

Ilona Friedman Transcript

Isadora Kianovsky: Let me see if this works, is it recording? Okay, it says it's recording. Alright, so I guess we can start. This is Isadora Kianovsky, and today I'm interviewing Ilona Friedman as part of my final project for the Oral History Internship at the Jewish Women's Archive. It's July 30th, 2022. Ilona, you're currently in your home in Tampa, right? And this is over Zoom. Alright, I guess, let's get started. So Ilona, could you tell me a little bit-- tell me when and where you were born and maybe a little bit about your family background.

Ilona Friedman: I was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1935. And from what I remember, I guess I had a normal childhood. My father was a businessman--he sold textiles. My mother was a homebody. She was an accountant--a bookkeeper--before she became married. And my grandmother--my mother's mother--and her husband lived with us. They lived in our apartment, so one bedroom was ours, and one bedroom was my grandparents'. In fact, that's the only grandparents I really knew. And my mother took care of the household chores—we did have a lady living with us, her name was Kati, and she used to work for my mother's great aunt, and then she came to live with us. So even though she was doing things around the house, she was considered a family member. I believe she came from Poland. But she helped with cooking and all these things, and we certainly felt very much at home with her. I had a sister who was four years older than I am. We went to a Jewish school. And let's see... we could walk to school. We didn't have a car, we didn't have a telephone. I guess that went on until the war came.

You know, while I really knew nothing much about it, I know my father was taken away several times, until he was taken away the last time. I know they were air raids. We had to go to the cellar or basement where all the neighbors went. In fact, people used to say that if an air raid was coming, I was sure to have a stomachache. [laughs] Which sounds

funny today, but... A lot of burden fell on my mother.

IK: Right.

IF: What happened—well, we used to go on walks to the park. We used to take trips, like to the zoo. We went swimming sometimes in an area in Buda. And so we took a lot of public transportation. What else? So my father later had to take on a gentile partner, because Jews were not allowed to have a business of their own. Right. And on occasion he took me, I don't know if he took my sister, to see the place of business.

My mother was one of four children. Two of her sisters died in teenage from tuberculosis, which, as you can tell, at that time there was really no cure. Unfortunately, they died. She had a brother who also lived with us. He was a good uncle, but eventually he was called into service and he wound up in Russia. Unfortunately, he didn't come back. He got ill, and there was no medical attention for him, so he died. Now, my father was also one of four, but his mother and sister lived in Romania. A brother--two brothers came to Budapest, and they were friendly with one brother who lived in Ujpest, and they had one little boy who was my only cousin. We used to visit by train, I think. And well, when the war came...I'm going back and forth. That brother's wife died of kidney failure, and the grandparents helped bring up the boy. But once the Nazis took them away, we never heard anything about them. I know my mother inquired through the Red Cross whether they survived, but we could find no information, so we have to assume that they died in Auschwitz. Then what happened... my father's brother, who lived in Ujpest, was taken away, and I don't know how he wound up in a railroad station, but the railroad station was bombed, and he perished in that incident. My mother and grandmother went to the cemetery by bus to try to arrange his burial, but on the way to the cemetery, they were taken off the train and sent to a warehouse. So at home, they had no idea what happened to them. My grandfather—he was really my grandmother's second husband, but the only grandfather I knew—and he was with us. So for a few days, we had no idea

what happened to them. Eventually, like four days after, they came home. And we were supposed to report to a [inaudible] post after gathering some things from home. My mother got sick, and my grandmother went back. That was the last time I saw her. And again, we have to assume that she must have died in Auschwitz—my father came home once, he tried to go into hiding, and it became so difficult that he went back to his unit. We went to a Swedish safe house. And it turned out to be not safe, because the Nazis invaded the house. My mother was taken away, among other people who lived in the apartment. Because we didn't have a room of our own, we shared a room with I don't know how many people. The rest of us were taken to the ghetto. My sister and I and my grandfather wound up in the ghetto. My sister had the idea, I guess after maybe a day or two before the ghetto was closed, to go back to the safe house and see if my mother got back. Fortunately, she did—she managed to escape from a group that was marching, most likely to Auschwitz. And from then on, we went into hiding. For a nine-year-old, I had to learn the Catholic prayers. We changed our name, but for the life of me, I can't remember what that was. Luckily some of my father's friends who he used to play cards with helped us a few days here and there, and then one of them was kind enough to give us his divorce papers so we could requisition an apartment. And so we had to go to City Hall and requisition a place to live. I know my mother worked in—like a buffeteria. She worked in the kitchen so she wasn't seen. She must have brought food back for us, or she shopped, I'm not sure. And we were there till the war ended. We went back to our apartment—actually we lived very close to where we used to live, and we were lucky enough not to meet anybody we used to know.

In time, we found out that our family was not coming home. My poor father, a few days before liberation, was shot to death by the Nazis. Because he had typhoid fever. So of course he never came home. My mother had family in the United States, and through the Red Cross, they found out our location, and they got in touch with us and they sent us care packages. And eventually, they wanted us to move to the United States.

My grandmother was one of eight children, and her family went to the United States when she was a young girl. She took care of her great-aunt. And, surprisingly, the family went without her. And one time her father came back to get her, but she wasn't going, and eventually she married someone who was a tailor. She had four children. So she and her husband used to have a coat-checking business in a restaurant. So that's how they earned their money, and I know, on occasion, my mother helped out, but it was nice having them in the same place.

IK: Was this in Philadelphia, are you still--?

IF: In Budapest.

IK: This is still in Budapest, okay.

IF: So we weren't--first of all, to come to the United States, my mother had to change her profession. She became a gardener. Believe it or not. So she learned about it; she went somewhere to learn the essentials. The people who were in the United States were siblings of my grandmother. And they didn't want to bring us out until my great-grandmother died, so she wouldn't know that her firstborn was no longer alive. So it took a long process--we got all the papers and were able to leave. It was 1949. My sister couldn't come with us right away because she was eighteen, and you know that, after eighteen, you have to get your own visa.

The two of us went by train to Vienna, I guess to a Jewish Center, maybe part of the Joint Distribution Committee. And from there, we were sent to London. And from London, we went to our boat. Offhand I can't think of where the boat left from, but we came by boat. We arrived in the United States in August of 1949. And my sister came after us in November of the same year. So we came to New York. We met relatives that we never met in our lives. And they took us right to Philadelphia. So, after a few days spending with one aunt and uncle, we went to live for a few months with another uncle and aunt

until they found us an apartment. I think by the time my sister was going to come, they found us an apartment.

Also, in Budapest, I thought I was finished with school--that I could get a trade. I realized I had to go back to school. So it was a rude awakening! [laughs]. Even though I learned English, it's different when you're learning or when you hear the language and try to speak it. So I know the uncle we lived with had two children, one of them was about the same age as myself, so she was going into ninth grade, and they had a son who was a senior in high school. So I was registered and I went to school, but I didn't understand what to do about homework. It took a little getting used to hearing English and being able to speak it and understand it—it certainly goes faster than the way you learn the language.

So once we moved to an apartment, I had to go to junior high school, and the school they assigned me to I heard was not a good school. And so my great uncle helped me go to the school and transfer me to a different junior high, which was mostly Jewish children, although it was mixed--there were black children. And I've never seen a black person my life. So I had to learn all about that. And again, I could take a school bus or I could walk. So, after that, of course I went on-- I decided to finish school and go into high school. And I think in junior high, I was also allowed to take a special English course, so I would be better able to grasp the language. What I learned was British-English, so the spelling was different. But that certainly helped. And I think by high school I was more acclimated to the English language. In fact at home, I told my mother she had to speak to me in English, or I'm not talking to her. [laughs]

IK: You said there were a lot of Jewish kids in this American high school--were they all immigrants like yourself, or...?

IF: No, no, there were very few immigrants, if at all. You can imagine a new kid coming in and the kids are in cliques.

IK: Yeah, yeah.

IF: So you're on the outside. So I made a few friends in the neighborhood, but most people have their friends, they didn't need me.

I did join the choir, I enjoyed singing. I helped in the library, because I was always a book reader. Really from the time I was a teenager, I loved books and I was always taking books out of the library, until later, I was able to buy books. And also what helped my language is listening to the radio. And one aunt and uncle—the uncle was disabled--it was hard--he had something happened to him when he was born, so he couldn't walk right, but the family got him a candy store where they sold candy and comic books and newspapers. And I got introduced the comic books. So that also helped my language, believe it or not.

IK: What kind of comic books were there? This was in the late '40s, '50s?

IF: Yes.

IK: Were there any specific ones that were fun?

IF: Well, it was a new thing I learned about. I never knew about comic books. I don't remember exactly.

IK: That's okay.

IF: But anyway, I enjoyed them. It was nice when we lived on our own. And my mother started out working as a sewing machine operator in an aunt's factory. And then eventually she went back to her trade as a bookkeeper. And so, when I'd come home from school, I was by myself. There were—I don't think there were ever any food shops like what they have today. We would go on the weekends to the grocery store, the butcher, and so forth, and so on, and I'd go with my mother. Of course, she did the

cooking, and I also learned how to. And then my sister came, she started at Temple University. It's interesting, from the get-go she knew she wanted to be a scientist.

IK: Wow. Did she ever tell you why, or she just knew?

IF: I don't know. She was always a good student. I had to work harder. But that's how it goes. But I have to say that in Hungary, she met her future husband. They were dating before we left, they got engaged with the proviso that if he makes it out of Hungary to the U.S., they would get married, but if you didn't make it, that's it.

So, eventually, he did leave Hungary, and he wound up in Canada. So my sister was in Philadelphia two years before she went to Canada to get married, but a year later, they came back. So, anyway...after high school, I did win a scholarship to Temple University. And I did go for two years, but then I got sick and I stopped going. I was interested in accounting. But accounting changed with the years. What used to be handwritten entry became...well, almost like on a computer.

IK: Yeah, like the typed...

IF: Because that was in--it would have been '54. So it was sort of like a computer, that you could do it electronically. I had several jobs and--to meet people. kids at that time would go to synagogue dances. It seems funny now, because now you're doing things on computers. [laughs] Things were safer that I could go with friends to the movies, whether it was in the neighborhood or take a train; you didn't have to be afraid of being kidnapped or being molested or being hurt, where today, you have to be scared.

IK: Yeah, yeah. So going back to the synagogue dances and everything, what was-- I am curious what being Jewish looked like for you growing up and how that changed. I'm sure it was very different being Jewish in Hungary, and what you did there to keep your Judaism, and then in the United States, what did you do. Were you observant at all?

IF: I don't know how it worked, but we didn't officially belong to a synagogue. We didn't go every week, we went to some of the holidays, I'm not sure to which. We certainly observed holidays. I know we observed Passover. And we observed Hanukkah for sure. And Simchat Torah I'm also sure of. But we did not keep a kosher home. We were not Orthodox. We were not Reform, but I guess you would call us Conservative. For instance, bat mitzvah was not in the book yet.

IK: Right.

IF: I was confirmed. And let's see...after the war, I took piano lessons. So did my sister. I know...well, we observed Saturday some of the time, not to do anything. But as I say, we did a lot of walking. I know like to my piano teacher, I walked. So, that was the norm.

IK: Yeah.

IF: And I guess what I didn't like is to practice.

IK: [crosstalk] The piano? Or the Judaism?

IF: Or the what?

IK: The piano?

IF: [nods]

IK: Yes, yeah, okay.

IF: I know you're musical: when did you start taking lessons?

IK: Piano, I was probably five...and then I quit. [laughs]

IF: [laughs] How long did you play before you quit?

IK: I only played four years. And then I moved on to other instruments, as I got older.

IF: What is your favorite?

IK: I've played clarinet the longest, for sure. But I love playing saxophone. I haven't done it in a long time, but in high school—

IF: Why?

IK: I don't know why, I should! I kind of fell out of practice with it once I got to college, but in high school I loved playing saxophone.

IF: Have you ever sung?

IK: Yeah, I like to sing too. I sing a lot alone in my room.

IF: Oh, maybe you can join a group.

IK: Yeah. Yeah. I did a little bit of acapella in college. For two years, I think, I did acapella. But with the pandemic, it was kind of hard.

IF: No, you may have a chance to sing somewhere later.

IK: Yeah, I mean, I hope. So you liked singing in the choir, and you also did acapella, right?

IF: Yes.

IK: Was that in college?

IF: I only did acapella.

IK: All right, and that was in the synagogue. Or that was elsewhere?

IF: No, actually, acapella I did in high school.

IK: Oh, okay.

IF: And then later at a synagogue. I belonged to a youth group in one of the synagogues. It was another way to meet Jewish kids. The synagogue had a professional choir, and they also had a lay choir. And that's what I joined. Well, I enjoyed singing. And on occasion, we sang for services. Maybe once a month. And I enjoyed it very much.

IK: Yeah. Was the music a big part of your Judaism, or your own personal experiences?

IF: I don't know. I honestly don't know, but I know my sister was very good at the piano. She was certainly more advanced than I even aspired to be. I mean, she could play hard pieces and really sound good, I was not that kind of person.

IK: That's okay. We've all been there.

IF: [laughs] Yeah.

IK: So your sister was four years older.

IF: Yes.

IK: Were you were you to really close, or because there was an age gap...?

IF: Well, sometimes. We were called close, I think, mostly we were close. I'm sure there was jealousy.

IK: Of course.

IF: Like with most kids. Yeah, I had a feeling that my mother preferred her. She was very smart-- and I'm sure that she appreciated that. I had to work harder. I mean, even studying for school, it took me more effort than I think she did. But you know, then we're

two different people.

IK: Right, right. And you still went on to have a really interesting career and life, so, in the end...

IF: Well, she became more academic, and I wasn't.

IK: That's okay. Everyone...yeah. So, you said you did accounting, right? Bookkeeping.

IF: And accounting, yes.

IK: And then, did you also work in... I remember in your questionnaire you wrote that you worked with your husband with the science journals, right?

IF: Well, eventually, when I met my husband. He was a microbiologist, immunologist. Since I had typing skills, I typed up his papers and I became acquainted with terminology. So, I really liked what I was doing yeah.

IK: What was it like to be a woman...I know women worked, but specifically working in the medical field and with scientists ...Did being a woman affect your work at all, or how people perceived you in the field?

IF: Well, I wasn't a professional but, for instance, when he asked authors to write chapters for a book, I was the one who contacted the authors, and I was the one who followed up to get things back on time. And I got familiar with names of other scientists. So, people realized that I was doing something with my husband. Unfortunately, University of South Florida didn't believe in spouses working together. They put hardship in our lives. I mean, even when they didn't do the salary--because you know my salary came from a grant. They didn't like that either. I'm sure that there is a big chunk of antisemitism in the school.

IK: Yeah. Yeah.

IF: You know, in all the years my husband worked there and I worked there, there was never *matzah* for Passover?

IK: Really?

IF: We brought our own...[crosstalk] really, never.

IK: That's really surprising. I feel like...I don't know. At that point were there a lot of-- this was in Florida, right?

IF: Yes.

IK: Were there a lot of other Jews in Florida, or were you kind of--?

IF: There were a good number.

IK: But they still didn't have *matzah*.

IF: That's the way the South is.

IK: Yeah. Wow, that's really-- I wouldn't have suspected that at all.

IF: My husband realized it, then I did. [a bit inaudible]

IK: Yeah.

IF: There were some people who are not Jewish. Their wives managed to inveigle themselves into the atmosphere, even with degrees that they managed to get in two months--it doesn't seem possible...But that's how it was.

IK: So I guess I'm curious a little bit about your life in Florida, too, because I don't know if I've ever asked you about that. At this point, you had children, right?

IF: Yes.

IK: You had all of them in Philly, and then you all moved to Florida?

IF: Right.

IK: Right, so what was--I know your husband was also Jewish, right? His parents were immigrants—

IF: Yes, of course.

IK: So what was--how did you sort of observe Judaism in your in your home with your children? Did they go to Jewish school, did you--?

IF: Until they started kindergarten, they went to preschool in a synagogue. OK, And the school they went to had a good number of Jewish children. I did, I lit candles every Friday night. We observed holidays. We didn't join a synagogue until the kids started preschool. And so we went from time to time.

I tell you, the way my husband was brought up and I was brought up were two different things, because my husband's family came from Russia, which is now the Ukraine. They lived a poor life. And so they didn't grow up with the things I grew up with. My father-in-law was a tailor. And my husband was their third child. The first baby was a "blue baby," he didn't survive. The second one had heart problems from the beginning, and she passed away a couple years before I met my husband. So he was the only one left. And the family was talking Yiddish, which I was not-- in the Jewish schools I went to, I learned Hebrew.

IK: Oh, OK.

IF: So they looked down upon that. And in Hungary, if you spoke Yiddish, you were the poor Orthodox. So it was a big difference.

IK: Yeah. And did your husband's family--they were already in America for a while before you came, or—was he raised here--?

IF: Yes, yes.

IK: Okay.

IF: But, I mean, they did marry in the United States, and the children were born in the United States. But I'm sure—well, at home they must have spoken Yiddish because that was my husband's first language. So they were more primitive considering our family.

IK: Yeah.

IF: Remember, education was important. And when my husband decided to be a scientist, they thought he should be an accountant. Or have a business, you know, nothing academic.

IK: Right, right. That's so interesting, I hadn't even thought about the Yiddish versus Hebrew.

IF: It's a big diff—well, some of the Yiddish words are like Hebrew.

IK: Right.

IF: Except with a different accent.

IK: Yeah.

IF: And it's more like German from [inaudible—likely “the language”] than... But his parents didn't like it [that] I didn't speak Yiddish

IK: [laughs] No? So you spoke Hungarian? Is that--?

IF: From the time I got better at English, I did not speak Hungarian at all.

IK: It was only English, okay.

IF: Well, I think I got more Americanized than my sister did.

IK: Yeah.

IF: And I wanted it that way.

IK: Yeah. Do you think it was partially because--I don't know, you being younger, you were there for longer? Or you just liked--was there anything specific about America or American culture that you really liked, in particular?

IF: Not sure.

IK: No? You mentioned musical films.

IF: That was very much in style in the fifties.

IK: Yeah. [crosstalk]

IF: They were fun. [inaudible from crosstalk] when you go sing and dance.

IK: Yeah, I love musicals.

IF: Some of the oldies, I think, are still classics today.

IK: Yeah.

IF: Some of that music, you would remember and maybe hum along. But today's music you don't always. But I guess I made up my mind that I'll be a total American. And I didn't want to marry a foreigner. That's funny today.

IK: Yeah, yeah. I feel it's sometimes it's like that. I feel like America has its very sort of individualist... it's kind of a closed... because there's so many different people here, and so many from different places and countries, I feel like America is just kind of a big---

IF: It's a melting pot.

IK: Melting pot, definitely.

[Cut for personal conversation. Interview resumes at 40:35]

IK: You were in college--I know this was a different time-- but you were my age around-- or near my age around when Israel was a new country, right?

IF: Right.

IK: In America, did you have--

IF: No, it became a country the year before I came.

IK: The year before you came. So did you--what was your awareness of Israel, or did your family talk about it?

IF: Probably not. But I must have learned in school. Because first of all, after the war, there were Zionist groups. I belonged to one. So some of those people made *aliyah*, some didn't. But it was a way of being with the Jewish children, not in school.

IK: Right.

IF: I don't know how I joined or how it happened, but I was part of a group.

IK: Interesting, yeah. Did you ever end up--did you ever go to Israel?

IF: I've been to Israel several times, but that's been since I'm an adult, not when I was a child.

IK: Okay, yeah, that makes sense. Because it was probably hard to go back then, to go that far.

IF: No, actually I've gone once since Herman died.

IK: Yeah?

IF: Yeah, I wanted to take a trip to see friends in Italy in Israel. And I went by myself. I didn't want to be part of a tour.

IK: This was in the last, what, 15 years? Herman died--

IF: Yes, let's see: I'm in this place ten years, so maybe probably six, seven years ago.

IK: Okay, wow.

IF: So, you know, I wasn't truly alone.

IK: Yeah. What did you do there? I mean, you said you saw friends, did you go anywhere?

IF: Well, I wanted to see places where I haven't been before. So like, some of the archaeology-- archaeological digs under where the mosque is.

IK: Okay.

IF: And they had malls that weren't there before, like a train station was made into stores. So I only had a couple of days. But I didn't want to see things I've seen before.

IK: Right, I mean, there's no point in going all the way over there, just to see the same things every time. That's really cool, though--the archaeology, was there anything that you found really cool about that?

IF: You know, so many things changed. There was a superhighway, which wasn't there before. It's just new sites.

IK: That's awesome. Okay, well, we're kind of coming up on an hour, so I don't want to--if you are kind of feeling like you're ready to end, or you want to keep going? I don't know how you're--?

IF: No, keep going--what questions do you have? I did a lot of talking, so I don't know what you'd like to do. [laughs]

IK: No, of course, I mean--here, let me see. I have a few questions written down, I just wanted to check in to make sure that whenever you're ready to stop, we can stop.

IF: Okay.

IK: We honestly did talk a lot about a lot of the questions I had, you just answered them for me. I guess, this is kind of going back a long way, and I don't know if you remember it because I know you were very young. But you said you went to a Jewish school in Hungary when you were very young?

IF: Well from the time--we didn't have kindergarten as such.

IK: Okay.

IF: So really from...I guess from first grade through eighth, I went to a Jewish school.

IK: And what was that like? What activities--?

IF: Well, we learned about normal subjects, but we also learned about not only the prayers, but the language. Then we had to learn the way Hebrew was pronounced, to change it to the way Israel is doing the Hebrew words now.

IK: Right, right.

IF: You know, like the S's become T's, and whatever. In fact, when I hear the old, it makes me shudder.

IK: [laughs] Yeah, I can imagine. Wow. How did the school change when the war started, and throughout the war? Were there—did they open?

IF: They must have opened because at one point, I went back to school.

IK: Okay.

IF: Remember, the war was over, I guess sometime in January of 1945. So school year may not have started till the fall. I don't know exactly when we went back to school. But...just trying to think. Well from maybe fifth grade the upper school was open, but they--called gymnasium. So you know that's when the 12th grade. Yet the learning was more like college studies. I know some of the advanced subjects that my sister learned, she was able to take exams in it to get her into college.

IK: Oh wow, that's early for--I don't know, that's quite young.

IF: Trigonometry and calculus and all that lovely stuff.

IK: Yeah.

IF: That kind of math is not my cup of tea.

IK: Me neither. [laughs]

IF: But you learn—

IK: Eventually I learned, yeah. Did you go to school when you were in the safe houses, or did you stay in the safe houses, the whole time?

IF: We stayed in the same house the whole time. And I think the reason my grandparents lived with us, because apartments must have been scarce.

IK: Right, right. And you still went to school during the war, throughout, or--?

IF: No, everything must have shut.

IK: Okay, okay. Yeah. I don't know, are there any other stories that you want to tell, or any moments in your life that were very meaningful to you that you'd like to talk about?

IF: Well, what are you thinking of specifically?

IK: I don't know, I mean, I know that's a very general question. I guess...I don't know--because I'm a Jewish studies major, I'm particularly interested in the Jewish aspect of people's lives. Was there a moment where you felt very connected to your Jewish identity? And this doesn't have to be when you were a kid, this could be in recent years, when you....

IF: Well, you know one thing for sure, when I started dating, I made sure I only went with a Jewish person. Today, the kids don't care.

IK: Yeah.

IF: So I--I've been asked by non-Jewish people, and I said no, and he asked me why, and I said, "Because that's what I should do." And I never went out with a non-Jewish person

IK: Yeah.

IF: You know, Jewish people-- not all of them are savory. [laughs]

IK: Yeah.

IF: So, you know, you have people who are not so great.

IK: Right, did you--

IF: There are all kinds of people in Jews, as well as non-Jews.

IK: Yeah, of course, of course. Was it just the expectation at the time, like from your mother, that you would marry a Jewish man? Or was that your own personal--

IF: You know what she used to tell me, and it does make sense, that you can love a non-Jewish person, as well as a Jewish one, but why not stick to the [place?]

IK: Right, yeah.

IF: Young people ought to think of that.

IK: Right and that--I mean that makes sense, coming from a childhood where being Jewish was a very big part of identity, right?

IF: Right.

IK: That you'd want to--

IF: Some of my grandchildren never dated a Jewish person.

IK: Yeah. Yeah.

IF: And there has to be smart nice Jewish people around. There has to be.

IK: Right.

IF: The emphasis is not there.

IK: Yeah.

IF: I mean, they all had a Jewish background. They had it at home as well as outside. But it doesn't seem to matter.

IK: Why do you think that is?

IF: I think I have a feeling it doesn't matter.

IK: The changing times.

IF: I guess so. But I mean, it's more and more popular.

IK: Yeah, the interfaith marriages. Were the communities you were in when you were younger predominantly Jewish, like the people you spent time with, or did you hang out with non-Jewish people when you were young?

IF: Well, some non-Jewish girls, yes.

IK: Okay.

IF: Like from the workplace.

IK: From the what, sorry?

IF: Workplace.

IK: Oh, workplace.

IF: Where you worked.

IK: No, sorry, it cut out for a second.

IF: It's okay. Look, even with hearing aids, sometimes I mishear something.

IK: Yeah, I understand. My hearing is--I don't always catch the word.

IF: Well, that's okay. You're entitled, but you're younger.

[Cut for personal conversation. Interview resumes at 52:12]

IK: Have there-- so I know you said you went to Israel--are there other places you've traveled?

IF: Well, my husband had a lot of speaking engagements, and there were meetings that are all over the world. And so I didn't always go with him, not while we were raising the children, but I went with him enough times to see many countries. So our first trip to Europe was to go to Russia, and he was eager to go because his parents came from there. But things were more stricter at that time--that was in 1966. So, like the plans we made were changed because of the system and the Korean War.

IK: Oh, yeah.

IF: So, we missed our connection. We were to go to Leningrad for three days, and it became one day. And we couldn't get to Moscow in time--because of the Korean War, they didn't want an American pilot to drive a plane to Moscow, they wanted their own pilot. And so we were stuck at the London Airport for many hours. So we missed our connection. And it was a mess. So, by the time we went to Moscow, they want to let the Leningrad trip go away, but no-- I mean you have to pay ahead for all the side trips. And they didn't want to let it go, so they had to go by train, spend a day in Leningrad, and we paid for a hotel and everything, and come back the following--the same evening. So it was crazy, and I was pregnant with Andie [daughter], I was just--I was worn out.

IK: I'm sure! Being pregnant having to go on all of it--

IF: I mean, it was the beginning, but even so, I was tired.

IK: Yeah, I'm sure.

IF: And you know I wasn't as alert as I would have been. They showed us the sights, but it had to be a rush because instead of three days, we got one.

IK: Right, right.

IF: And what they did, they put the women in one room, the men in the other. And you have to leave your belongings.

IK: Right.

IF: So you took only the immediate essentials. It's a beautiful city, but everything had to be in a rush.

IK: Yeah.

IF: Back in Moscow, we weren't given a hotel, which we paid for, but they were put in the dormitory.

IK: Oh my goodness.

IF: And bad enough to be in the dormitory--the room was enough for one person, so we couldn't be in the same room.

IK: Oh my goodness.

IF: It was ridiculous. And my husband wouldn't do anything to change the situation.
[laughs]

IK: He said—

IF: If some people yelled loud enough, sometimes they got changed. But he thought the location was good. So some of the Jewish attendees, we went to synagogue Friday night. And that was an experience. It came in handy--my husband understood Yiddish, and he could say a few words here and there. So then we were treated like royalty, being in the first row.

IK: Aww!

IF: And, of course, prayer books in all Hebrew.

IK: Yeah.

IF: And you have to find your place; which is not the only place where we've gone to synagogue, like in Germany or Austria, where you had to find the prayers--because, for one thing, you didn't buy your prayer book. In Europe, you have to buy your prayer book. And here, you don't have to buy it.

IK: Yeah, they just give it to you.

IF: So yeah, I had to try and find the corresponding prayer. And, of course, the women are always separate.

IK: Yeah.

IF: But actually in Moscow, we were not separate.

IK: Wow.

IF: But any other European country, you were separate. In fact, I was shocked in Budapest when they went to synagogue, that even after the war and all the atrocities, the women sat on one side and the men on the other-- you couldn't sit together.

IK: Right, right. Wow, yeah. To think that--

IF: Things don't change.

IK: Some things never change, it's so true. Yeah. And I guess it's been a synagogue that's been around for so long, maybe they want to keep the traditions and...I don't know.

IF: I mean, I'm sure, at one time, they had to keep the religion hiding.

IK: Yeah, yeah. So maybe--

IF: And maybe gotten some Jewish education on the sly.

IK: Yeah. Wow. It's really--I haven't even thought about post-war synagogues. I don't know, it just had never been something that I considered that much because, I guess in my brain, they were kind of all just destroyed but I guess they weren't.

IF: In Spain, well, in Córdoba, were there any synagogues?

IK: One, and it had not been used for hundreds of years it was—basically, it was a one-room—it was basically a museum. That was it.

IF: Interesting.

IK: But also because it was a different--because it was from the expulsion, you know.

IF: But was it still being used as a synagogue?

IK: No.

[personal conversation until 58:45]

IF: So do you have more questions for me?

IK: I don't know, we hit a lot of them. I guess, I kind of--the last big one, I had was--if you have any messages for my generation and your grandkids' generation -- if there's

anything that you think is important to sort of impart, especially seeing how the world is very, very crazy these days and very-- I don't know if there's anything that you feel is important to remember.

IF: I guess to keep the faith. And what else? I guess that would be it. Don't forget about your upbringing.

IK: Yeah, yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I feel like that's been really important recently, family and--

IF: And don't forget about family.

IK: Family, yeah.

IF: It's so easy to do that when you're scattered all over the United States or elsewhere, as family is very important. It's the lifeblood of a group.

IK: Yeah, absolutely.

IF: That, even if you have differences, don't forget where you came from. Because nothing says you always have to agree on your viewpoint. But remember that they're part of your family.

IK: Yeah. That's easy to forget sometimes, but it's a very good point.

IF: Because you know, with family being scattered, and everybody's busy, it's easy to put family aside; that, "No I don't have time." But you should make time. Don't put it off for another day. Because when you look at it, life is really short.

IK: Yeah.

IF: And if—honestly, if you don't make a plan, it's never going to happen.

IK: Yeah, yeah, especially these days, it's just so much going on, that you have to sort of--

IF: I mean, sometimes people don't get together because of politics, and politics should have nothing to do with it. I mean, you can't believe the politics have to be all the same-- they don't--and you don't have to agree with it, but don't let it be a roadblock in the relationship.

IK: Yeah. That's important to remember these days. Just not letting the divisions get too much in the way, yeah...I think that's all I had in terms of questions: is there anything else you wanted to talk about, or anything else I didn't include? ... What are you up to these days, are you--?

IF: Well, it's much quieter than it was.

IK: Yeah.

IF: After Herman passed away, a friend who was a teacher—she is a teacher, but she taught in a school for disabled children -- and she thought I might like to volunteer with the kindergarteners. And to help with lunch, which doesn't sound very interesting, but I did it for two years until the teacher got-- she left, and I didn't want to go back for that. And we have a Jewish school that goes from kindergarten through—preschool, actually -- to eighth grade. And the headmistress at that time was the former rabbi of the synagogue. I asked her if they could use volunteers. And I worked with kindergarteners for a number of years, helping them with reading, and that I enjoyed a lot.

IK: Yeah.

IF: Well, I stopped when the pandemic was on its way because I didn't want to get sick.

IK: Right, of course, of course.

IF: You know, before the pandemic, sometimes I would get the colds that the kids got.

IK: Mm-hmm.

IF: This is, you know, you can't help it. [With] this pandemic, I didn't want to be involved. And they got a new headmistress, and she cleaned house, so to speak, and got rid of a lot of staff.

IK: Yeah, yeah.

IF: And so I didn't want to go back under those circumstances.

IK: Yeah, of course.

IF: So, you know, I miss that, but I also had to get up very early to get there by 8:30. So I'm not doing that. I also learned to play mahjong.

IK: Oh!

IF: Because I thought I'd never learn. Well, I was working full-time most of my life.

IK: Yeah, yeah.

IF: I worked part-time and I worked full-time, so I didn't have time. And so I started playing that once a week. Well, you can't really go anywhere. Some of the people I used to know have passed away. Some are still afraid to go out. So I can't go out for a meal. Unless I go out with Andie [daughter] and her husband. Susie [daughter] is not interested in eating out. Sometimes my grandchildren are home, maybe we'll go out for lunch, but then again, that's not a given.

IK: Right, it's kind of hard these days to know where people are at.

IF: So I read a lot. And there have been new babies in the family, so I've been doing some knitting.

IK: Aww, that's so sweet.

IF: But it's--you know, it's very quiet.

IK: Yeah. Yeah, I can imagine it's...everything's so different these days.

IF: Oh yeah.

IK: It's wild, yeah.

IF: You know. You heard of Batya, I'm sure.

IK: Say that again?

IF: One of my grandchildren.

IK: Oh yeah.

IF: So she just finished college, and she's going to Canada for a year for a postgraduate in Physics. After a year, she'll go to Berkeley. So she's home for now so be home for another four weeks. So at least I've seen her like once a week.

IK: Oh, that's really nice.

IF: So...what did we do...She is vegan and some things, because she is sensitive to some foods. She can't eat dairy, for instance, and she tries not to have eggs.

IK: Yeah.

IF: So she found the restaurant where she could find something to eat. What else did we do, we did do something... On occasion, we've gone to the bookstore, which I always

enjoy browsing.

IK: Yeah, me too.

IF: You know, sometimes I just go and browse, and they also have a Starbucks so if I want a cup of coffee and something, I'll have it.

IK: Yeah, yeah.

IF: And start reading a new book. I belong to a book club.

IK: Oh, cool.

IF: So I read for them, I wait for myself. So again, a lot of it they've done remotely. But I've been part of the Council of Jewish Books: for the last two years, things could be done remotely. So where I couldn't belong before-- there was a fee, which I didn't mind doing, and you met authors discussing their books. So for two years, I did that and I loved it. And now we're doing some things in person, some things by Zoom. So I liked that. You know, sometimes my daughter, Andie, will stop by, and she and her husband like to walk. They have two dogs . Sometimes she'll stop by in the evening after work and we'll go for a walk. And that's how my life goes.

IK: Yeah. I feel like everything's kind of toned down a bit, but sometimes that's nice. Sometimes it's nice just to have the--

IF: We do the best we can.

IK: Right, exactly. It's a weird time.

IF: I'm glad we had a chance to talk.

IK: Yeah. Thank you so much, this was really lovely just catching up--

IF: You're welcome. In fact, if you think later of any questions, you can contact me and I'll answer you.

IK: Thank you, I really appreciate that. This has been really nice and...I don't know, I really, really appreciate you taking all the time to--

IF: Ah, sure.

IK: Yeah.

IF: It's a worthwhile project.

IK: Yeah. And it's also just nice to see you, because it's been so many years.

IF: It's nice to see you too. Now you're also an adult!

IK: Well, I can let you go I know we've been talking for—[crosstalk]

IF: No, I enjoy talking to you.

IK: Me too, thank you.

IF: I got to know you a little bit better.

IK: Yeah, yeah! And I feel like--

IF: Because when you're younger you don't have much to say.

IK: Right. [laughs]

IF: Or you feel funny talking to an older person.

IK: Yeah, yeah. Because I remember, I talked to you a little bit, I think, about your life when I was--I must have been in middle school.

IF: Uh-huh. [affirmative]

IK: I called you once on the phone and I was asking you, but I don't even remember what we talked about because it was so long ago! [laughs] And I'm sure because I was twelve or something, I was probably like, "What? Wh—" [stutters] I'm really, really grateful that you were available to talk, because it was really nice hearing about...just everything, and--

IF: Well, yeah, it's a pleasure to talk to you.

IK: Yeah. Well, thank you so much, and if you have any questions about the process, I don't know when I'll be done with the transcript, but I'll send it to you. And we can chat more about whatever you want, and I'll keep you updated on how that's going and everything.

IF: Good luck to you.

IK: Thank you so much, and hopefully we can talk again sort of soon--it won't be another three years! [laughs]

IF: [laughs] I hope not.

IK: I hope not. Maybe next Passover, who knows?

IF: You know, you can't ever tell.

IK: You can't ever tell. Well, it was really lovely talking to you, so thank you so much, it was really nice.

IF: Same here and keep good care.

[END OF INTERVIEW]