Avigdor Niv (2013)
Interview 3

Interviewers: Dana Ehrentreu, Sara Held, Nathaniel Cain, Moriah Patashnik
Also present: Yaffa Niv

[Beginning of Interview 3.1]

Dana Ehrentreu: So today, we’re just going to talk about after the war and—where did we leave off?

Nathaniel Cain: We left off—

DE: You had just gotten back to your hometown. Oh, yes, yes, yes.

NC: After working and going to school, how you told us about school and how the…

Yaffa Niv: Oh, hello! How are you? I’m okay. [laughs] These are for you.

[mixed talking as YN serves refreshments]

Avigdor Niv: So we’ll start where I think I left off, it’s, you know, it was the time that I started going to school and I went into the 3rd grade in the, the Hungarian. The next year, since it is now Romania, I was living in Gheorgheni. My parents decided that I should study in Romanian and they put me in a classroom. I did not know one word Romanian and I don’t think that I knew where I was until Christmas, but by the Christmas vacation, which is almost 3 months—

YN: Hold this for me.

AN: I will continue in a second.

[mixed talking as YN continues to serve refreshments]

AN: So by the time, by the time the Christmas vacation came around, 3 months and a year, I was able to communicate and babble in Romanian, and there was one performance that all of us were asked to sing and they just told me to risk—move my mouth but don’t say any sounds because it didn’t sound anything like Romanian. Anyway, as I started learning Romanian and spoke Romanian, I started forgetting the German. At that time, I was not very sorry for losing the German, but in retrospect, every single time you lose a language, it’s not too good. You want to keep the knowledge of any language that you have acquired in your life. Then came that very unpleasant story of the nationalization and being declared as kulaks and what have you, and then I told you that I advanced to the gymnasium, to the first class of high school. At that time, high school started in the 5th grade to 12. It was one—there was no separation, and I progressed. I studied in the 5th, 6th, and 1 or 2 months in the 7th before we managed to leave Transylvania.

DE: I’m sorry. Can you just orient me, what year is this when you were starting to leave Romania?

AN: It was 1950.

DE: Okay. And that makes you how old?
AN: It makes me 13. 13 and a half.

DE: Okay, thank you.

AN: And I told you, to go back a little bit, I told you that in 1950, I turned 13, in the winter of 1950, and I told you that before the war we had a large synagogue which was—it had a community of almost over 1,000 Jewish people and now there is a community, a small community of 90-some people, and religion is not encouraged by the communist regime. And we have instead of a rabbi and cantor and a shochet, we have only one person who is the religious leader of the community, and it's a shochet. It's a shochet who does the butchering from time to time for the Jewish, the Jewish tradition of kosher butchering. So, my stepfather, another person, and this shochet, we were—we stood on the steps of the synagogue and I said the prayers and made the first time the [indistinct] in public and I was declared a bar mitzvah. Each of us had a little glass of the tuica, the Romanian common drink, and I walked to school 8:00 in the morning and everybody went on their way. So I did not even have a, what you call minyan, the 10 people, 10 males that are required for an official Jewish ceremony. So that was my bar mitzvah.

And, well, at that time we were hearing all the possibilities to go to Israel, but we really didn’t know if that will come around. And I think 2 months before the end of the school year, I left school because my parents applied to leave and to obtain that one-way trip certificate to allow us to leave Romania and they would not allow me to go to school because if I want to leave Romania, Romania does not have to waste its money on educating me.

DE: What was all this like for you?

AN: To tell you the truth, I’m still 13. I have authority. The teachers, the instructors in the school, and I do whatever they are telling me to do. My parents explained to me, “Never mind, we’ll go to Israel. You’ll study in Israel.” Well, so the summer went somehow and on September, September the 9th or something, or 7th—I don’t really know exactly—we left Gheorgheni in Transylvania. We traveled to Bucarest from where we could take a train to Constanța, and we boarded a boat and we’re allowed to take with us 7 kilograms per person, no jewelry, had to leave everything valuable behind, and although you could sell it, but people were threatened not to buy anything from the Jews, so in particularly from the kulaks.

Moriah Patashnik: So did they search your luggage when you got onto the—

AN: Yes, they searched the luggage. They were looking for anything valuable, anything that the person that was searching didn’t like. He just threw it to the side. I don’t remember as a child. I just remember that everything was searched and turned upside down. What were the things that were there? Some clothing obviously, and we knew that you are going to a very hot climate, so we didn’t take any winter clothes. We took mostly lighter clothes, clothing, and household dishes—pots, pans, flatware, these kind of things. A few plates, very few people took china because they did not rely on them handling the boxes in the fashion that you would not break everything up. So—and we went on to the boat. We had the privilege of being in the sub-department, sub class. So there was the 1st class, 2nd class, 3rd class and sub class. And in one of the holdings, holding hauls in the belly of the boat, there were beds hang up and all of my fears—I don’t know. You tried to climb. I couldn’t climb up, but anyway, it was so hot in there. It was very dangerous. So, we spent about 3 days and nights trip from Constanța in the Black Sea through the [narrows?], through Turkey through the Mediterranean to Israel. I spent all the time on the deck. So, next to—there were the decks for the 1st and 2nd class, we were not allowed, but it was a part of the deck in the front, in the bow of the ship, and that's where I stood with a couple of other friends, and that’s where we slept all the time. The space allocated to us in the boat was not habitable. I don’t remember. My parents slept next to me. This how it was.
So for a day we were very happy to have arrived into the port of Haifa and the issue of this embarkation started and people are given numbers and we were given a very late number and all of a sudden, my stepfather became very agitated that we have a late number because it happened that people that, the Romanians have declared inappropriate persons to leave Romania were not allowed to disembark at Haifa, so we were afraid all the time. So I don’t remember. My—at that time, my uncle who lived in Israel, he was the young fellow that left, he left before I was born and left for Israel. He then studied in the Israeli Institute of— at that time it was called Deceon. It was a Jewish Institute of Technology and then it became the Israeli Institute of Technology, and he enrolled in the British Army, then to the Israeli Army after ‘48, and he was already a high ranking officer by that time, and somehow he arranged, he arranged, he came, we were literally near the border and could talk for him from the top of the gangways and what have you. He somehow arranged that we were the number 30 of 42 to get off the boat. He, you know, he got down and he passed through and all of the sudden you are in Israel and you are free.

Well [laughs], we didn't pay attention that I was dusted with DDT because everyone was suspected of bringing fleas and that was a tremendous effort, so we were sprayed with DDT and loaded into a truck and were taken to a temporary camp where we were given tents before it was decided where we would live in Israel, and Israel had a very healthy approach to the immigration because in those times, the boat of Transylvania brought two shiploads of immigrants every week continuously for several months, and there were near 1,000 immigrants on each trip.

But anyway, it was near the Jewish holidays and we were taken out of the camp and we spent the holiday with my uncle, and I had another relative from my father’s side, a very, very distant relative, and I spent some time with them. And later on from there, we were allocated to a camp for immigrants, Ma'abarot. It's a camp for immigrants. It’s a tent city and we were given a tent. It was very hot. In Israel at that time of the year, it’s the eastern hot, dry desert, sandy winds. They’re called Khamsin. Anyway, it's very unpleasant and coming from mountains in Transylvania, it was a weather shock for us, mostly. My stepfather had an uncle who lived in Netanya, and we were sent to a little camp area near Netanya [indistinct]. Netanya. And 2 or 3 weeks after we stayed in this camp, we moved into my stepfather’s, my uncle’s apartment, and that’s where we stayed.

But pretty soon, we realized that we are penniless and my father couldn’t get, couldn’t find a job. It was a very difficult time in Israel. It was the 1950, only a year and a half after the Independence War. There was literally famine in Israel, and they realized that they were not able to take care of me as a child and educate me because to go into school where you had to pay tuition, and later on in Israel, they passed a decree created in which they provided free education after high school to everybody. At that time, you had to pay. So, again, I was out of luck. No school. So anyway, those times the kibbutz movement with assistance of the British agency was taking me in and organizing youth groups, 50, 60, in a group, and they were placing them in all of the kibbutzim, and my parents had thought that that’s the best way, will be for me, but that literally pushed me out of the family environment and it was not very, very happy environment because of the dire economic situation into a commune. I was surrounded with 60 other kids of my age more or less, between 12 and 14, and I ended up being in Gvat Brenner. Gvat Brenner. G-V-A-T, Brenner, B-R-E-N-N-E-R. Brenner. It is one of the largest kibbutzim in Israel. It has 1,200 members and here I used to take this young group of immigrant children from Romania to educate them, to teach them, and create a nucleus for us, a new settlement or an addition to an existing settlement and reinforce. We were a situation that you get up in the morning, you go and work until noon, and then noon time given an hour or so to get ready. Then we go to classes and you learn 3 or 4 hours. And [laughs] you get up early in the morning and by the time you have lunch and you get to the class, you are so tired and most of us fell asleep, and it was hot. The weather in Israel is very warm and I remember the classes being a torture for me. They were teaching us to speak Hebrew, to sing in Hebrew. Some education of the movement of the kibbutz which is mostly social studies of the environment, of the
history, and some education in biology, mostly as pertains to agriculture. And to learn to be good kibbutz dwellers and kibbutz members and knowing the earth that you work and the cows that you milk and the chicken that you have to feed, and all that stuff. I liked plants and evidently I have shown that I have manual skills, so I ended up working in a tree nursery, subsequently an orchard, and throughout the time I always worked with plants, and that working with plants. Then I worked on a gardening lot. So, I learned a lot about agriculture, about gardening, about flowers, but when I finally arrived here, the desire to, to work with plants went away very quickly. It was hard work, but there was nothing better at that time.

Well, very quickly the 2 years about this nucleus was supposed to have been organized as fast, and it was by then 1952, and most everybody has decided that they are not staying in the kibbutz and that nucleus broke up. Most everybody went back to live with parents and go to school and I had lost contact with them.

[tape skips]

AN: Lucky, there was offered by the kibbutz a situation that they called an adopted child of the kibbutz. So I became an adopted child and I was living among the kibbutz children, all the children that their parents were members of the kibbutz. And there was a school. The kibbutz had a school that taught classes from first elementary to the 12th, high school grade. So I was placed according to my age into the 10th grade. Well, but, you see [laughs] I was lacking the education that goes between 6th, a little bit of 7th, to 10, that's 2 and a half years of education, and I tried to make it up by really making a big effort to, to learn. All these years, I thought that I was dreaming of becoming of a physician, but as you heard my story, there was no foundation. There was not a chance. In Romania, while we were in Romania, that was not a possibility because a son of a kulak would not be allowed to go to university to study medicine. So I somehow started giving up the dream. When I got into the kibbutz, I needed a high school education. I was so paralyzed for education as you can imagine yourself to be. So I didn't know what I wanted to do, but as the years, the 2 years that I was among the kibbutz children and I was at a school, in a regular school, I was able to study, and I put all my effort in reading everything that I could put my hands on, literally everything, and I started studying. Very soon I realized I have to study several topics that were not particularly taught in the kibbutz. The kibbutz taught, again, the kibbutz movement, social studies pertaining to the history and the importance of the socialistic movement to maintain the kibbutz ideology. They taught agriculture. The teachers were professors and they knew by Weissman Institute, and they were literally very knowledgeable in educating us. But, I realized that understanding and getting 4 or 5 courses in the structure of the earth and the dirt and how roots obtain restitution from the dirt would not help me pass the matriculation exams to enter the university.

So, somehow with the help of my mother at that time—she was working very hard. My father, stepfather, became very ill, had a heart attack and was not able to work. Somehow, she gave me some money and I bought a course in correspondence and I started studying high school in correspondence. So whatever I was not taught in the kibbutz school, like mathematics, physics, chemistry geared to the high school level, I picked up and studied. In addition, in Israel you have to study the Hebrew grammar and the Hebrew literature and the Bible studies. These were studies I took up in correspondence. As anybody in Israel will tell you, for a newcomer that the language is not a native language to study and understand the Bible in Hebrew. It’s an uphill battle. Not to say anything about literature, but particularly grammar. I had a very hard time to study grammar, and there were no preset educational methods. I literally had to memorize everything. So I entered the end of the second year, I’m already 4 years in Gvat Brenner, 2 in the youth group and 2 in the school. It was about the end of the 3rd year, but I told them. I went to—but I want to go and study for matriculation exams, like here the high school exam or SATs, everything that you need to know for the SATs, in order to be accepted to a university. At that time, only the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, because that was the only medical school in Israel.
So when I went and told them that I want to study, they made fun of me and they said, “Nobody in the kibbutz said that you have to study.” So I tried to explain to them that, you know, I want to study. Nobody has to tell me. I want to know and that’s what I want to do in my life. Well, they brought me for trial in front of the class and the entire class, my classmates, were seated there, and I was seated here, and the teacher was sitting there, and they were, everybody was accusing me of being disloyal, of having taken advantage of them.

**MP:** How many classmates?

**AN:** Eh, 30, 40. And the attack was very harsh because I didn’t have a parent to keep my back and I didn’t have anyone to support me. So finally I told them, you know, “We are a family in the kibbutz and everybody has to, you know, confirm to their family,” and then they said that they invested in me a lot of money for giving me that wonderful education, and although I worked a little bit to return the favors, but that’s what I want to do, and even in families sometimes there are arguments and [Hebrew phrase] I want to leave. I cannot stay here because you are not letting me study. And my illustrious teacher over there says to me in a quotation that rings in my ears even today, “There is no difference between amassing knowledge and money. Money in the kibbutz, [indistinct] capitalistic, gold and silver, money, is a despicable thing because on the kibbutz, what matters is equality. Everybody works. Everybody gets everything, whatever they need. So in this type of social structure, when you say you want go and work, earn money to go to, there’s no difference between amassing, learning and amassing money.” So studying became all of a sudden a very despicable, capitalistic idea. I couldn’t perceive that. Anyway, these arguments back and forth, 2 or 3 days, I was asked to give them back the latest, new shoes that I got from them. They gave me an old shoe. I packed my belongings and a sheet, took my bag, stepped on the bus and traveled home, home to my stepfather and my mother.

Well, they were not very happy because they had 2 rooms. One was kitchen and one was where they slept. And so I slept in what was the kitchen and I looked for work and I went to work and I worked this time not 4 hours, 6 hours. I worked in gardening. I made up plants for gardening. I planted gardens for others. I made a living. I had to live. And after coming home from work and in the hot summer, 8 hours outside, it’s tough, and you have to pick yourself up after a shower and sit down and pick up your books. I did this somehow and came the time of the exams, it’s called the extern exams. You do intern exams if you study for school and extern exams if you study outside of the school. I tried to get into the 12th grade, but it was only one high school that I was aware of and the manager of the, the principal of the school explained to me in so many words that if he accepts me in the 12th grade, I won’t be up to par to whatever the others can do and I will lower the standards of the school and he did not accept me. So, my parents didn’t know any better. Their Hebrew was not very good. They were—didn’t have the connections, didn’t have the way to understand that they had to do something to prevent that from me.

Anyway, I passed the matriculation exams and—but I got very poor things in Hebrew grammar and in Bible studies. It’s impossible. The grades are from 1 to—10 to failing. The 5 is a passing grade, but it’s below standard. So I have 5 in Bible studies and 5 in Hebrew grammar. In mathematics and science studies and one time in English, I, I got reasonably high grades. I got 9 and 8, so it was a passing grade. At that time, I was already nearing the age of 18 that you have to enroll in the military service, so I enrolled in the military service and I served in the compulsory 2 years that you have to serve in Israel. And during my service, I made another effort and whenever I had free time, I studied. I studied these 2 topics that I… you have the privilege to repeat the exams to get a better grade, and I was lucky. I got a better grade and I passed the exams. But this is not the end of it because to get in Israel into the medical school, you have to pass the composition exam. There were some 600, 700 candidates and there were less than 50 places and there’s no other medical school. So I tried the first time and my grade was below the minimum and I was not even invited for an interview. By that time, I decided I’m going. In France, you can enter into a university and after you study, the decision whether they accept you to a medical school is
after the first year. And I thought, I’ll be able to prove them that I’m capable, and I was accepted to the Sorbonne in France, in Paris. We had a distant relative that lived there, but they were in no situation to keep me there, so I would have to work there, so that was one way out. I bought a boat ticket to Marseille, from Haifa to Marseille. I didn’t know how much it would cost me to get to Paris, but, and at the same time I continued to study to prepare myself for the competition exams. And I moved from my parents. I moved to Jerusalem. I worked. I dug ditches. I did a lot of hard, physical labor, and then I found finally a job in a bank and I was what’s today a teller at the bank and I had one year of that. It allowed me to study. I passed the composition exams. I went to an interview. I was in that interview and, lo and behold, I was accepted to medical school. So—

DE: What year was that?

AN: That was in 1959.

DE: So you were 22? So you finished the army?

AN: Finished the army and then completed the military service and worked a year, almost a year in Jerusalem. I lived in Jerusalem on my own. At that time, I met my wife.

DE: Can you talk about that a little bit?

AN: [laughs] There is not much to talk about.

DE: Of course there is.

AN: We lived in Netanya. My mother, my stepfather and the uncle lived in Netanya and I was in Jerusalem, and I used to come home almost every weekend, every other weekend, and we were in a group of kids, and that’s where I met her. And after we met, we continued to be very good friends and we got to go out, what you call going out steadily, and she just finished the military service and she wanted to study, and there was an issue of whether going to the university in Tel Aviv, which had biology. She wanted to study biology and they had biological studies, or in Jerusalem. As I was accepted in Jerusalem, she decided to go to Jerusalem. So she came to Jerusalem and she studied. We hang out together for the last 54 some years.

DE: [laughs] Just hanging out?

AN: So—

MP: So you were accepted to the Sorbonne, but never went?

AN: Never went.

MP: Okay.

AN: I, you know, I didn’t have to go because—

MP: Right.

AN: It was the issue of the end of the summer of ‘59, and if I go to—if I get accepted to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, to the medical school, and that was the only medical school in Israel. I told you that. And now there are 4 medical schools in Israel. And, or, pick up the ticket that I already had because
you have to buy tickets on these boats, and go to, to France. And then the beautiful friendship that we had, my wife and I, would have [phone rings] uncertain future. Anyway—

DE: You weren't married yet, though?

AN: [phone rings] No, no.

DE: I thought you were. Okay.

YN: [in background] Hello? [indistinct]

AN: So we went to—we started the university. We studied the same classes. Biology and medicine have similar classes for the first, almost the entire first 2 years. So we went to the same classes. We studied together. We tried to help each other, but I rented a small room about the size of a stamp. There was room for, for a bed and a little desk of a foot and a half long and one foot deep, and my, my, my closets and bookshelves were two window indentations, and there was one door, and that’s it. And that’s what I could afford to pay for, and I studied and went to the courses and in the evenings I would work, mostly do what later on other [indistinct] to be a nurse, helping out somebody, and I studied 3 nights in somebody’s home and I slept next to a terminally ill patient and I helped with whatever needs he had. [tape skips] I did bookkeeping. But anyway, I worked throughout the whole years of my medical school all the time until I literally could not because I had to prepare for the final exams.

After the second year, end of the second year, we got married. I was the keeper of a building. In Israel at that time, the front of [indistinct] was very significant and there were was a very strong [indistinct] and it received donations from many, many people. They had a wonderful building and a big yard and they had the tiny one-room apartment for the watch man who watched the building at night. So for doing the bookkeeping for this [indistinct], I was given the privilege to use the watch man’s apartment that nobody was using at that time, and I had to do the watching of the building. And that’s already until the end of 6 years. So I graduated, finished a master’s degree after the 5th year, and then more or less a steady salary used to come in and we could live on—we had something to live on, but I still worked. I worked as a… all the years, 3 nights on average at the hospital, at the university hospital, Hadassah, in Jerusalem and mostly in the emergency room, and that gave me… I would work for 8 hours a night. That’s the night shift, and I could sleep sometimes 2 hours, sometimes only 5 minutes of it, but the classes would continue the next day.

Now looking back into what was nice and what was beautiful in my life, really, meeting my wife was one of the great changes because my life became more organized, settled. I had a direction. Having been accepted to medical school, having participating in a group that has a goal and a level of education that I was aspiring to, so the years of studying in the medical school were my most beautiful memories and I enjoyed very much my studies of the physician. And I always thought that I have to do a lot. I have to prepared and—I read mostly. I had a very poor handwriting and I had very poor skills of really what was she does [points at MP], taking records and writing something in a fashion that can be read afterwards. So I spend much time, my time during lectures listening, listening very intensely. I couldn’t hear anything except what the teacher was telling us. And then I would go to the libraries, take out books. I’d go to work, then read. I always had 3 or 4 books to carry, heavier books, because I was always reading and knowing. The books in [indistinct] have much more than the teachers are able to pass onto you in frontal lectures and they go with things in depth, and I feel that that gave me a better education, having supplemented all the frontal education with whatever was written in the books and dramas or what have you. I complement myself because that gave me a very wide understanding in medicine and ability to practice my, my professional work with significant inherent security.
Well, I was at the end of the, end of my 5th year, and Yaffa was pregnant with our first son, and I finished the final exam in obstetrics and gynecology. Some exams you had to take at the end of 6 years. Some exams you could take at the end of the 5th year. So gynecology and obstetrics was one of them, and the day after my son was born.

DE: Wow! [laughs]

AN: So I just finished the exam and I came back and before the final exam, we had to do the baby deliveries, and I came to the delivery room and the nurse tells me, “Hey! You passed the exam. You are one of the brightest students. What are you doing here? You don’t have to be here anymore.” I said, “No, no. My wife is in the delivery room, in the other delivery room.”

MP: How old were you when your son was born?

AN: How old was I? I don’t remember.

MP: What date is this?

AN: It was 60—it was ‘75. ‘75, so let’s take out 37 more, 37, so that’s 32.

MP: 32 when your first son was born?

AN: Yes. So—

DE: What’s your son’s name?

AN: Michael.


AN: The one on the left hand top.

DE: Oh, okay.

AN: Michael. So, we were very happy, you know, but my 6th year was coming up and the 6th year is the time when you spend most of your life in the hospital and Yaffa saw very little of me, and Michael, and she spent many nights by herself because I had the responsibility of being, serving as a student, senior student, and I spent nights working in the hospital. So by the middle, it was 2nd year, I stopped working in the hospital.

DE: You had a lot of experience by then.

AN: I could not afford to work anymore because I had to spend, I had to study and I had to prepare for the exams, and I prepared for the final exams and I passed the final exams.

DE: So this exam was for—

AN: Becoming a physician.

DE: Okay.
AN: So you pass an examination again the 6th year and the next one you have to do a year of rotating internships, so I started my year of rotating internship and that’s in Jerusalem. And then when I finished that, we moved to Tel Aviv and then I went to the program of surgery in—it’s called Ichilov Hospital, which is part of Tel Aviv University. And, again, the way you specialize in Israel is a… it’s a 6 and a half year of specialization. You have to do so many years to spend professionally and another 6 months in research, so not only you have to, when you finish your, your 6-year exam, then before you start your internship, you had to write a doctorate thesis. At the end of the training, at the end of the residency program, of the specialization program, you have to spend 6 months in research to come up with a work that had some scientific value, so I studied—I studied initially general surgery and then at that time orthopedics started becoming a very attractive profession because of the advancement of technology and methodology and what have you, so I decided to switch to orthopedics. So I did a year of general surgery, 3 and a half years of orthopedics. I had to go to the [indistinct] all these things done don’t matter. Then I did 6 months of research. I operated day and night on little newborns, that femora to measure something, and had to publish a paper which was published in [indistinct].

DE: What?

AN: You know, it had to be a scholarly. Otherwise, so I received—I was the first one to receive master’s degree at the Tel Aviv University, Continuing Medical Education.

DE: Huh.

AN: In orthopedics. So, in addition to my M.D., I have a master’s degree.

DE: So what year are we at now?


DE: Okay.

AN: After the ‘67, during the ‘67 War, I served in the military as a physician already and I did a lot of operating day and night. And then in the ‘67 War, Jerusalem was liberated and Mt. Scopus was liberated, and I don’t know what, how much you remember. There is a huge amphitheater on Mt. Scopus that all the times was in the hands of the Israelis, but that was an island inside, inside [indistinct] and under the United Nations auspices. So you could not, we did not have access. They would allow for a group of workers to maintain the place and it was a whole trajectory to get through to them, and sometimes they attacked the convoy, and that was under the auspices of the United Nations. Anyway, Jerusalem was liberated in ‘67 War and the first time that the Hebrew University graduation ceremony was held in this Mt. Scopus amphitheater was when I received my diploma.

DE: That’s amazing.

AN: It is amazing because all the government was present and it was a large, and they were giving out all kinds of diplomas for fellows in art in master’s degrees, but doctorates, physicians, a group of 50 doctors because doctor is really big thing to do, and I was honored. I felt privileged. I still have that memory. It wasn’t any—you stand there in the later afternoon and it becomes a bit cool, and the wind blows, and you see that the desert, and on a clear day you can see from the [indistinct] you can see the Dead Sea.

DE: Wow.
AN: And you watch the Judea Desert. It’s a beautiful place. It’s a beautiful place. Anyway, so then we, after receiving my doctor’s diploma, as I said in ’67, we moved to Tel Aviv area. Yaffa moved back to Netanya. We lived in Netanya and she worked in Netanya while I worked in Tel Aviv at the Ichilov Hospital specializing in orthopedic surgery. When I finished my residency, I was a couple of years I worked for, in a couple, in 2 hospitals, and I slowly became what you call the deputy chief of surgery, orthopedic surgery. That was in Tel Aviv and I really wanted to—that by that time we had 3 children. My 2 daughters were born and so we’re a family of 5, and I got to the point that I felt that in order to advance my medical studies, my orthopedic knowledge, I have to go abroad and learn. So I applied to fellowships and I was accepted to the Harvard program, to the Massachusetts General Hospital, in hip replacement. I was really interested in joint replacement and there was a guy there who was one of the major players in the world at that time and I was his fellow for 6 months. So we left Israel and we boarded a plane in roughly 90-degree weather and we landed in Boston in probably—what was it? 32, 34 degrees, with wind and frost. The next day we arrived in Boston, it started to snow and I keep telling everybody is stopped snowing May 15th. It started raining May 16th. So anyway—


AN: This is ’70—December ’76. And I started working in January ’77. So I worked for 6 months in Boston and meanwhile while I was there, I was looking for a possibility to find another, another place, for another fellowship, because this fellowship was only for 6 months, and there was a gentleman in Baltimore by the name of David Hungerford who offered me to come and work with him, a mixed clinical and research fellowship. So I came. We moved over here to Baltimore. So in July of ’77, I came to Baltimore and we are here since. So the things that happened that when I was here for 6 months, they started telling me that they are looking for another person for the next year and do I want to continue and be here? So my contract was extended for a total of 2 years. So by that time I was faculty member at Hopkins and—

DE: What were you doing at Hopkins?

AN: Doing surgery, operating, and doing research.

DE: Okay.

AN: And I worked here on bone blood flow, and Hungerford didn’t have a lab, and I established a lab, created the lab. His department was located at Good Samaritan Hospital, which I stayed in connection until I was due to retire. After 2 years, I decided I want to go—I planned on returning back to Israel, but the situation in Israel was such that there was no open departments. Still, the current situation was so tenuous. No new hospitals were built. No new departments were built, and when I inquired and picked up my connection with many people in Israel, inquiring whether the contract I was offered by somebody and the promises I was given going back, how realistic, they told me not to dare even to fly and come back to visit him because he does not have anything to offer. He did not have a department. The department was nonexistent, did not have instruments to operate. He did not have space to admit patient to—so, and then was the time that my children started growing, adjusting, starting high school here [tape skips] and I opened my private practice. So in ’79, August ’79, I opened my private practice and I was in private practice since. I retired from active orthopedic surgery in 2002, and afterwards I worked at—that was because of some health reasons, and then I worked as a physician in orthopedic surgery consultant to the social service, Social Security Service.

So this is kind of the story of my [laughs] my life so far in which the part which is relevant to your education or to the education that I want to impart is, no doubt the story of, the horrible story of the Holocaust, but the way I feel that I was able to despite of the enormous difficulties I encountered, I
managed because of my intense desire to achieve a higher education, to amass that despicable knowledge to bring, to be a surgeon, an orthopedic surgeon, and take advantage what are modern, modern life can offer in terms of providing for my patients and providing for my family. I want to think that my family thrived and my children and their children got married, and the children has 2 children, so now the family of one single child, Yaffa, and one single child, myself, is together a family of 14 people, plus 16 with the 2 dogs.

DE: [laughs]

AN: One is represented in this photograph and the other dog that’s not in this photograph. So anyway, this is the story, and if we reflect to the story of the Jews that went and suffered the whole Holocaust horrible times, and what was important and how that can be avoided in the—what brought me satisfaction and pride in my achievements, in my family’s achievements, is education. My son studied and he’s a Ph.D. in computer sciences. My older daughter finished MBA from Duke and my little daughter, she’s a lawyer. She studied at NYU and became lawyer. She’s a lawyer in New York.

So I continue, Yaffa and I, continue to provide opportunities for education of our children, and we think that the most important thing in life is education. You have to learn. You have to read. You have to widen your horizons. You have to see history. You have to be proficient in sciences, but you have to be proficient in social studies and in history so that history does not ever repeat itself again. How can we achieve that? Well, each one in its own way, but one thing. You have to learn, understand and be able to differentiate between what’s right and wrong, and to be able to have a strong character, to stand up for what you think is right, and you can reach that only by education, not by somebody telling you that the world is, that the earth is round, but by doing things that could teach you and understand, you comprehend why people say that the world, that the earth, planet is round. Science is—there are all kind of ideologies that have survived from the Middle Ages and seem to have some researches now, the 21st century, that are bubbles, that are non-scientific. You should be able to have that knowledge to study, to pursue scientific approach to our life. Scientific approach is look at the facts, try to understand them, try to repeat experiments that you can, and failure, failure of an experiment is not a failure. Failed experiment is something that you have to study and learn from it. So, we have to thrive to something that I think it’s the motto of my way of thinking is, never again. Never again Holocaust. And way in which you should fight it is by education and pursue your education. And the more people that are educated, the more people go to, to higher education, the better our world is going to be. So, that’s what I have to tell you. I could have spent another, another 3 days talking, going in further details. I think that I would bore you. If you have questions, I’d be very happy.

MP: I have a question. You said that a long time ago that they had found your father’s ring and his pocket watch. Was that all taken or do you still have them?

AN: That pocket watch I have. We have it somewhere in the house. I don’t remember at this minute where it is. I do have that. The ring, I know that my stepfather sold it and gave it away because they would not allow, the Romanians were not allowed rings, not even wedding rings for them to carry with them. So they melted all the gold and sold it to get some money because we had to pay for the ticket, the boat ticket, to come to—so, what happened to the silver cigarette holder, I don’t know. It was lost to me throughout the years.

NC: You also talked about having a book that you picked up from—

AN: Yeah.

NC: Would you go and show us that book, please?
AN: You—okay, I’ll show it. So keep on asking and before you leave, I’ll go upstairs and I’ll bring it down.

NC: Okay.

AN: That’s interesting. Or you want to make—you want to pause and you want me to go up and bring it now?

MP: Either way.

[End of Interview 3.1]