

Ida Meshoulam Transcript

Q: Now I'll note that it's Thursday, September 25, 1997, and I'm sitting with Ida Meshoulam at the Campus House in Newton Center. This recording is for the Jewish Women's Archive, the JCC Oral History Project, and for Ida to share with those who love her the most. So, we're here today, Ida, to talk about you, which is a real honor for me to be here to do that with you.

Ida Meshoulam: Thank you, and it's an honor for me to have you, of all people, interview me.

Q: I chose you, of course. Why don't we go back and start at the very beginning, a very good place to start, and tell me about what you remember from your childhood?

IM: Well, I was thinking of that. I think I was very fortunate in two things: I was born into a very harmonious family where we knew only love and understanding. The second thing was the community that I was born into. Perth Amboy, New Jersey is small, about 80,000 people. I don't remember five hundred people or five hundred Jewish families, but very much in common, they were Zionists. They had the same level of learning or culture, most of them, and it was a very closely knit community. And that gave me my first insight into community service, too. We had one of the first [inaudible], which at that time, the Confederates. That was very successful. My parents went to every Zionist convention that was in the neighborhood. My mother [inaudible] of Hadassah. My sister and I were in Junior Hadassah. So, I had a very good beginning for volunteerism and things that I enjoy doing.

Q: And have done throughout your life.

IM: And throughout my life.

Q: Let's remember a little bit more about what it was like. You say a harmonious family and household. Can you tell me a little bit more about how that came to be and what you learned from your parents and the Jewish labor that was there?

IM: Yes. My father was just crazy about my mother. He just couldn't take his eyes off her. Sometimes she was even embarrassed. "Not in front of the children" [laughter] That kind of thing. The extended family was very close. Had Uncle Nat living next door, and one living almost across the street. My grandparents were about a block or two around the corner. If ever I was peeved, I would run away from home; I'd go to my grandmother's. And after the first or second time, they didn't bother calling and finding out. They just waited until they closed shop and came to pick me up. [inaudible] We used to spend many Friday evenings at my grandparents'. I remember one Friday evening, it was snowing, my father carried me on his shoulders, and I thought it was terrible that he didn't carry me all the time. I wanted it to snow all the time. I must have been a little bit of a maverick, bothering my mother a lot or something, because my father took me out a great deal when he had to go to New York on business. He very often took me out. As I was growing a little bit older, he had a pasteurization plant, and he would go to his clients to collect money. He would take me with him. I don't remember him taking my sisters or brother, so I think it was to get rid of me.

Q: [laughter] Or he enjoyed your company.

IM: Maybe. My grandparents were religious. My parents were traditional. Kosher home. We had to go to Sunday school. I went to Hebrew school, but most of the time, I played hooky because in those days, it was the old-fashioned melamed. Later, my younger sister had the advantage of a Sabra come in, a modern teacher. By the time she was nine, they went on a visit to Palestine. She spoke Hebrew well. When I went as an adult, I hardly knew [inaudible]. That's the difference in the teachers. As I say, we kept, of course, all the holidays. Having gone to Sunday school, I knew the details of why and

how. I'm surprised here, in this building, so few people know the details that I know.

Q: I take it you credit your family.

IM: I credit my family with that, the family and the community spirit both. I think they work beautifully hand in hand. I had an older sister, two years older than I. We very often had the same friends. We went to the same college, but yet she was very different. She was shy, and I always had to – when I started dating, I had to look for a blind date for her, something like that. But we had good relationships. My brother was a delight. And I must say, my parents, even though he was the only son, were very modern in their psychology. They never showed any favoritism because he was a boy.

Q: Unusual at that time.

IM: [inaudible] my mother must have been – if she had been educated, she would have been a wonderful psychologist. At a young age, she gave us independence. Our graduating class – high school – always went on a trip to Washington. She gave me money to go to the next biggest town where we did our shopping to buy the clothes by myself, to choose. Now, at sixteen years old, I think that showed a lot of understanding of teenage independence and things like that. Even about driving the car, they let me have it whenever they were home and not using it. But the stipulation, when I got there, I had to call up that I arrived.

Q: That hasn't changed too much.

IM: And when I left, I had to call up that I'm on my way home, otherwise my mother would be hanging out of the window for half an hour.

Q: Did you learn how to drive at sixteen?

IM: At seventeen. At that time, it was seventeen, yes. My brother wasn't as ambitious as my sisters, and he didn't go to college.

Q: But you did.

IM: We did.

Q: And your sisters? All three of the girls?

IM: Yes. My youngest sister graduated [from] the Hebrew Theological Seminary for teachers – teachers' college. I remember friends asking my mother when days of Depression came and women used to buy winter coats every two to three years, and my mother was wearing the same winter coat for six years. So, I distinctly overheard a woman say, "I can't understand. You're sacrificing for girls? If they were boys, it would be different." That didn't make any difference to them.

Q: She was a wise woman.

IM: Yes, a very wise woman. And a beautiful –

Q: It was unusual for women to go to college at that time.

IM: Except also in Perth Amboy, where I was born, I can't recall any Jewish girls. It was a community of a lot of foreigners because [inaudible]. It was a big industrial city. There were a lot of Hungarians, Ukrainians, and all that. When I was in elementary school, I was very often [the] only Jewish girl in the class. We had only one high school in the city. When it came to the high school, there were twenty-five percent Jews there.

Q: Love of learning.

IM: Amongst the Jewish girls that I went to high school with, I don't recall any who didn't go on. If they didn't go to college, they at least went to what they called normal school for

teaching to be a teacher.

Q: And what did you enjoy studying in college?

IM: I started with journalism. In those days, women weren't in journalism. So, it included a good smattering – Introduction to Statistics, Introduction to Law, Economics, and things like that. But my father, who was a practical man, said, “Look, what are you going to do when you get out?” So, he made me take education. I became a teacher.

Q: Became a teacher. Let me go back because I interrupted you before you were going to say something about how beautiful your mother was.

IM: My mother was really beautiful. I remember at PTA meetings – everybody thinks their mother's beautiful. Their children come around me. “Your mother's the most beautiful here. At a very early age, her hair was pure white. She had gray eyes and dark eyebrows, which she never touched, and beautiful skin. She really was –

Q: Do you have pictures?

IM: Oh, sure. There's a picture in my room on my dresser [inaudible].

Q: I'm going to look. I'm going to stop this for a second, Ida, while you get it, and I'm going to go look at your mother on your dresser. [Recording paused.] Okay, here we go again. We just looked at some beautiful pictures of Ida's family. And then Ida said she was twenty-four when she got married. And I wanted to ask about – I know you worked after college. How did you meet David?

IM: Yes, before I go on, I want to go back to my college days. It was during the Depression. My sister, being two years older than I am, was a junior when I was supposed to go into college, and my father couldn't afford two at one time in those days, so we made a pact. I worked a year and went in a year later. That year, I was able to save for my first year at college. So, I was a freshman when she was a senior. But she

didn't stand by her pact. She didn't help me when she got out and got work. So, when I was a – I had to leave school my junior year. I made it up with credits later, but I didn't graduate Rutgers. I want to be honest about that because this goes to my children. They have to know about it, too. In 1933 – you could almost say '34 because it was November – my family decided to make Aliyah to Israel. My mother's family always lived there.

Q: They went from Russia to Palestine?

IM: Russia to Palestine. And when my mother and father went to Berlin on their honeymoon – go back a bit – they went to Berlin because my father had two brothers studying there. One was studying medicine and the other was studying engineering. So, they must have been comfortable, because from Russia to send children abroad. While they were there, they got cable not to come back home, that the pogroms were approaching their vicinity, and the two families met in Berlin to decide where to go. My father's family, as I say, I think they had money according to the [inaudible]. They lived there [inaudible] they went – wanted to go to America, where they already had relatives who were comfortable, etc. But my maternal grandfather was always a Zionist. He had made several pilgrimages from Russia to Palestine. His wife accompanied him. The last trip that he made, his wife was pregnant, so he took his eldest daughter with him. When he came back, it was my mother who was born. My mother never saw her eldest sister until she was about twenty-two, twenty-three years old, because they went to America. And the first opportunity that my father had, he sent her to Palestine to visit her family. My grandfather was the first mayor of Hadera [inaudible]. So, we always had a very strong attachment to Palestine. And in '33, we went to settle there.

Q: So, at that time, it was your parents and all of you?

IM: All of us. The whole family. Yes.

Q: Did you go to Hadera?

IM: No, we went to Haifa. I had an aunt who had a [inaudible] there, so it was easy for us to [inaudible] until we [inaudible]. My father had some business connections where he got an agency for wholesale grocers and things like that. Then we settled in Tel Aviv. But at the beginning [inaudible] – oh, this is another funny story. One of the reasons, my – one of my uncles wrote that there was a wonderful opportunity: the biggest hotel in Tel Aviv was up for sale. And my mother, being the kind of woman that she was, would make a wonderful housekeeper for the hotel. A hotel works only well when you have your own people working there, and I could help in the administration or something like that. And my mother, my younger sister, and I went first. When we got there, the hotel was sold. Said, “Why didn't you tell us?” “I was afraid if I told you, you wouldn't come.”

Q: Which hotel was it?

IM: (Palatine?) it was called. He said, “I was afraid you wouldn't come if I had told you.” He was that kind of a Zionist. I had cousins who were well established there, and they wrote to me they'd find no difficulty being – it was under the British Mandate – with my English, etc. One of them promised that I would get a job surely in the Education Department as a teacher. When I went for an interview, the guy with the pipe in the corner of his mouth asked me if I had my “pipers” – papers. When I started to speak, he said, “I'm sorry, we don't want English with an American accent. Only English accent.”

Q: Wow.

IM: But I was very lucky. I got a job with the biggest English lawyer in the country, Max Seligman. It was an education. He was perfect [inaudible]. Being his secretary, I worked up to be the executive secretary. Then, when it came to making out contracts for mortgages, etc., after a while, he would just give me the details. So much money between this and this; write up the mortgage and write up the contract for that. That in itself was a wonderful education.

Q: At that time, Ida, where in Tel Aviv did your family live? And where was the office?

IM: His office was on [inaudible] Street, the business section.

Q: So, the same area?

IM: Yeah. We lived on Yehuda Halevi Street, right near Allenby, one block away from Allenby. We had had a seven-room house, and we had a four-room apartment. People in Israel were so economically conscious. I remember the cousin came. We had a very nice entrance, [inaudible] foyer. "You could have your son sleep here, and you could rent out another room." Things like that. It was difficult.

Q: I was going to say, was it a big adjustment? Because you described the community that you grew up in. It was closely-knit and comfortable.

IM: It was a very big adjustment.

Q: And you really were a pioneer –

IM: And we were pioneers.

Q: – to a new land.

IM: New land. I said we had a lovely apartment for what was considered those days in Israel, and a big one for those days. We had three bedrooms in a very large – my poor brother had a little cubby hole, so he used to get dressed under his bathrobe. And he would call his bathrobe – "This is my [inaudible]." One thing that really, I think, made us very happy – we all had a good sense of humor and accepted it as well.

Q: Goes a long way.

IM: It was all very warm. One thing that was hard for me was adjusting to my new aunts and uncles. I was an adult, and they were strangers to me. I was accustomed to sitting

on my aunt's and uncle's knees in America. [inaudible]

Q: [inaudible] different –

IM: Different.

Q: – relationship.

IM: Also, maybe because they were brought up during the pioneer days and all that, they were very different. They were strict about many things. I told you we lived in Haifa at the beginning. There was an American girl who married a [inaudible], and we became very friendly. One day, she asked me if I would like to go with them to Tel Aviv, where there was an imported exhibition of furniture to help them choose their furniture. I said, “Fine.” And she said, “We'll be staying at my brother-in-law's house.” Well, brother-in-law's house, you imagine that it's a married man. I had made an arrangement with somebody, a Palestinian I had met in America, who studied at Carnegie, and let him know that I was coming, and I made a date with him for that night. My sister-in-law was furious. “We wanted you to meet David.” [laughter] I went out that evening, but one day, we met each other on the street [inaudible] something like that. Well, after that, he started coming to Haifa every weekend. They said, “My God. When we married, he came once a month or something. Now he comes every week.” He was a very deep person. Spoke English. That was the only way that I – and to show you what kind of person he was – well, he was born in Bulgaria, and there he went to a school equivalent to Solomon Schechter. They had a very liberal king who gave them the same budget for parochial schools as they did [inaudible], so he knew Hebrew when he came to Palestine.

Q: And English.

IM: And English. But he taught himself English. He would translate Shakespeare by himself and things like that. And he was always interested in learning more and more. I think that was the first attraction that he could learn more [inaudible] gateway to that. He

spoke eight languages. His mother [inaudible] was Latino. They were Sephardic Jews. Bulgarian, of course. Bulgarians had to learn Russian because the language is based on Russian. During the Balkan Wars, they had to leave Bulgaria. They went to Turkey. He knew Greek. What were some of the other –? Arabic. He studied Arabic when he came to Israel.

Q: Is that how you learned Hebrew as well?

IM: Nowadays, I hate to use the word ultimatum for getting married, but he gave me an ultimatum. We weren't married until I knew Hebrew. He said, "We're establishing a house, and English is a foreign language for me. That has to be the language of the country." We still speak only Hebrew at home. Even my grandchildren were born here.

Q: They speak only Hebrew.

IM: We speak only Hebrew at home. One of my daughters-in-law teaches Hebrew at Tufts, and she's very strict, but everyone – and it is a blessing. My grandson is in Israel now and he's able to visit his relatives and play with his little cousins. And he knows the language [inaudible].

Q: So how did you learn?

IM: I took correspondence courses. I went to classes. I boned up on it. I wanted to get married.

Q: You wanted to get married. [laughter]

IM: [laughter] I loved those blue eyes.

Q: And were you married in Tel Aviv?

IM: It was a very small wedding. Didn't know enough people to have many friends over, and [inaudible] it wasn't too warm towards my family and the expense of it and all that. So, we got married at the [inaudible], at the [inaudible], and after that, we went to the – I can't remember the name. My son asked me this week, and I couldn't remember – the swankiest restaurant in Tel Aviv.

Q: You'll have to find out.

IM: I can't remember the name. I know exactly where it was.

Q: Is it still there?

IM: The location is still there. It was on Pinsker Street opposite the [inaudible] theater.

Q: I'll have to find out.

IM: And when the children were born [inaudible].

Q: Did you live in Tel Aviv near your parents?

IM: Yes, I lived in Tel Aviv near my parents, within walking distance, and I never learned to cook while my mother lived there because every time I asked her for a recipe, she would start to tell me, "I'll be too hard for you. I'll make it."

Q: But you did learn how to cook. You're a fabulous cook.

IM: Oh, yes. But at the beginning, I didn't.

Q: Later?

IM: Later. [laughter]

Q: I've heard that story numerous times. Even my sister-in-law, apparently, was married, and she and my brother-in-law lived in Brighton, and my in-laws were in Lynn, where they still are. She made, for the first Shabbat, chicken, and it was completely raw because she didn't even know how to make a chicken. My mother-in-law had done such a good job cooking for her.

IM: My kid sister used to come home from school – she's twelve years younger than I am, so she was still in high school then. She used to come home from school almost every day at dinner time and just drop in to say hello. And then I realized she was a scout to see whether we really had something to eat. After I got married, I continued working until I became pregnant. And once I had children, David didn't want me to work. But then after that, I was itching to do something.

Q: Can I ask you a little bit about those years when you were, what they call now, a stay-at-home-mom?

IM: Well, first of all –

Q: Was that the way it was for you and your friends in the community?

IM: Yes. Married women mostly didn't work then.

Q: And what were your days like?

IM: Well, I made myself very active. The first thing I did was to join a Canadian-American-Israel club. I went to one of their meetings. And I decided, maybe that's not for me. I didn't come here to get to know – not every American is the type I would have associated with here either. I didn't come there to continue being an American. I looked for other projects. The first thing I was introduced to was Orphans Aid. This organization was not for orphanages. They felt that the tragedy was big enough when a woman became a widow without taking her children away from her. So, we found ways of aiding her, buying

her a machine so she could become a seamstress, for clothing them, and that was done in a beautiful way. We gave them [inaudible] to go to these shops. The children went and tried on shoes, tried on clothes, and they never knew that was paid with [inaudible]. I love the way that was done. That organization became very big, and they had to divide it between senior and junior, like senior and junior Hadassah. So, I became president of the junior. I must tell you another thing about David. When my eldest son was bar mitzvah, and the senior president came to the bar mitzvah, she thanked my husband for letting me be so active. He said, "If she doesn't do it, who would?" He always went, and he was wonderful in that respect. Went in with all my mishegoss. When the war broke out, the War of Independence, many young men came from the States, and they were very good because they had just finished their service in the American First World War, and I became very active in that. I think I was the only non-uniformed officer. I was what they called the liaison officer. I had charge of [inaudible]. They came with suitcases of clothes, no place to hang them up. They came like tourists. They thought they were [inadubile], and you had to take care of them. My friends who had nice daughters would arrange parties so we could introduce them, etc. A local boy, he was wounded and had to recuperate. He had a mother [inaudible]. We had to find a place for them where they could stay to recuperate. So more than once, we had young men recuperating in our house, and that's why I say about the David – he never objected. "What are you doing to our home? You're turning into a [inaudible]?" He went along with everything.

Q: [inaudible]

IM: Yes.

Q: He must have had a sense of community as well.

IM: Yes, he wasn't active in community things because he was very busy in business. His hours were very long. Whether the organization – oh, and then later, after the army things and developing the country, wasn't that important, I was very active in [inaudible],

and my last pet organization was Micha. That's an organization for preschool Deaf children [inaudible] wonderful institutions in Ramat Gan, near the university there. Spencer Tracy came for the cornerstone because he has a Deaf son.

Q: I didn't know that.

IM: Yes. I used to go there almost every day. Most of the mothers who came with their children were from the Oriental Jewish side. So, they sometimes had to stay a whole morning there. So, we had to see that they had a bite to eat and that they were comfortable. And then I had a very big job there. There was a woman from California who had her MA in special education, and she donated twenty-thousand books. But what do you do? You have to catalog them, arrange them. So, I had a job. I took that on. But that was an education, because I learned the difference between various things and the approach just by reading the prefaces and things like that. I learned so much from arranging that library, and since it was near Tel Aviv University, the students who were studying special education could use that library.

Q: So, Ida, while you were busy, your children were playing at home. They were going to school. Your mother was cooking.

IM: No, my mother and father – I forgot to tell you this point. After two years living there, my brother decided that he wanted to go back. He realized that he made a mistake in not going to college. By that time, he matured [inaudible]. So, he went back. My sister met a young man. I told you I came with my mother. My sister and father came later. She met a young man on the boat. They corresponded, and that turned into a love affair. So, she came back to marry him. She came back to the States to marry him. Business was very difficult for my father. To make Aliyah, you have to be young, be ready to be a pioneer or a senior, ready to retire. But he was in his mid-fifties. Business was transacted on a very different [inaudible]. And coming from a community like we did, he would go into the bank, and [inaudible] was a good friend of his. "Come in, Harry." He didn't know anybody

there. My mother and father worked very hard, trying to make ends meet. They couldn't, so they came back to the States, too. But by that time, I was married, my parents stayed only to see their first grandchild born, and they came back to the States. Now I was there alone. I mean, no one in my immediate family.

Q: And how did that feel, being so close with your family?

IM: It was difficult for me, and maybe even more so for David, who was so understanding that he never joined any of the men's clubs. They used to ask him to come to the Masons, the Rotaries, and all that. He refused to go any place where he'd have to leave me alone in the evening. "You don't have a sister. You don't have a mother here." He tried to be all of them to me. No wonder I loved him.

Q: And he you, to do that.

IM: As the children got bigger, our business was – David was a shipping agent, not traveling agent. He was the agent for some Italian lines and the Bulgarian lines, Greek lines, and all that. During the World War, shipping went down. So, we had to look for other businesses. And eventually, he was always partners with his brother. They worked a very good business, but there were a few years that was difficult, and I wanted to pitch in. The kids were bigger. So, I began teaching English literature, tutoring for the matriculation, because under the British administration, everything was as the British do.

Q: And at this point, they would let you tutor even with an American accent?

IM: Well, it was written examinations. [laughter] And I was very successful at that. Their curriculum is much more difficult than the American English curriculum. I had to teach three Shakespearean plays. They had to take tests on three Shakespearean plays, Bacon's essays, Macaulay's essays, and really, very, very difficult things.

Q: And your students would come to you?

IM: Yes, they would come to me. And I worked really many, many hours. It was also very lucrative.

Q: You had mentioned that you went to theater, to symphony, and opera.

IM: Oh, yes.

Q: And enjoyed the evolution of vital cultural life.

IM: We had a subscription at the Palestine Symphony Orchestra. And then when the [inaudible] auditorium was built, since we had subscriptions, we got them very easily because they're very difficult to get. Even today, you can only inherit subscriptions to the Israel Symphony Orchestra. And then we lived in a neighborhood that became the cultural center of Israel. Across the street from us was the Zionist Organization building. A block or two away was the Habima Theatre. Then, about two blocks the other way was the Tel Aviv Library and Museum. So, everything was within walking distance. It was very nice. My kids could take it. We also had subscriptions at the Habima Theatre and for the chamber theater. We had a wonderful circle of friends.

Q: And did people drink coffee [inaudible] the way I remember?

IM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q: Before, during, after. Morning, noon, night.

IM: Yes. Even now, if I had a morning [inaudible] meet some friends for a cup of coffee [inaudible]. There was something else I wanted to – it'll come to me. And of course, we try to imbue our children with the same sense of values. We bought them subscription tickets to the junior orchestras, etc. Our first apartment was right across from the Mediterranean. How do you live in Tel Aviv and not be at the Mediterranean? Used to go for a swim every morning and so forth. Until about the first year that I was there, I

developed a very bad case of rheumatism because of that. It was too damp, so the doctor told me I had to go to the farthest point I could in Tel Aviv from the sea.

Q: Far away from the sea? I bet in those days you could also see it, unlike today, where everything is so built up. You have to go behind the buildings and the restaurants [inaudible].

IM: From our new apartment, I could see up to Ramat Gan. It was beautiful. And then that section also became built up. My sons went to the Tel Aviv gymnasium. It was a private school. The other schools you had later on when it became Israel, but at that time – and they went to the – my older son went to the Haifa Technion, and the other two went to – one went to Tel Aviv University, one to Jerusalem University, and they all changed their profession.

Q: You mean after university?

IM: After university. Sometimes after marriage, even.

Q: Did they marry in Israel? [inaudible]

IM: They all married Sabras. They all married Sabras. Maybe that's why we all speak only Hebrew at home.

Q: And when did you –? I guess that's really jumping. Do you have more stories to tell? But at some point, I know you came back to the States.

IM: Yes, I came back because my three sons, one by one, came here for their graduate studies. By the time the last one came. I was a widow, so I came on a pilot visit for a year to see whether I could live here. Was a bit difficult, a bit traumatic, but I realized I had to be near my children.

Q: When was this, Ida?

IM: This was in '76.

Q: So, just to back up, you were in Palestine when it became Israel.

IM: Yeah, I was there forty-two years.

Q: You were there during the World War.

IM: Yes.

Q: You were there during –

IM: The War of Independence. During the rioting.

Q: [inaudible] war.

IM: The Yom Kippur War. For the Six-Day War. I had three sons in the Army.

Q: I was going to say.

IM: Three sons simultaneously in the Army. And I was active. I was keeping myself busy all the time and helping. I wanted to tell you about friendship there.

Q: You had a wonderful circle.

IM: Yes. Oh, this must go back about fifty-five years or so. Some of my friends said, "Let's form a group." They were anxious to improve their English, and I was anxious to improve my Hebrew. So, we were about twelve or fifteen women who met once a week, on Wednesday afternoons, and each time at a different home, and someone had to present a paper, a lecture each time. And it became very interesting. I have a friend, an American who lived there at the time, and she's back in Boston, also for many years. A few weeks ago, I met her, and she had just come back from Israel, and she said, "You know what? I called (Louisa?) up." She said, "The chug is at my house today. How about

you coming –?”

Q: Oh, my goodness.

IM: Still in existence. She was so happy that she could give them all that they wanted to hear about me and all that. I've been very lax about writing to them.

Q: And you're busy on Wednesdays. That was the original Wednesday before it started here in Newton, or continued. I just want to check the tape here, making me a little nervous that it hasn't shut off yet. [Recording paused.] This is side two of my wonderful talk with Ida Meshoulam. Okay, so the chug continued in Israel.

IM: The chug continues. I don't have any relatives – some relatives on David's side. One nephew, whom I'm very close, and he comes here about – but I have a son who went back to Israel. He was very successful there. Now I told you that each one of the sons changed their profession. He started to be an accountant. After three or four years, he found it very dull. He realized that he liked working with people, not with figures, so he had a baby a year old. He came to the States to study business administration, went to the American College of Washington, which was a very clever move of his because he couldn't get a job otherwise. Before he went, he got himself a job at the Israeli embassy as an auditor there, and he graduated there and came back to the States. Had a very good job, but he still wasn't satisfied, so he came for his PhD at BU [Boston University]. While he was at BU, he worked at the Digital and became a vice president there. His one fault is wherever he goes, he becomes a vice president. He can't go any further because he can't buy the company. But he decided that he was a workaholic, so now he gave up working for them and became a professor at the Technion.

Q: And he's there with his wife?

IM: Yes.

Q: And how many children?

IM: They have three children, a married son with an adorable daughter, and a married daughter with an adorable daughter, and a beautiful, unmarried girl who's just finished her Army service [and] is going to study medicine.

Q: So, three grandchildren –

A: In Israel.

Q: In Israel. And two great-grandchildren?

IM: Two great-granddaughters there. And I have two great-grandsons in America.

Q: And how many other grandchildren?

IM: Five. I have eight grandchildren altogether.

Q: [inaudible] eight?

IM: Yeah. Oh, the joy. I had three sons, and I always wanted a daughter, and my first grandchild was a girl. A daughter. These are her two boys.

Q: Everybody's so beautiful. Having lived in Israel for forty-two, forty-three years –

IM: Forty-three.

Q: – and having such a rich life during the time that you were there, what are some of the things that you learned, other lessons or values that you would hope that your family, wherever they might be, or others might carry on, take note of?

IM: Well, one thing –

Q: I'm not ending, but I just –

IM: Yes. One thing that I learned when I came back here, I found it very difficult to make friends. I would meet people who were nice to me but never invited me to their homes or anything like that. And then one day, I figured out why. They were all born here. At this age, they weren't looking for new friends; they had sisters, they had classmates, and all that. So, I had to learned to be a little bit more aggressive about it, start inviting them to my home, and got my circle of friends that way. Here, of course, I joined Hadassah. I wasn't an active member of Hadassah in Israel because there were so many things [inaudible] everybody belonged to Hadassah. I wanted to do something different, which I did.

Q: Clearly.

IM: Yes. But here, I joined Hadassah, and what was a blessing for me here was moving here, having the Jewish community, and being able to be active here and volunteering there. I think what my sons have learned is they're not active in community spirit because they're very busy with their careers and all that, but there is a sense of having to belong, that you don't live for yourself alone.

Q: It sounds like you learned that in your family.

IM: Yes.

Q: And you've created that in your family in Israel.

IM: I must say –

Q: And you created that for yourself.

IM: Our family showed so much affection and all that; it has gone down to my sons. Well, I remember they were teenagers. My friends used to say, "I envy your daughters-in-law." And they are the most really wonderful husbands.

Q: If you were going to give advice to someone raising a son, what would you say to them since you did it so magnificently?

IM: I don't know. I treated them as children and people, not as sons. I mean, not [inaudible] because they were males, that there was another way of doing it. I think we gave them their independence early, like my parents did to us, and we gave them advice, but they made their own decisions very early on. And whenever some big decision came along and my husband had to speak about something, they adored him. There's so much respect for him. I remember once Ilan was about eleven years old, and my husband scolded him for something. A few hours later, he came to me, and he says, "Look, next time I do something wrong, please, you do it. I can't stand it when Dad yells at me." They had great respect for him.

Q: Sounds like David was a wonderful person.

IM: He was.

Q: Human being, husband, father.

IM: Yes. Also, I believe very much in not only genes, but in the environment. His father was not a religious man, and he was a three-day-a-year temple-goer in Israel. They didn't keep a kosher home. When my parents lived in Israel, I promised my mother I would keep a kosher home. David had to ask me, "Can I use this knife? Can I use this fork?" He knew very little about it. When his father came to – when they came to settle in Israel, his father was one of the founders of the Bulgarian synagogue. Even though he didn't go there often, he realized they needed a place where they would feel comfortable, one of their own. So he helped found that, and my three sons were bar mitzvahed in that synagogue. I can speak about religion there. If anything could have made me very irreligious it was also Orthodox, and my parents belonged – before they called it Conservative, they called it Progressive, and used to go Friday night. I'd sit between my

father and brother and all that. Suddenly, I couldn't go anyplace. There's no place that I would feel comfortable. Most of the people did not go Friday night or Saturday services, except on the High Holidays. And I resented the Orthodox for pushing me away from religion. I really resent – as I say, I could have become completely anti-religious.

Q: Pushed you away in terms of their requirements or because you're a woman? Or both?

IM: Yes. Their requirements. And because I'm a woman. They were so taken there – demands of how you dress and how you behave and all that. Couldn't possibly. And that was the only thing you could belong to in those days, the extreme Orthodox. And now, I enjoy going to services, and I enjoy –

Q: You're a member of Temple Emanuel.

IM: Emanuel, yes.

Q: Did you find in Israel that – I know a little bit what it's like now, but that you really were able to fully live your life Jewishly. It wasn't the religion in the synagogue.

IM: No.

Q: It was the day-to-day.

IM: The day-to-day, yes. First of all, don't forget the children in schools. They begin studying the history with the Bible, not the prayers, but the history and all that [inaudible]. I know very much about it. People think I'm pious, but that's not why. I used to help them with their homework, and I learned. I learned a lot that way.

Q: I'm finding that myself.

IM: Yes. Now, another thing that I learned while I was there was they always begin school in September, and then there are so many interruptions because of the holidays. So, once I questioned an educator about that, he said because most of the people came during the pioneering days, they had no religion, and so through the children, what the children learned at school, they took home. The children taught their parents the rituals and the reasons that they celebrate this and that.

Q: You were there when Palestine became Israel.

IM: Oh yes.

Q: What do you remember?

IM: What do I remember?

Q: What changed?

IM: I remember that, first of all, with the news – first of all, the partition was declared. We're sitting at the radio listening to the votes: yes, no, yes, no. And when it was finally that we were going to have our own – Gil, that's my eldest son, must have been about eleven years old. Oh, I told you, we were [inaudible]. I always had a girl living with me. She was a Yemenite. She was with us for twenty-nine years. She's now on a visit here, and my kids run to visit her. She's their big sister. They adore her.

Q: [inaudible]

IM: So, I woke her up, and I said, "Look."

Q: What's her name?

IM: (Tamar?). "(Tamar?), we're taking Gil downtown to see the excitement. And want you to know we're not home. You're in charge of the little children." And we took them down,

down to see people dancing in the street and all that. But you know what? He doesn't remember.

Q: He doesn't remember. He was there, but –

IM: You try, but you don't always win.

Q: And how did life change? I mean, it was fifty years ago, this year, that this happened.

IM: Yes.

Q: And what was different?

IM: Well, first of all, Haganah was formed. It became very military conscious. Security became one of the important things. And at the same time, economy grew. People became more affluent. I still don't understand it. The country does well, but it's not a rich country, and the people, many of the people, have money when they're traveling all the time, building beautiful homes, [inaudible]. That is one puzzle [inaudible].

Q: That continues to this day.

IM: To this day.

Q: I can imagine that the day-to-day life continued, not tremendously unchanged initially. But did people have a stronger sense of being solidly grounded in the world when Israel became a state from an Israeli perspective, because I hear from my parents and other people what it was like from a diaspora perspective, but you were there.

IM: Yes, definitely. A very, very strong sense there. I don't know about today, as I said, because, like here too, if they become less civil-minded and things like that, they're interested in their own. But there, it was very important; they all thought and were very anxious for the country to get well established. But as I said, unfortunately, it also meant

that the army had to become very well established, the security. The Machal and the army, and conscription into the army – until the age of forty-five, you have to give up a month and go into reserves, and all that. But the schools began functioning on their own, because before that, that was in the British administration. Hospitals – there are government hospitals. There are private hospitals. The health insurance is wonderful there.

Q: Cradle to grave.

IM: What?

Q: Cradle to grave.

IM: Yes. That really is. They have no worry in that respect.

Q: Did you, either before independence or after, have Arab or Palestinian friends or associates?

IM: No. First of all, we lived in Tel Aviv, and that's a hundred percent Jewish. Then, towards the very end, there began to be an association that we – trying to get closer to the Arabs. There were some who worked in Tel Aviv and lived in Tel Aviv, and I think maybe culturally at the same level, we tried to form an organization with them. David and I were terribly criticized because we were all for that association. But we tried. It wasn't long endured, and before David died, I think just a few years before that. But there are some groups; even now, they're doing a lot.

Q: Right My understanding from people and family that I know who have been there a long time ago and also have just come, that when people are neighbors, there's a natural need to get along.

IM: Oh, yes.

Q: Politics aside.

IM: The people in Jerusalem, Haifa, who had them as neighbors, are closer to them than those of Tel Aviv, because we never had them.

Q: So, Tel Aviv was –

IM: Completely Jewish.

Q: – completely Jewish when you were there.

IM: When the borders opened after the War of Independence, I remember [inaudible] my cousin ran to – I told you I had an aunt who had [inaudible] Haifa. Miriam worked for her maybe forty years. They ran to visit her, to see this old lady. And David's office at the beginning was in Tel Aviv, because the Jaffa Port, we didn't have a port in Haifa at that time, so most of the people worked for him there were also Arabs. But not to the point that they associated socially. There was one man, an Arab man, who married a Jewish woman, and they lived in Tel Aviv. He was very popular because he was wealthy and sold a lot of land to the Jews.

Q: In Tel Aviv?

IM: All over Israel.

Q: All over?

IM: All over Israel. But unfortunately, he was murdered because of that. They brought up his son as a Jew. I didn't have any opportunities, really, to get to know them.

Q: And you must have witnessed, in addition to a tremendous growth in the economy and building that goes on to this day, just an amazing, I guess, infancy, childhood, adolescence of the country.

IM: Yes.

Q: Did you travel around?

IM: Yes. We knew Israel very well.

Q: Were there places you went on vacation while you were there?

IM: Yes. Well, first of all, we always went for our anniversary, to Jerusalem, to King David, where we had honeymooned. Then the Sukkot, we always went to [inaudible] beautiful time of the year to be there. There's some lovely hotels, and we'd go [with] a group of several friends there. And having been in the business of a ship's agent, we also had the opportunity to go to Europe often. We really had friends with whom we had very much in common. Most of them were several-generation Israelis, old-time Israelis. We sort of leaned towards the Israelis. Some friends were six or seven generation Israelis. At the beginning – and now, they're mad about fashion. They're much more strict about being up to date with the brand name than we are. “Oh, you're wearing that. That's not stylish anymore,” they'll tell you. It's really amusing how they [inaudible]. I think it's trying to come closer to the whole world that makes them that, because they're not generally superficial, but I find that so funny.

Q: They like the good things like everybody else.

IM: And malls. They have some of the biggest malls in the country, in the world. They love going to the malls. It's very exquisite.

Q: Let's just talk a little bit about food, things that you – I know you make your bourekas and other [inaudible].

IM: Yes. Well, since I didn't know how to cook, when I learned, I had to learn the Bulgarian way of cooking [for] David. Unfortunately, he lost his mother when he was

fourteen years old, but he had wonderful aunts and uncles there, and they adopted me very nicely. One aunt came and spent a week with me to teach me some of their favorite dishes. Their cooking, not only [inaudible] but in Israel generally, I would say the main dishes are vegetable dishes with meat as the garnish – the opposite here – and a lot of it in tomato sauces, things like that. I don't know about now. I haven't been there for a few years. They still serve, as you come in, the very first thing, a cup of Turkish coffee and [inaudible]. And then later, after an hour or so, they come to the coffee and cake business.

Q: I know you make wonderful honey cake.

IM: Yes.

Q: Cookies.

IM: Cookies. No, I'm a good cook. I don't do as much anymore because I get tired. Whenever the kids have a party or something, I offer to do something, and I said, "You should have kept your mouth shut."

Q: [laughter]

IM: [laughter] I'm tired. It exhausts me.

Q: Well, it's work. Physical work. I just want to go back for a minute, because we haven't really made your way back to the state completely. But it must have been very sad when David passed away.

IM: Oh, yes, that was very sad. And especially it was – I thought he was looking a bit pale, and when he had a doctor's appointment, I insisted on going that day with him. I never did that before. When he came out of the office, the doctor patted him, "Good boy, keep it up." And two weeks later, he was gone. He died in bed. I was away at a meeting,

came home, and he evidently – in Israel, you rest every afternoon. I went to this meeting, and he was still resting. Evidently, he had decided to get up because he had his trousers in his hand, and I didn't realize. I came home and said, "Lazy bones, it's time to get up." That was terrible. For him, it was wonderful. For us, it was terrible.

Q: How old was he and you at this point?

IM: He was seventy. [inaudible] seventy. Today, that's young.

Q: What year was this?

IM: In '76.

Q: And at that point, your sons all had their own homes and were married?

IM: Yes, they were all married. As a matter of fact, a few days before that, my youngest son was in the States, and he was studying for his doctorate, and it was Independence Day. I said, "We always call them for the holidays. Independence Day is the holiday too. I want to call them." Because a telephone call in those days was a very luxurious thing, to telephone abroad. So, I called him, and [inaudible] said, "How did you know to call me today?" He was married five years, and they had no children. They were thinking of adopting, and that day they came back from the doctor, and she was pregnant. So, over the phone, he was able to give us the news. When David died just a week or so later, and we came for the funeral, he said, "Did Aba really know that (Raquel?) was pregnant? Did he know?" I said, "Yes, he knew. He was very happy."

Q: Is he buried in Tel Aviv?

IM: He is buried in Tel Aviv. I immediately bought the plot next to him. And then about ten years ago, I said, "It's crazy to send the body over, to have the family go to the funeral – all that." You have to think this – there's a time you have to think of the living and not of

the dead. So, I bought a plot in New Jersey, where my family [inaudible].

Q: In Perth Amboy?

IM: Yeah. My parents, my brother, everybody in the family has a plot there. I bought a plot there, and I told Ilan, who lives in [inaudible] – said, “[inaudible] told me she was having difficulty finding a plot in a suitable place. They’re terribly crowded.” So, I said, “You can sell her mine.” Well, he put me to shame. He said, “Sell it? We’ll give it to her.” So, we did. So, we did. They did inherit something from us. They don’t let me talk about funeral arrangements. I know exactly how I want it. So, [inaudible] you know what? Write it down. Which I did.

Q: Good. That’s important.

IM: Yes. And since it’s going to be only graveside because it’s in New Jersey, and I feel – I have lots of friends who would enjoy coming to my funeral. So, want some arrangements for some observation here, too.

Q: Good. After David passed away, how much longer did you live in Israel before you came to the States?

IM: Not too much longer. I came to get away from it, as I told you, pilot visit. I came. I stayed a year.

Q: Did you stay with one of your sons?

IM: Yes. I had two sons here at that time. I stayed with them. I went back, and then my third son came here. So, I realized that I had to be near my family. I missed the grandchildren very much. When I came here, I thought, “Oh, gee, I’ll get an apartment in Newton.” Lived in Newton, independent. Well, first of all, I had a big shock. At that time, the devaluation in this [inaudible] was terrible. While I was a rich widow when David died,

by the time I got here, it was almost wiped out. What I would have to pay for rent here, I could live there for – renting for a month, I could live there for a month. And Ilan insisted that I live with them because his wife wanted to go back to college. So, I thought it was temporary. And I said, “Until I find an apartment.” And then they decided to go back to Israel, so I had to look for an apartment. I was very fortunate. At the same time, they opened JCHE [Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly].

Q: So, you're one of the –

IM: I'm one of the natives.

Q: – original natives again.

IM: Thirteen years. We should be celebrating our bar mitzvah.

Q: Right, or bat mitzvah.

IM: When I came here, also, I became very active. I noticed that the people – they had nothing in common. They didn't know each other. There was no organization. So, I organized a social group, and it's going very strong – very lovely organization. You can't be friendly with everybody, but we do a lot of work for the building.

Q: And of course, next door, you made yourself vital, to say the least.

IM: Yes. I found that a lifesaver, that I could learn there and I could do things there.

Q: I know in your tradition of having subscriptions, that you go out, you go to theater.

IM: Oh, we go to theater.

Q: You go on trips.

IM: Yes, we even went to see Little Me last night at North Shore. And I wasn't sure I was going to like it, but I loved it. It was Neil Simon. It was crazy. It was like a Danny Kaye performance. Go to concerts here. (Uri?), my son, is an opera buff, so when he goes to the opera, he tries to get a ticket for me too. He has a subscription.

Q: And I know you're very close with your younger sister.

IM: Yes. You see, with my elder sister, even though there was only two years difference, I was never that close because we didn't have the same theology. And with Ruth, I have so much in common. And also, with my sister-in-law. We never call each other sister-in-law – sisters. She lives in New Jersey, and we speak to each other at least twice a week. One, she calls me, and once I call her. Very close to her. But you see, my sister married a Communist, and she forgot she was Jewish and became a communist.

Q: Your older sister?

IM: Yeah. I called him the last of the Muscovites. There was a time when it was stylish to be Communist during the First World War. And met many of their friends. And when they came to Israel, would come to visit me. They would have our address. They all broke away from it. But he to the very end, and she too.

Q: You mentioned the First World War. We didn't really touch upon the Second World War. You were in Palestine at the time

IM: The Second World War? Yeah.

Q: What did you know? Not know? What do you recall?

IM: Well, we did know the German immigrants began coming on the boat when we made Aliyah. There were a few young German men –

Q: So, the early '30s.

IM: – who had an insight that they had to leave Germany. And then, of course, there was the influx of the people, the German immigration, who came. That changed the face of Israel a lot.

Q: In what way?

IM: Where it used to be a bit careless, people wouldn't keep in line to get on the bus or on the train, jump over you. I used to be afraid to travel alone. The Germans had to be orderly, and they began standing in line to get on the bus in an orderly way. They put in a lot of discipline and organization. I guess, coming from the small cities in Europe [inaudible], it was very sloppy and very careless in that respect – cleanliness. The city became more [inaudible]. The Germans really gave it a different flavor. I guess every Aliyah does that. They say that now the Russians, too, [are] giving it different flavor.

Q: Do you remember Operation Solomon and Operation Magic Carpet?

IM: Oh, yes.

Q: It must have been very dramatic when you saw Ethiopian Jews.

IM: I went to the little airport for Magic Carpet to help them get organized. At some of the scenes, it was a rainy, muddy day, and we went with a lot of clothes to distribute and all that. You see this Yemenite man walking around with a lady's coat, the fur collar. He, of course, have the best and the warmest one. I don't know whether his wife had a coat. I also remember a case where they immediately got coupons for food, like food stamps here or something like that. There was a woman who was pregnant, and she was in labor, and you couldn't get her to go to the hospital. They threatened to take the food stamps away from her. She wouldn't go to the [hospital]. They were afraid. Many of them had seen a wheel for the first time when they came on the “magic carpet.” The Ethiopians, I didn't see the influx of them. That was later. Well, the first little girl who worked for me in my home was Ethiopian, a pretty little thing. They're very good-looking.

They don't have African features. They have European features, small features [inaudible].

Q: Can you think of anything we've left out, or any words of wisdom you'd like to add? Is there anything you'd like to show me in terms of objects you might have?

IM: Objects? I gave most of my objects away as the kids got married. This picture, this painting [inaudible]. We were in [inaudible], and there's the artist colony there. David told me to choose a picture. I chose that one, and he was surprised, I said, because that type, the old [inaudible] Jew is dying out. Our kids won't know what they looked like or anything anymore. And this is a famous artist [inaudible]. The one there is by a friend of ours – (Ravi?). It's Lag BaOmer. The Hasidim dancing at Lag BaOmer.

Q: Lag BaOmer

IM: His whole family were pupils of mine – the children while they were in school for the matriculation, and the parents wanted to know this too, so that's also inscribed to us. He gave that as a gift. But I really don't have – as I say, anything that I had, I gave to the kids, and the only two pieces I brought with me [inaudible] at this table. I brought a lot, but everything got spoiled.

Q: In what way?

IM: Water-soaked.

Q: That's too bad.

IM: We had [inaudible]. Some things at the very bottom of the case were saved. I have a very big Persian rug. It doesn't fit into any house, except (Uri's?) because they're so big. For years, they had the campus director chairs as their only furniture and my Persian rug in their living room. Most of the books and papers were saved.

Q: You have a necklace from Israel, a black stone.

IM: Yes, I have that. And this also. Israeli. And I have a pin. It's very unusual.

Q: [inaudible] I'm going to stop for a minute. [Recording paused.] Ida just showed me, in addition to some wonderful pictures – one of her paternal grandfather and family. She said there's one of her maternal grandmother and family that's being reproduced, enlarged, and made to last, and she's looking forward to her grandson being able to realize that he's the fifth-generation.

IM: [inaudible] generation.

Q: Which is wonderful.

IM: The pictures are [inaudible] – the maternal was taken in 1909. But this one was taken way before that.

Q: So, over a hundred years.

IM: Over a hundred years.

Q: That's wonderful. Ida also showed me two pieces that she brought over when she came from Israel to this country, pieces of beautiful furniture, and a gorgeous pin that was hand-made, and her beautiful necklace. I'm going to take a few pictures. There are also two pieces of art.

IM: That one.

Q: You want to just say again? Ida, this one's from Safed.

IM: That one is [inaudible] artist colonies.

Q: Right, that you picked out because you want your family to know what older Sephardic men look like. And this one is from – it's rabbis dancing on Lag BaOmer, which was signed –

IM: [inaudible].

Q: – by an artist friend. So, I think we'll stop for now. I think it's lunch time, and we've talked enough, and Ida has places to go and things to do.

IM: I have to go to the doctor.

Q: So, if, Ida, you think of other stories, details we've left out, or words of wisdom you'd like on tape, we'll talk in the next few days, and I can always add on. But thank you so much. As in Japan, they say that people whose lives have spanned a century are their national treasures. I agree a hundred percent, and I think you're a national treasure, and I feel very fortunate to know you, Ida.

IM: Thank you so much. [inaudible].