't familiar with that? What is it exactly?

MP: Gosh, it -- bimbrio is--

RB: Was it quince?

MP: Quince.

RB: Okay. And how would you make it?

MP: I don't know how to explain to you.

RB: Okay. Was it cooked maybe on the stove, or was it--

MP: I don't remember. It was -- I haven't done this in years.

RB: Okay. It's a very old recipe?

MP: Very, very.

RB: Okay. All right. What about blessings? Were people blessed when they would take sweets from the tray?

MP: I don't think so.

RB: Okay. You don't remember that.

MP: I don't remember that.

RB: Okay. All right. What did you do for fun when you weren't working? What kinds of activities did you engage in?

MP: When I was in Rhodes, you mean?

RB: And Seattle.

MP: I don't know. I don't what I did (Laughs).

RB: When you were not working, did you play cards?

MP: Played cards, play--

RB: What kinds of card games did you play?

MP: What kind of cards did I play, Stella?

RB: Was it canasta?

MP: Canasta.

RB: And did you play pan?

MP: Yeah.

RB: Okay. What about mah jong?

MP: No.

RB: Not mah jong, okay.

RB: Where did you learn how to play pan and canasta?

MP: Someplace in America with my friends (Laughs).

RB: Okay. So your friends would get together--

MP: Yeah.

RB: -- and they would teach you how to play.

MP: That's right.

RB: Okay. Did you belong to any social groups?

MP: I belonged to Ezra Bessaroth group, that's all.

RB: The Ladies Auxiliary?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Okay. And what did the group do? What activities did you attend with the Ladies Auxiliary?

MP: I don't remember (Laughs).

RB: Was it luncheons?

MP: Yeah, go to luncheons, go to -- I don't know.

RB: Okay. I know that the Ezra Bessaroth Sisterhood and Ladies Auxiliary engage in a lot of fundraising, and they have a bazaar--

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: -- that women bake for. Did you help bake for the bazaar?

MP: Yeah.

RB: You did.

MP: Yeah, I did.

RB: Okay. What other volunteer work did you do?

MP: I didn't do very much volunteer, because I came here, and I think -- I couldn't do anything anymore.

RB: Yeah, you had four children to raise. That's a lot of work.

MP: Yeah.

RB: Now, I hear that you were very active with City of Hope? Is that right? Do you remember working, volunteering at the City of Hope?

MP: I did some of it, not very much.

RB: What did you do?

MP: I know I remember I'd do something for the City of Hope, I used to do it.

RB: Okay. What about the PTA for your children, for their school? Did you work--

MP: I used to go to the meetings.

RB: Did you?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: Okay.

MP: And the school was very close to my house. It wasn't very far. I used to walk, go to meetings.

RB: That's terrific. So you were active in your children's school that way?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: I also hear that you volunteered to make -- to knit during World War II.

MP: I didn't do very much knitting, no, very little.

RB: Did you make some Afghans?

MP: I tried, yeah.

RB: That's remarkable that you were involved in different activities and raising children at the same time. You were a busy woman.

MP: Oh, I had time for everything (Laughs).

RB: (Laughs) How did you juggle everything?

MP: I don't know, I did it one way or the other (Laughs).

RB: (Laughs) Did you like to have friends over? Did you entertain much?

MP: I used to when I was home, I used to entertain a lot. I enjoyed having friends over, yes.

RB: Can you tell us a fun story about entertaining friends? Anything funny ever happen or--

MP: Just entertaining. They used to come and we used to play cards and eat, and that's all.

RB: Was it men and women or just women?

MP: No, just women.

RB: Just women, okay. Was this before your husband died, or after, or both?

MP: Both times I did it, yeah.

RB: Okay. It sounds like you and your husband were quite social. Did you enjoy having friends over as a couple?

MP: Very much so.

RB: Very much so.

MP: He used to love to have friends over any(?) way(?).

RB: Did you ever go dancing with your husband?

MP: Oh, yes! Boy, did I! (Laughs).

RB: Tell us about your dancing, you and your husband, dancing.

MP: Well, we used to love to dance. We used to go to the Ezra Bessaroth. They had the affairs, you know. And we were there dancing. And we used to get up, the first one. And I used to say, "Sam, why don't you wait until other people go dance?" "No, what's the difference? Come on, let's go."

RB: (Laughs) Did you ever go to nightclubs to dance?

MP: Very few times, yeah, I -- yes, I did.

RB: Were there certain dresses that you would have to wear or--

MP: No.

RB: -- certain -- did you--

MP: Whatever we had.

RB: What kind of music did you listen and dance to?

MP: Whatever they music they had, we used to dance.

RB: Was it big band, you know, Benny Goodman? Was it Artie Shaw? Who do you remember?

MP: No, no, none of those.

RB: How about Turkish dancing, did you -- not Turkish, because you're from Rhodes--

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: -- Greek dancing, did you hear Greek music?

MP: Well, Greek dancing and Turkish dancing is almost the same.

RB: Is that right?

MP: Sure.

RB: That was your experience.

MP: Yeah.

RB: Okay. I know that you've experienced the loss of both your husband and a son, your son Leon.

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: When did your son Leon die?

MP: When? When did he die, Stella?

RB: Has it been about twenty -- maybe twenty-four years ago that he died?

MP: Is it that long? I don't know.

RB: Did he live in Seattle when he passed away?

MP: Yeah.

RB: Or was he--

MP: No, he was living in Las Vegas.

RB: Las Vegas. Was he--

MP: He was working there, and he got very sick. And he came home for Janine's, my granddaughter's wedding. He didn't look very well to me. I said, "Don't go back, stay here. I'll take you to a doctor." He said, "No, I'll go to a doctor over there, Mom. I have a doctor who takes care of me." But he didn't look good at all. He looked sick, yeah.

RB: You were worried about him--

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: -- at Janine's wedding.

MP: Yeah.

RB: And did he pass away shortly after, or--

MP: Yeah, he did.

RB: About a year later?

MP: Yeah. I hear there's an important story about -- you had a conversation with Rabbi Greenberg about your son, Leon's, death. Do you remember what you told Rabbi Greenberg?

MP: Oh, yeah, when he came to tell me about Leon, and I said to him, "I thought there was a God up there that takes care of those things, they don't let you lose your son, you know." "I have no answer for that, Mrs. Piha." That's what he told me. "Why did he do that to me?" He said, "Well, I have no answer for that."

RB: So what was it like for you at the time that Leon died? How was that for that you?

MP: Well, it wasn't very good times.

RB: Yeah. It sounds very tragic, that he died at a very young age.

MP: Uh-huh, yes.

RB: I'm so sorry. Your husband, Sam, died a few years earlier, is that right?

MP: Yeah.

RB: He died in 1970?

MP: Uh-huh.

RB: And what were the circumstances of his death? What--

MP: Old age, I guess, I don't know.

RB: And what was that like for you when he died?

MP: Well, it--

RB: I know you were very close.

MP: It wasn't a very good time.

RB: I imagine. Did he die of heart failure? Is that the--

MP: No, it was old age. He was sick in the hospital.

RB: I see. And did you take care of him for much of the time? Was he sick for a long time or--

MP: He wasn't sick for very long.

RB: No, okay. And can you tell us what it was like after your husband died? How did life change for you?

MP: It's not that life changed, it wasn't a very good life anyway (Laughs).

RB: Okay. I hear that you spent some time with friends, with good friends. You've had lots of good friends in your lifetime?

MP: Yes, I did.

RB: And some of the time you would travel together, is that what you--

MP: Yeah, I did travel with one of my friends. We went to Rhodes together. That was Rae Mayo--

RB: Is that right?

MP: -- was her name, yeah.

RB: When did you go back to Rhodes?

MP: That was a long time ago.

RB: And what was that like for you to go back as an adult?

MP: It was beautiful.

RB: It was beautiful. I can't wait to go one day.

MP: Oh, God, it was just beautiful.

RB: What were your favorite parts about the trip?

MP: Well, just to go back to Rhodes and to have a nice friend with me.

RB: Did you know any people there or--

MP: Well, the people that I used to know when I was there, they were old already. They weren't there anymore.

RB: How about the homes? Were there any buildings that were the same?

MP: They have new buildings, new homes, new hotels, beautiful hotels.

RB: What about the synagogue, was that still there?

MP: The synagogue is still there, sure.

RB: Oh, boy, I bet that was something to go back to.

MP: Oh, yeah, the synagogue was beautiful to go--

RB: That's wonderful.

MP: And of course, my father was a cantor there in one of those synagogues, you know.

RB: Yes. So how did it feel to go back to the synagogue that he was--

MP: That he was cantor there, yeah. It was very touching, but it was good.

RB: Yes, I bet. Now, you also traveled to Israel and Hawaii, is that right?

MP: Hawaii? Did I go to Hawaii?

RB: With your sister?

MP: Huh-uh. I don't remember that.

RB: Okay. How about Israel? Do you remember any trips to Israel?

MP: Yeah, I went to Israel because I had a cousin there, first cousin. And I stayed with her for a while. Yeah, I did go to Israel.

RB: That's marvelous. And where in Israel? Did you see Jerusalem or Tel-Aviv, or did you--

MP: I went to Petacheela (phonetic).

RB: And what did you think of Israel? What was it like to be there?

MP: It was beautiful to see it. It was another city (Laughs).

RB: And also I hear that you've taken some cruises in your lifetime, that part of your travel involved cruises with relatives from Atlanta, is that--

MP: I took a cruise from Atlanta?

RB: Or with relatives from Atlanta. You met them and you took a cruise together.

MP: I don't think so.

RB: So you did some travels, and were these travels mostly later in life, after Sam died or-

MP: Uh-huh, yeah.

RB: Okay. All right. Now, I remember hearing a fun story about your granddaughter Janine. You have a lot of wonderful grandchildren.

MP: I sure do.

RB: Yes. And she had asked you -- she was in Los Angeles, and she asked you to come and visit after your husband died.

MP: Yeah.

RB: And there's a fun story about how she suggested maybe that you come look for another husband.

MP: She told me, she said, "Grandma, go to Los Angeles, there is a lot of bachelors. You're too young to be alone now, so it's time for you to get married." I said, "Listen, honey, I won't find another one like Grandpa, so no use for me to even bother." "Come on, Grandma!" I said, "No (Laughs)." Yeah, she wanted me to get married again.

RB: And it wasn't there a funny line about prostate (Laughs)?

MP: (Inaudible) what?

RB: You had told Janine something about how you didn't want to get married to take care of someone's--

MP: Oh, some old man, yeah.

RB: (Laughs) Okay. So you have many grandchildren, is that right? How many do you have?

MP: I think so -- they're not that many, but they're good.

RB: They're good.

MP: Wherever they were, they're good.

RB: Do you have about nine, is that your memory?

MP: Let me see, I have, one, two, three, four, five, six -- yeah, I have more than nine.

RB: Okay. And what is it like to be a grandmother?

MP: You get old (Laughs). You're older (Laughs).

RB: What are the rewards of being a grandmother?

MP: Well, you got nice grandchildren, and they look for you, and that's enough. That's great. Every time they come and look for me, I enjoy them. And I said, "Sit down here and talk to me." That's what we do.

RB: So you really love spending time with them.

MP: Oh, yeah.

RB: That's wonderful. And you have great grandchildren as well, is that right? You're a great grandmother?

MP: Yes.

RB: You have about -- is it five great grandchildren?

MP: I don't know how many great grandchildren I have.

(SOMEONE IN BACKGROUND PROMPTING)

RB: Five, okay. And what is it like to be a great grandmother, to see your -- you know--

MP: You get -- like I say, you feel old (Laughs).

RB: (Laughs).

MP: No, I really don't feel old. I feel fine.

RB: What lessons or values would you like to teach your grandchildren and great grandchildren?

MP: Well, I don't have to teach them because they're very smart. They teach themselves. They know what to do. They know how to act and they know what to do. I don't teach them.

RB: What did you do as a parent to teach your children certain values about being Jewish or about life? What--

MP: I didn't teach them, they do it anyway.

RB: Okay. And what do they do that you're most proud of?

MP: They're very smart, all my grandchildren are very smart, and they're very good, and they go to school and they learn things (Inaudible) and they're happy.

RB: So education is very important to you?

MP: Yeah, sure.

RB: And they are good students.

MP: They are, they're very good.

RB: Yes. Okay.

MP: I haven't heard anything bad about them in school, anyway.

RB: They're all good students and smart, smart people?

MP: Yeah.

RB: What about in terms of your Jewish identity? Did you send your children to get a Jewish education? Was that important to you as well?

MP: It is important to me, but if they want to do it, it's up to them, you know, whatever they want to do. But it is important, yes.

RB: You sound like a very respectful grandmother.

MP: Thank you (Laughs).

RB: You really do. You sound very -- like you really respect your children and grandchildren for who they are.

MP: Yes, I do.

RB: They're lucky to have you.

MP: Thank you.

RB: Do you have any other thoughts that you want to share for your family? Any messages you want to let them know?

MP: Just be good, that's all. Be good, be nice to people, be smart, do your homework all the time (Laughs). They do that, I don't have to tell them.

RB: It's important. Well, you know, it's been a pleasure talking to you--

MP: Thank you, same here.

RB: -- and interviewing you. Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate it.

MP: Oh, that's all right. You're welcome.

RB: Okay. Well, we'll stop for today.

MP: Yeah, okay.

RB: Take care.

[END OF INTERVIEW]