Interviewers: Alexis Vast, Lauren Geldzhaler, David B[?].

[Beginning of Interview 3.1]

David B: Hello [indistinct] um I’m David B[?] and I’ll be asking you some questions today, and I’d just like to know did you react when you heard the war was over? Do you remember when you learned that Germany had been defeated?

RB: Not when Germany was defeated. When we got liberated. This is the period. I was staying, like I told you, with my girl friend from the convent who had come to pick me up and stay with her parents, and I would say that that was--we got liberated, I think--Brussels, where my mother was, got liberated in August. I think ours was like a week or two later because it was like two-pronged. They came up from the south. On one side was where the British coming up more to the small towns, and the Americans came through, went straight up to the capitol, Brussels. So it was like two-pronged. The Americans were ahead of us a little bit. We didn't, and in that little town that we were staying in Leuven with my friend, you can just imagine. We heard that we were going to be liberated by troops, but we didn't know yet who they were, whether they were English or the Americans. We didn't know at all. And then, all of a sudden, we hear, like there were, when they were withdrawing, the Germans, there were many little bridges in Leuven and surrounding it, and they were blowing them up as they were retreating. And then, as we were in the house, we went to the window, my girl friend and I, and we looked, and you wouldn't believe it, like you see in the movies, the soldiers were crawling on the floor in the street, and each time-the front door from the building is a little bit receded from the front--they were laying in that door on the floor, crouched and with their gun. And that's how they overtook street by street. And as we were watching the window, and being that I had English for four years already, somebody, one of the soldiers shouted, get away from the window. Get away from the window, because he was scared that we were going to be shot at by the Germans shooting. That's how, when they got the street covered, then they came in, marching in, the soldiers.

So we ran downstairs. We ran out. We ran to the first soldier. We hugged him and kissed him. Oh, and I didn't even realize yet that they were the British, and we said, ah God, and they didn't even know what it was for me. For me it was double freedom, to be relieved of the thinking of that every day I could be taken who knows where. It was just unbelievable how, what a joy. That joy is immeasurable. You never experience something like that in your life ever again. It's like probably these poor people today, whether it be Katrina or whether they got now the earthquake when they come up, it's just such an unbelievable, overpowering feeling.
But then since I was liberated, I wanted to know whether Brussels was liberated already, and they said yes. Then I said to my girlfriend--I stayed another two, three days with them because we wanted the Germans to be a little further away yet from that town. And then I said, I'm going to my mother. I have to go, and I left, and that was unbelievable feeling.

Now coming to my mother, and she was still living in the house from the resistance fighter, but now she was liberated and I was liberated, and we heard that the World Jewish Congress was helping the Jews who had survived. So we went to that place where [indistinct] I want you to know something. You're in total shock anyway. You don't even know how you'll react. I mean, you don't even know whether you're alive or not. It's such an eerie feeling. So we went there, but what I do remember is they said, we're giving you money for rent and we're giving you money for secondhand furniture. Go to a secondhand place. What do you need? So we figured we needed a bed to sleep and we needed a table and chairs and maybe some dishes and maybe some linen. We had nothing. So they numerated and they figured it out and they gave us some money, and we went and looked for a place where there was secondhand furniture. And we found an apartment in an attic in the Rivendell, and we decided--it was just like a kitchenette and a place for a table with four chairs, and right behind there's a small room, but a double bed would fit, but not a chiffrobe. I don't think we could put a chiffrobe there. We just stacked it, I think, on boxes in the corner, and that's how we started.

Then after a few days, my mother said to me, look, you're the oldest now and you've got to take care of your mother and your sister. That's how it was in the olden times. And I said, yes, I'm going to go look for a job. And I found a job, and this gentleman was a Jewish gentleman with a small business he opened. He needed a typist and somebody to answer the phone. I said, fine. I can do that. And somehow when I was--but he was such--how shall I say? A hard man, hard man. But I tried not to be too much in this. I tried to do my job I remember, and then the one day he comes to me. I was just telling that story because people always think they can't lie. For some people--I was brought up like that. You don't lie. It's always hard for me to say a lie. If I feel it's not worth it, I'd rather not answer, but if I need to, I will lie even though my father always said, oh, my God, lying is like the biggest sin to him. But here, even here, I hear older folks. They need something and they will say, but I can't lie. So I realize they haven't gone through much in their life because if they go, you lie when you have to.

So this guy said, I'm working and I'm telling that story, too, sometimes. Here I am 17, out of the convent, shy, reserved. I'm afraid of my shadow, and here he comes and he said to me, you know my wife wants strawberries--and this is midwinter in Belgium. Where are you going to find strawberries?--And you better don't come back. Go and look and bring me back strawberries and don't come back without them or I fire you.
Now I needed that job. I needed to bring my mother the money. What am I going to do? So I go. I figured, how am I going to find strawberries? Where do I know where there's a store with strawberries? But I went out and that's when you learn to put aside every bit of shyness that you ever had with a new, and every bit of anxiety. I went to the main street. I knew I had to go to the main street. Anybody that came across me, please, could you help me? Do you know where I could find strawberries? And after a few people there was one person who said to me, yes, I know where, and I'll show you where. And I did go and I found the strawberries and I came back. It's then that you realize that you are getting aggressive. In a way, it builds the aggression in you, that you have to do things even though you don't want to do them, but you have to for survival. And then you start realizing more and more, yes, you should be truthful, but you should learn to lie, too, in order to get what you need. You see what you need, not because for the sake of lying and not for the sake from nothing, but for survival. It teaches you a lot. See, and this is where I feel a lot of the young people here in America don't experience that and sometimes fail because they don't get the opportunity to start with it and then develop a certain sense of conquering things that you were unable to think of that you would conquer.

DB: When did you meet your husband?

RB: Well, this was now right, we're now, let's say after the liberation. Daily survival. I go to work and my mother is trying also to find some sort of work. Now we find out from the government that we are allowed to get wool. Wool was sold only on the black market. It was just black market all over because you couldn't get it, but the government allowed you to buy wool from, let's say, England or Australia. You could buy wool, regular price, not black market price which was outrageous, but regular price. And why is my mother entitled? Because we had a knitwear factory that I told you that my father went bankrupt in, and being he was the second largest manufacturer and they saw how much he paid in taxes and everything, they allowed my mother to buy a lot of wool, but with one condition. She could not sell it, the wool. She had to manufacture. How do you find a manufacturer? This is after the liberation. The people who were in that business, the knitwear, were mostly Jews and now they're gone. Who are you going to do? But, you see, there's another element within the Jewish people. We have always bartered with one another. You give me that. I give you that, and there's always an in between person that you can get who helps you. Let's say, it's the same like with weddings. In order to get together, a man and a woman, they go to a matchmaker. There was always these times, but the matchmaker was, let's say, for girl and boy, but here there was also a matchmaker, which we didn't call a matchmaker, for bringing, let's say I want wine. I don't know where to get wine. Somebody knows. There's somebody who know where you can get wine, so you go to that person and he brings you then to the person. It's always that commercial type of things which was all over.

So we found a person who says he knows of some survivors who are looking for work, too, and they are knitters. Now the question is how they going to knit? I mean, they haven't got anything.
Again, they went to the World Jewish Congress and said, we would like to make a living, but we need a machine. So the World Jewish Congress gave them money. It was, I remember like today, like about $110 to buy that machine that he needed.

Now my husband was--there were seven people who survived in one apartment. It was his father, his mother, his brother, his sister, her husband and her husband's brother. They were seven people who survived, never went out for two years, and the resistance fighters came and brought them food, and also tobacco, but not real tobacco, to keep them occupied to make cigarettes. They smoked them, too, to their detriment, but they smoked them and they also made them. They were the ones.

So my husband went to the World Jewish Congress, and he wasn't my husband at the time, and he got a machine being the father knew how to knit. The brother, the younger brother knew, and he himself knew how to knit. They knit on that machine 24 hours. They took shifts. And my mother got the wool. She found out about it. She brought the wool to them, and they knitted. They manufactured and we sold it to hotels, to certain stores. There, too, my husband, being that he was capable, my mother said, how about you being the sales man? So he made some extra money there, too.

But I never went to see him. I wasn't even involved because I was working now for Americans. I switched and I worked for the American PS. So I never was involved with that and my mother was involved with the matchmaker, the in between. He carried for her the packages and she went to pay them, and I never was involved for two years while I was working for the Americans. But then, one day--I don't remember. My mother wasn't feeling very good, and I had already finished working for the Americans and now I was working for the World Jewish Congress. I got a job there in the research department. Why research? Because we got tons of letters from Americans who were looking for their relatives in Europe, but mainly Belgium. They said they have a brother or the nephew or an uncle or someone and they wanted to know whether they had survived, and we had all the books, the catalogs, that the Germans had kept where we could spot right away this one. Of course, names were very different. Let's say they came to America and they made it Newman, but it wasn't Newman. It was Norman. It could be spelled Neiman. It could be spelled any which way. So we used to take that name and we were four people. One was from Hungary, one from Czechoslovakia, me, the Belgian, and one from Germany, and we kind of analyzed the name. I was the youngest, but we kind of analyzed the name, what it could be. For instance, the name Newman in American which was Norman in German and Neiman maybe in Czechoslovakia. They, the people from Czechoslovakia, Jews, also changed their names sometimes and it became--and he, the Czechoslovakian knew that. He said, this could be Novotny. It was a very Jewish name, too. And then we looked up Novotny. The name is there. And sometimes it used to take us three, four days until we could find what the American wanted, and of course most of the time they were not there. We had to answer them and--we had to
answer them and being that I spoke and wrote English, I answered the letter then to America and said whatever. The others also spoke English. I can say it, all that. So that was an interesting position, but after two years somehow. Now we're liberated in '45. The war ended '44. I worked for the Americans from '45 to '46, a year and a half, and then for the congress, World Jewish Congress.

And one day my mother wasn't feeling good and I don't know why, but she said, why don't you go and pay them, you know? I didn't even know where they were, but I found the place and I came down, and as I'm coming down, my husband had heard that I worked for the Americans, but I loved to go dancing at night. You know, they had a dancing there and I danced with them and I met a lot of Americans, and I had a lot of propositions to come to America. But I don't know. I just said-- they were wonderful young men, wonderful. Decent. Such decent young men, really. So good and so understanding. Even though I used--most were Protestants and I had never heard of Protestants. I didn't even know what it meant because to me Christians were only Roman Catholics. I didn't know any. But they were such nice people and I always felt maybe they're anti-Semitic or so, and I used to say, you know, I'm Jewish and invariably every one used to say, “That's okay. Why are you saying that?”

I said, “Well, I just, maybe you don't want to dance with a Jewish girl or whatever.” No. That's what I admired. I said, ah, these Americans are just wonderful, and because you see the Roman Catholics, like my girlfriend, she had to go and ask her father confessor whether she could be a friend with a Jew. It was so indoctrinated that they shouldn't, God forbid, and I used to think, oh maybe they don't want to get together so it's no. And I must say I met a wonderful American. He was from Texas. I loved it when he sang these cowboy songs. He was divorced and had a child, and he proposed and I went with him for a while and I said to him, “Look, I hope you're not upset about it because I don't want to make you feel bad. I was saved by Christians, but I cannot marry a Christian. I have to marry a Jew. I can't betray my father.”

So he says--you know what he said to me? “You know what, I'll convert and I'll become a Jew.”

I said, “No, I would never ask that of you.” But he was really serious and I thought that was so beautiful, but somehow he had to go to the front or somewhere. We went together for six months, but then he--

But as I said, as I'm walking down there to pay my husband the money, as I'm walking down his younger brother was there and I didn't hear it because they were in the other room, “Oh,” the younger brother said, “Listen, if you don't want her, I want her. I'll ask her for a date.” But as I come down and I pay them, and that's the first time I ever met them, and my mother dealt with them for three years. He said to me, “Would you like to go on a date?”
I said, “Yes, why not?” So I went out with him and that's how we developed. That's how I met my husband and that's--we got engaged a few months later and married six months later.

**DB:** How did you decide to go to the US?

**RB:** Yes.

**DB:** Why didn't you want to stay?

**RB:** No. I'll tell you what happened. My husband, when he smuggled himself into Belgium. He smuggled himself from Germany to Belgium, and his family. They were illegally there. When he came in, he had already papers to go to America from relatives. They had intended to go to America, but, you know, in between the war and all that. His older brother was here already, but they didn't make it, but they had the intent to go to America. So then they went to the embassy in Germany. He was born in Germany and Germans, they went right away. Poles, forget about it. You're a Pole, born in Poland, there was like five-year wait. Germans pretty quick. You could go pretty quick and also he had already applied for it right after we got liberated, so that was in '45, early '45. So that's when he went. He went in '47 to America, so a few years. And his parents had gone because of his older brother they came, so he could go, too. And I didn't want to stay in Europe. I had made up my mind. I didn't want to stay. It was too sad. It was too anti-Semitic for me. I didn't want to stay there. I was either going to go to Palestine at the time or-- I didn't want to stay in Europe. I said, that's it, and being I met him, he said, “I'd like to go to America.”

I said, “That's fine. I'm going to America.” It was hard. It was so hard. Today when I think about, I came here. He came here before me and he was a camp counselor and he had earned about a hundred dollars for the whole season, and he had that kind of money on him when I came, and I came with $25 and that was our fortune. But first we went to the Jewish agency because I needed clothes. I needed other things when I came, and they wrote up what I needed. It was like $65 in those years--a dress, a coat, whatever--and my husband $55. They gave him $55, me $65. They said, you're young. You can make it. At that time--would you believe it?--that in New York on Fifth Avenue you could buy a dress for two bucks, 50 cents, a nice dress. It's just, when you think of it today, it's like insane. I can't even believe this, that this really happened. It's just unbelievable, but it was very hard to get a job. I couldn't get a job. I was going to do dishes and all that. Then I became a nanny, found a place as a nanny, worked there for three months, and they gave me $150 a month, which I thought, oh my God.

And then we got our own apartment and I used to say to my husband because in Europe there were no--we didn't have any bathrooms. You had like outhouses mostly or one on the floor for five apartments, up to the attic. There was only one, just a toilet, that's it, and a sink. You washed
yourself in a basin when you boiled up water. So I used to say, and there were bathhouses where you went to take a bath or a shower. I used to say to my husband when I came to America, “If I ever own my own bathroom, I'm going to feel like a millionaire.” And when we got our first apartment where I had to pay--you see, there was no apartments to be gotten in New York. You just couldn't get an apartment. You had to bribe. Who did you have to bribe? The janitor. Now, my mother-in-law got us an apartment, but we had to bribe the janitor. I had saved in just a few months, I had saved--well, I got $150, I had $450 because my husband worked a little bit, not much, and being the nanny, you slept in that house. I didn't have to pay no rent and all that. So I saved the $450 and I felt so great, and we had to bribe the janitor $300, and painting. We had to pay $100 for painting the apartment. So the money went, but I didn't care because we had an apartment. It was not a furnished room. A furnished room is unbelievably dirty and all that. So then I had my own bathroom. If--I will never. As much money as I'll ever have in my life, I'll never have that feeling as when I had my own bathroom. It's so overwhelming. It is so unbelievable the happiness that I thought I would never have. But afterwards you get used to it, but it's an unbelievable feeling. Your own bathroom. Then you can take a shower or wash yourself whenever you want, not at a designated hour or something. All these things, young people don't realize how fortunate they are. And now when you're going to take a shower, you're going to think about it [laughs] how fortunate Americans are.

So then, when I was here, as I said to you it was very hard to get a job because there was that underlying anti-Semitism which I talked about. Wherever you went, they wanted my mother's maiden name, and the minute I said Rosenfelt, we'll let you know. After a while I got wise to it. This is New York 1947, '48, yes, terrible. Until, as I said to you, I beat them to their game. Like I say, you learn for survival. So you say, what's your name? Rachel Bodner. What's your mother's name? Mary Bodner. Father's name? John Bodner. Invariably, I didn't need. I got the job. You have to go through--do you know, to find a job, I don't know whether today they're doing the same thing. Years ago was the resume. I mean, now it's the resume. No. No resume. They give you a book with maybe 30 pages and it's got little holes, and you punch the little hole with your pen, and they ask the most stupid questions. How many times do you go to the bathroom during the day on the job? Do you get along with other people? Don't ask, and yes or no, yes or no, and you have to answer. These used to be the tests for applying for a job as a typist, as a secretary or whatever. Yeah, it's incredible, but I made it somehow. There must be a lot of people that couldn't go through that. They were too annoyed by that or whatever. But I got some good jobs I can say, and I worked, and then I became pregnant. I got pregnant and I said to--

**DB:** What year was this?

**RB:** I got pregnant in 1950. I should say '51 because he was born in October '51. But luckily my mother had gone to Israel. She wanted to go to Israel. She went to Israel and after--but I had registered her. Before I left I said, Mama, if you ever want to come, you're a Polish citizen. I'm
registering you with the American consulate, and if you get called or whatever, you just say no, but let it lay there, which was such a good thing that I did in 1947 because when I applied, she wanted to come from Israel to America, she was already registered three years, and she came. In those years, being that I made the application to become a citizen, she could come on the second preference. See, as a wife and a husband you come, and a child, you come on first preference. But if you are a parent and you make an application to become a citizen, the parent can come on the second preference, which speeded everything up, and she came just before my son was born which was very good that she came. And then somehow my husband--he worked as a cab driver--even though he could have made much more money being a knitter, but he didn't want it. He said he wants something else and he became a cab driver, and it wasn't that much money and it was really hard to make ends meet. And being that I knew how to sew--I had gone to Fashion Institute in Belgium as I told you, and I went. He worked all day from morning. That's like a certain hour that they go from 5:00 to 4:00. That's their, and then the other cab driver takes over, 4:30, 5:00 'til the morning and then he comes in. And being that I was trying to figure out how am I going to make extra money, and you know what they did? They gave you--if you wanted to type at home, I think it was--if you wanted to type 1,000 envelopes. I think it was 1,000. You could make $5. So I said, no way. A thousand envelopes for $5. Even though I was going to do it, but I said, how am I going to do that? But then, it wasn't like today that people were afraid to go out at night. In Brooklyn the dress shops were open 'til 10:00 at night, and why? Because when the husbands came home, they used to go with their women to these little dress shops and they got alterations there. It was right away fixed for them. So there were girls who were sewing, but they wanted the regular hours, let's say from 10:00 to 6:00. They didn't want to stay late. So I went and I asked her whether they could use somebody. We had three little dress shops in my neighborhood and I asked them whether they could use somebody for sewing, hand sewing or whatever, because I said I knew how to do alterations which I didn't, really didn't, but I figured out I could do it, whatever. So they hired me.

So my husband came home 4:00. The kids were--or 4:30. The kids. I had two infants my then. The kids were bathed already and fed and in their crib already by 5:00, and I had cooked in between. Five o'clock, my husband and I, we sat down. We ate. Five thirty, the dishes went in the dishwasher. I got dressed and I went to the dress shop from 6:00 to 10:00 at night, for four hours. I was so thrilled. For four hours, something that I liked to do, $5. A dollar and a quarter an hour, but you know what? Five nights a week, five days a week, $25. That paid for all my groceries and I saved $5. I put away. I said, that I got to save. And I liked doing it. Besides, I liked doing it. After a while, the women who used to come into the store, they used to say, Rachel, we like to go and buy by Macys, but would you do my alterations?

I said, yeah, but how am I going to go about? I need to buy a machine. So I bought a machine. First I bought a plain machine, but then I bought a factory machine because I was used to sewing a factory machine, which is must faster and better. So then I bought a factory machine, and

Bodner Rachel, Interview 3
during the day while the kids were sleeping or something, I used to alter. They came to me because I lived two blocks away, and they used to come, the women, and I made extra money that way, and that's how you survive and you make the money. And that used to be most of my night.

DB: How long did you live in New York?

RB: I lived in New York really from 1947 that I was there, until I came here to Baltimore in '91.

DB: Why did you move?

RB: Because I have two sons. One son became a librarian in New York and he moved to Staten Island. He bought a house in Staten Island. He had a wife and a child by then. And my other son had gone to Israel for seven years, but came back to America and settled here in Baltimore. He came in 1990 and went to Baltimore, and then being he was here one year and he bought a house, then I knew he would stay here, and then I asked him whether he would want me to come here. He said yes, and then I came here in '91.

DB: Was your husband alive then?

RB: My husband, no. He had died already in 1988, with a cancer bout. He was pretty ill in a way throughout his life because just being hidden and never going out for two, over two years, it's like a prison sentence and it did work on him which I didn't realize at the time, but it must have worked on him mentally because why? Every time there was a crisis, he got ill. Either like a nerve in the shoulder, a nerve in the leg, and then later on the cancer from the smoking the weeds that they did when they were young. The smoking weeds. There must have been something in the weeds because the--his sister's brother-in-law, was their husband's brother, also was doing the weeds and smoked, and he died also of cancer a year after my husband, so there must have been something.

DB: Did you work in the dress shop all those years?

RB: Yeah. Well, I did first at home because I wanted to be at home. I had to take care of the babies. It was very hard. How could you get a babysitter or anybody? You would pay more than you make. But then when they got to be--when the oldest one was bar mitzvahed--he was 13, I went and I started going out of the house. I didn't want to work at home anymore. I worked in dress shops then during the day while they were in school. So I was home with them when they came home, part-time like. And my husband opened a little, with a partner, a little grocery business, but it didn't make much money. It was a very hard life.
And then afterwards, little by little, he had to sell the business because they were not making it do. He went in for a bigger company and he became a manager. First assistant, and then he was a manager for Walbaums, which was a big concern. And life became a little bit easier, and then I went to work steady outside, and as the boys got older, I could work later or whatever.

**DB:** I remember in one of our previous interviews you had said that due to all that you had been through, life doesn't seem as joyful you said.

**RB:** Yes.

**DB:** You said this changed when you had your sons.

**RB:** Yes. I was very thrilled. This was part of happiness. To have your own children is just unbelievable. It's such a purpose in life. Maybe before it just seemed you marry. You live together, fine, but children make you really appreciate life more. Yes, they were my joy and my happiness, and working and all that was nothing to me because I wanted them to have a good life. And then we used to go to the Catskill Mountains, to the hotels, and that was a real joy with them. So there were. I'm not saying that it was always down, but let's say, in a way there were the ups and downs when you felt so wonderful, but there was always something happening. The car broke down and you needed extra. It was mainly the money worries. Money worries, that's why--that is so important for young people to realize that the money worries overtake everything. Everything falls by the wayside if you don't feel you're going to make it this month. Where am I going to do? What am I going to do to augment? And you probably go through life with that, too, but you know something? In the long run when I'm looking back at it today I say, why was I so worried? It always worked out. Somehow it does work out, but it puts such a stress on you.

Then I had a mother-in-law that didn't help, either. Very possessive. No one was good enough for her sons and that, too. And I'm not the type of person to open their big mouth and to say, shut up. Did you see the movie "Monster-in-Law" with-- Then you'll get an idea.

**DB:** You said it took you--when did you go to Europe? You said you visited once.

**RB:** Yes, I did go there in--it must have been 12 years ago. Yes. I must have gone in '93 there because it was 12 years. No. I'm sorry. ’95. They came to visit me '93. I went in '95. Exactly ten years that I saw the one that's coming this week. Yes, in '95. I went back and--because I never wanted to go back. I never wanted. But somebody, like I mentioned before said to me, you're going to regret it. When you're going to be older you may say to yourself, why didn't I ever go back?
So I said, well, that's something that I'm thinking about, and I did go back. And you know something? I didn't miss a thing. I was so right. I realized one thing. There are certain things within me. When I think about a certain thing, I make a decision. Always like I say, the first decision seems to be the right decision. If it says don't go. It's the same with the telephone or anything. I'm ready to leave or something. No, stay another half an hour. I'm sitting and there's an important telephone call. There's like--I don't know what it is, but it's like something you have to eat. That little voice that tells you what to do. And my mother always used to say, the first one, accept the first one. Don't even think of the second, and she was right.

**DB:** So you just visited Antwerp?

**RB:** I went to Antwerp to visit the daughter from my best friend from the convent and I stayed there for a few days, but then I stayed with another lady in Landersale which is next to Brussels, and she was the woman, the companion, who helped the monk who had helped me. She paid attention to him in the last years of his life, so I had invited her when she came, before I went there, to come and stay with me because I thought it was such a wonderful thing. And I went to Landersale and again, it's unimportant to tell you what it was, but I went to the bank with my friend to change some money and again I heard one guy making an anti-Semitic remark, and I said, they'll never change. They'll never change, and you could give me a hundred million, the sky, anything, that I should ever live in Belgium, ever! I don't want to feel. You remain a--I was born there. I was raised there. You remain a stranger forever. If you're not their kind, forget it. It's so wonderful here in America, so wonderful. You know, one is so accepting of another human being. There are some, but on the whole you're not going to hear any remarks like that over here.

**DB:** Did you, besides your return, some world traveling?

**RB:** Well, the only time I went to Israel was right after my husband passed away in '88 because he had never flown, and my son had gone to Israel before that, the younger son. He couldn't find-it was the hippie era. He couldn't find himself here. He went all over and he told me he wants to find his roots. Remember that? You were not here during that time, but all these young people, I want to find my roots. So they, every one of them. If they were from Czechoslovakia, they went there, they went there. He wanted to go to Israel. I said, fine, and he stayed there for seven years and married my daughter-in-law. But then--and I couldn't even go to the wedding because my husband was already ill at that time with another illness that wouldn't leave him. He had like a fullness in his ear. We went to every doctor. In five years, I must have gone, we must have gone to maybe 20, 30 doctors, each time in New York. Every clinic. Every doctor we could find. Maybe they could help him. He had like, when he explained it to me, when you jump into water and your ear fills up with water and you want to get the water out, and you can't get that water out, and it just keeps on pressing on you and you feel you want to lay back. When he laid back,
he had relief, and he used to say to me all the time, why don't they put me already in the box?
And this went on for five years, but that must have been already the beginning of the cancer that
went through his body. Nobody could find it, nobody. Blood tests, everything you can imagine. I
spent my time in waiting rooms by the doctor, and you see, my husband had also worked in
Germany when he was young and they were going to give him a social security pension, but he
had to go to a German doctor. And the woman said to me, if the German doctor that observes
him for ten minutes will--for ten minutes, if she sends him out, you're not going to get much
social security. He kept him two hours. He examined him, the doctor, and then when she called
me she says, he declares him a hundred percent disabled. But I never found out what, how, when.
It was never told, but then I knew that he was a very ill man. And then right after--I mean it took
like three years for the cancer to develop, and somehow, then he died. As I said, I went to Israel
right after because he wouldn't fly.

And when I went to Israel, it's very nice. It's a beautiful country and you feel so free there, too,
really. And it was fine, but there are things we're so used to in America. There, you got to wait
during the day if the sun shines and warms your water on top of the roof. I can take a shower
here midnight if I feel like it. Forget it. You have to take a shower when the water is hot. There
are many other things. I said, I'm not a pioneer anymore. I'm too old for that. I like my little
luxuries here in America. Besides, there was no heating. There are little things just for electricity,
and God forbid you put on two or three. They all blew. It's not that much. So I wasn't ready to go
and live there, but, and he said, Mom, I'm treading water. It isn't so easy to live here and all that.
And finally I said, look, if you want to come to America, I'm going to help you, but sending you
money there, it's just going down the drain. It's enough. And besides, he was in the army
there and I didn't like that too much either, which I'm wrong perhaps, but anyway. But I said, no.
If your wife wants to come, fine. Not you. Your wife has to want to come because I don't want
you to say anything later that I pushed you. But she wanted to come, too, and she came, and they
came 14 years ago, and that's what made me come here.

DB: How many grandchildren do you have?

RB: I have four grandchildren, one from my eldest son in New York. He's 17, and three from my
son here, which two are girls. One is 20, going to be 20. The other one is 11, and my grandson
who's 17, autistic unfortunately. Terrible, terrible illness. One should never know from it. It is so
incomprehensible that nobody can figure out what it is. He's prone to violent outbursts because
of frustration, not to parents, but he'll smash everything inside. So they have to carry a lot of
burden.

DB: When you came down here in '91 you said.

RB: Yes.
**DB:** Were you retired by then?

**RB:** I was retired, yes. I still try to go, but I did find a job here because I was so involved with them coming off of my husband dying and all that, so I couldn't do much, but when I came here, I said, I have to do something and I worked for a Mr. Miller who's in Charles Street. They have a fur shop, but I worked. He also had clothes, long hours. I would stay with him for a while and then he closed up, and I went and worked also in fur.

**DB:** So what you said about activities that you go to schools and talk around here.

**RB:** Yes. I will speak. They asked me. They called me. I think it's like 13 years ago. They called me from the Jewish Council here in Baltimore. They asked me whether I would like to tell my story which I had not done in New York because, you see, there was a long period of time when we came until they first started interviewing people that somehow they didn't want to hear anything, and Jews didn't want to hear anything because there's always the guilt that they didn't do enough they felt, so they'd rather brush it off and say, don't think of the past. Think of the future. So, we kept quiet for many, many years, and then all of a sudden there came that spark, maybe through the children and grandchildren where they said, why don't you talk about it? Why don't you say anything about it? So then we started talking, but not in New York. I didn't. We only gathered together. We used to speak of our experiences, each one of us, to each other. But then here, they asked me if we would like to go and speak in schools and we said, why not? If they ask us, we'll go, so being that I had the experience with the nuns, they tried to get me into Catholic schools, but I wouldn't say--the majority were Catholic schools, but I did go to public schools. I went to Bel Air somewhere and even around there, further north, and one of the Trinity schools and they call me every year. They want to hear me. So fine. So I'm going there. So I felt like why don't you film me one time and then I don't have to come. They say, no it's not the same thing as having the impact from you talking to them, so that's what I did. And I also spoke in some churches downtown Baltimore. They invited me. And I spoke to adults then, and I even went to a Passover. They made a mock Passover seder in one place. I don't remember where, also somewhere around Baltimore on the outskirts, and it was--which is the closest to the Catholic? Is it Evangelical? No. Presbyterian? No. There is one that is the closest.

**DB:** Episcopalian.

**RB:** Oh, Episcopalian.

**DB:** Right.
RB: They invited me and they had made a seder that I should explain to the people more what it meant and all the things. So I did go and I was impressed and I liked it very much. Because finally—

[End of Interview 3.1]

[Interview 3.2 is unavailable]