Magda Schaloum Transcript

RB: Hi, this is Roz Bornstein, and the date today is Tuesday, June 5, 2001. I am here with Magda Schaloum at Magda's home on Mercer Island, Washington and we're here today to gather Magda's oral history for the Weaving Women's Words project of the Jewish Women's Archive. And Magda, do I have your permission to interview and tape you today?

MS: Yes of course. My pleasure.

RB: Thank you very much. Why don't we start with where and when you were born?

MS: I was born in Hungary, and the name of the city, Gyor, but we moved away from the city when I was about a year old, and we moved to a city called Felsogalla in Hungary.

RB: I see. And who were you named after?

MS: As far as I know, in the time when I was born, Hungarian girls, especially Jewish Hungarian girls, were named Magda. My Hebrew name is Malka. I was told that the Rabbi's wife was Malka and, of course, the Hungarian name is Magda. We always in Hungary used our Hungarian name but my parents let us always know what is our Hebrew name.

RB: And who were your parents?

MS: My father's name was Gyula Altman. His Hebrew name was Gedalia. My real mother's name was Janka, and last name, maiden name, Welward. And when she died, then my father remarried. His second wife's name was Ethel Goldfeld. And her Hebrew name was Esther. My father's Hebrew name was Gedalia.

RB: And when did your birth mother die? How old were you?

MS: One year old was when my first, my real mother died.

RB: I see. And could you describe the circumstances? What do you know about her death?

MS: Only thing I have some pictures, and I have some photos of which my father wrote beautiful words on it, but we never knew, even my sister, who was about four and a half years older than I was when our mother died, and we never found out what our mother died of.

RB: I see. And how long after your mother died did your father remarry?

MS: A year and a half.

RB: I see. And so the woman he remarried is the mother that you grew up with.

MS: Exactly. And you know, like they used to say “stepmother” and I was always very angry because she really is the one who raised myself and my sister. My grandmother used to say to us that when she came, when my father married her, both of us, we were so neglected. And when she came she was a dressmaker, and my grandmother used to tell us that right away she started to sew clothes for us. I never forget the expression; she said, “In about a week, both of you looked like a doll in a box.”

RB: So she immediately took good care of you.

MS: Oh yes, yes. And I had a brother by the same father and my stepmother, and so there were three of us.

RB: And what were your brother and sister's names? Your brother's name? What was your brother's name?

MS: My brother's name was Endre and his Hebrew name was David. And my sister's name was Jolie and when she was born, they gave her the Hebrew name Yenta and she did not like it. So when she got involved with the Zionist organization (and she found out "Yenta, Yenta") she changed it to Chava. So when she died, her name on the headstone is Chava.

RB: Could you describe your parents' backgrounds a bit more?

MS: Well, I always tell that I'm not from a rich family. Very religious family. And because especially my mother was so very religious, it was very difficult in the old country, in a smaller city, to keep kosher. And it was everything very, very expensive. So, my father, he was a locksmith, and even when I talk to the children about the Holocaust, about my background, that what we didn't have financially, it was even more with the love in the family that made up. It was very difficult, and because of that, my poor mother really couldn't survive when we went to Auschwitz because she was so weak because she couldn't eat anything because we couldn't get anything kosher.

RB: I see. So she tried to maintain her – were you Orthodox? You were Orthodox.

MS: Well, yes, she was very strictly Orthodox and of course, I was also Orthodox but maybe not as strong as my mother. And my father of course – a husband eats what the wife cooks and he was also a very religious person. I have to tell you that, for instance, when the high holidays came, then either he had his vacation time from work during Rosh Hashanah, and not on Yom Kippur. So on the day of Yom Kippur, he would go early in the morning to check in at work, came home, changed clothes, and all day he was sitting in the synagogue praying. And one of his colleagues checked him out at night. And we were always so scared that somebody will miss him at work but my father always said, "No, Hashem will take care of," and he did. Yes.

RB: Was there one synagogue in your town?

MS: One.

RB: And it was an Orthodox synagogue?

MS: Yes, an Orthodox synagogue. And all the Jewish people from the surrounding smaller cities, they would come to this synagogue. There was the only one synagogue close by.

RB: I see. Do you remember the name of the synagogue?

MS: No. No. Never knew that there was a name.

RB: What about the rabbi? Do you remember much?

MS: We did not have a rabbi. We had a cantor. And for the high holidays, they hired a rabbi. But I don't even remember the cantor's name. He was a young man and married and had two little girls. And when the Germans came to Hungary and they took him away to forced labor camp, he wrote a letter that unfortunately he is forced to eat non-kosher food. The little girl, she must have been about seven years old, and we were already in the ghetto, and she said, “Let's all pray that Hashem will not punish my father eating non-kosher because I want my daddy to come back.” Yes.

RB: That's something. How old was she at the time? Was she very young? Was she little?

MS: Yes, about seven years old. I used to baby-sit her.

RB: Is that right?

MS: Yes.

RB: Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood in the town or –?

MS: No, our family did not live in a Jewish neighborhood but there were a lot of Jewish people, businesspeople mainly. The town where I lived, it was a coal-mining town and so some of them worked in the offices, and my father was a locksmith.

RB: What part of Hungary was your town located in?

MS: Well let me see, from Budapest, it is about sixty kilometer. When I was working in Budapest, every morning I would take the train early in the morning and come back at night. After when I couldn't go to school anymore because of the Jewish law.

RB: Could you describe that a little bit more? You stopped school because of the Jewish Law. What was that about?

MS: Okay. In 1939, when the first Jewish Law came from Germany, the German government gave the order to the Hungarian government what to do with the Jewish people. Which meant I couldn't continue to go to college. Matter of fact my sister just finished the college and became a teacher in 1939 and of course, she couldn't get a job anymore because they even fired teachers and engineers and even in a business, Jewish business, they couldn't keep any more than a certain percentage Jewish salesmen. So, therefore, it wasn't allowed for me to enter college so I had to learn a trade. So I learned to be an umbrella maker. So every day, from my hometown, I would go to Budapest to work, and late at night coming back home.

RB: How old were you at this time?

MS: Well, I finished, in 1939 – okay, I was born in 1922.

RB: Right. So you would have been about seventeen?

MS: Yes, correct, that's correct.

RB: Seventeen, okay. If we can take a few steps back, there's so much to talk about so bear with me here. If we could take a few steps back and hear a little bit more about your early childhood, where you went to school, and what the conditions were like for you then.

MS: Well, one thing is sure, in Hungary there was always a very, very strong antisemitism, and even though we lived among the non-Jewish people and I had practically all my friends were non-Jewish kids, and still, many times when I would walk on the street, or my sister, they would yell out, “Stinking Jew” and they would throw rocks at us and of course, we were so scared. We came home and our father always said, “Just ignore them and just walk on.” It was very, very strong antisemitism and even though my best, best friends, were non-Jewish girls. I would say they were nice, but later, when the Germans came to Hungary, then one of my best girlfriend's parents was one of the biggest antisemites and they forbid her to be my friend. Eventually she wound up in an institution because she was so upset about her parents.

RB: In a mental institution?

MS: Yes.

RB: I see, how tragic.

MS: Yes, they kept her always just practically closed in the house. One day she met a very nice young man who was visiting his sister in my hometown, and they fell in love. She was afraid to tell the parents because she was a Catholic and the boy was Protestant. And so through me, they used to meet but then this and then the parent’s behavior against Jews, really, really upset her and she became mentally ill.

RB: How sad. Do you know what happened to her?

MS: No. No. Because when we went back in 1975, I didn't find only one old neighbor.

RB: Wow. So you were able to go through school amidst a climate of antisemitism. It was hard.

MS: Oh yes, there always was antisemitism. And my sister, when she was in the first grade, you know I don't know today if they do, but at that time they were teaching the children during the religious hour that the Jews killed Jesus. After the religious hour, they attacked my sister that the Jews killed Jesus. And she came home crying and so my father had to go back with her to the school and the teacher tried to explain that it wasn't her who had done it. And that many, many years ago the Jews did that. But that always, always stayed in their mind. My husband used to say that in Greece they said the same thing. And especially my husband used to say in the village, before Passover, they wouldn't even let the children come out from the house because they thought that the Jews would catch them, kill them for the blood. I don't know if here in the United States they are teaching that way about Jesus. I don't know.

RB: What school experiences stand out for you that had the most impact on you?

MS: Well my sister was always an excellent, excellent student and even when she was five, six years old, always wanted to play school and she was the teacher. And she was a very, very bright girl, so she wasn't even six years old because her birthday was in November, but because she was so advanced mentally, they took her for first grade before she even turned six years old. Then she decided she went only up to fourth grade. Then she taught herself during the summer and skipped fifth and sixth elementary grades. Then she took an examination before the school year and she passed the first and second year of high school, so therefore, she gained four years ahead so she was an extremely bright student and because of that she had always free tuition because, in Hungary, you had to earn to be a good student to get tuition. But she was always a very serious person, but very loving sister. That was impossible that I could start a fight with her. No way. And so when I entered high school, well I was more

like easygoing and happy and dancing and whatnot. So I wasn't the best student but – let's say it this way – I got half tuition back. One of the professor whom my sister adored and at the end of the fourth-year high school, we always had to write an essay, what is our plan for the future. And my sister wrote that unfortunately her dream to become a teacher is impossible because my parents couldn't afford to send her to school. So this woman professor went to the director and showed the essay and they called a Jewish college far away from my hometown, and they arranged that they accepted my sister. Again, she went through everything free but in order to help herself to buy things necessary, she tutored children and during the night she studied. So her dream came true, became a teacher, but she couldn't teach after that. So myself, I made it. So I'm glad. This same professor was really comparing me with my sister. And I didn't like her. We had another professor who was my class advisor sort of, and she taught German language. I liked her very much. So, as it turned out, after the German occupied Hungary, my sister's favorite professor was one of the biggest, biggest leader of the SS. My favorite professor – it would have been our fifth reunion in 1944, and she wouldn't even go to the reunion because she knew that the Jewish girls are not there. Before my sister died, we talked about that situation and she was telling me that her favorite professor – of course, after the Russian came in and they pointed out that she was a leader of the SS group, the Hungarian SS, and so she was put in jail and she got in contact with my sister and she wanted my sister to help her to get out from the jail, that she was so good to her. And so my sister said, “I wrote back to her and told the authorities there's too much Jewish blood touched her that she didn't want to forgive or help her.”

RB: So even teachers were involved with the SS and with the –

MS: See, the Hungarian SS, they called it the Green Arrow Cross was the name of the group but just like the SS. So she was in a school and in my hometown, one of the leaders.

RB: And so there was antisemitism all the time, you felt, growing up, and then it escalated at what point? In 1939?

MS: Of course when the Germans came in, then it was much worse. For instance, my parents and one of my aunts, they bought a little property, close to our hometown, and built a little house on it, and the house was in my aunt's name in order when my father retired then he would not own the house, and therefore, not lose his social security. So when the Germans came in, that was March 19, 1944, and by that time already we, my mother and brother and father, worked on the lot and we planted already vegetables and so on. And when the Germans came in and we were still in our own house, and somebody came and said that they have to admit on paper that they had the right to get my house, this little house, and we had to give them the key. We couldn't do anything about it because they were protected by the Hungarian government.

RB: Between 1939 and 1944, what was happening in your town, in your family?

MS: Well, in 1939, already, they started to take away the Jewish men and they took them to the forced labor camps. But my father was working even more hours than before because, from the coal mine, the coal was exported to Germany. When the German military came in, that was terrible. I mean anybody could come to the house and take away whatever they wanted. There was no restriction. For example, before Passover the German military came in and I had a beautiful silk material. One of my neighbor girl, who was so-called my friend, was an excellent dressmaker. So she took the measurement. I wanted to have a new dress for Passover. So when the Germans came in, I said to her, “Please don't even cut the material, just give me back,” because they said that they'll take us away to work and I thought maybe a nice piece of material will come handy to exchange for food or something. But when I went to their house, and I said, “Well would you please give me the material,” they said, “If I'm not going to leave immediately, then they are going to call the police.” They just turned it around. And they

were friends, friends, yes.

RB: So the relationships that you had with non-Jewish people changed.

MS: Very much.

RB: Very much during that time. And your activities became much more limited. You were not allowed to go to school, they said, no school. What happened? Was it the Hungarian government or the German or both?

MS: Mainly, the Hungarian government did everything.

RB: What else changed for you during that time?

MS: Oh, see, by that time, everything was rationed, not only the Jewish people but the non-Jewish people, for meat, for sugar, for flour, and of course then when the Germans came in, we didn't get anything. The only thing instead, they gave for the non-Jewish people – I mean, we got also lard, but we used to exchange with some of the neighbors and we got something else, flour for it or something. So they decided that the Jews will get oil. Well, we never cooked with oil in Hungary so when my mother started to cook with the oil, nothing wrong to cook with oil, but she says – we didn't tell anybody of course because again if they would find out that we are okay with the oil, they would have taken away the oil too. And then of course came Passover, and they usually sent from Budapest to my hometown the matzah to buy but it wasn't allowed. Now there comes seder. No matzah. So the only thing my mother again exchanged the dishes and so we had seder without matzah, we had potato instead. So then when I started to go to work, during Pesach, I would buy it in Hungary and bring back home for her but again luckily I wasn't caught with that. But at least she could eat the matzah during Passover.

RB: What were your work conditions like at the factory in Budapest?

MS: No, it wasn't a factory. I was working in a Jewish store. And it was an elegant, umbrella shop and in the back was the workshop so that's where I learned the trade and then I had to give exam but he was a very, very nice elderly gentleman but couldn't do much and I still, I went every day, every day, even though when the Germans came already in and I went until we were taken out from my house and put in a smaller apartment building. They collected all the Jews already from the surrounding area too. And so then I decided I didn't want to take risk because I never knew if somebody will point out on the street in Budapest there's a Jew and then immediately they will take away the Jews. So I thought I better stay close to my mother because my mother will need me and my brother and my sister – she stayed in Budapest because she got the job later on she was a principal in a Jewish orphanage and school. So she stayed in Budapest. And then, of course, my sister was telling me later on that, of course, the Germans and Hungarians, they occupied the beautiful building where was the Jewish orphanage and so they had to take the children and hide the children. She said she and her future husband had false papers from Raoul Wallenberg.

RB: Is that right?

MS: Yes but she says, “You know, Magda, even the paper in my pocket didn't help me much because if somebody recognized me on the street, and they said, ‘that's a Jew,’ and they find me with that false paper, it would have been the end” of her. But again, she told stories when she was so, so close already being caught and escaped.

RB: So, did she hide the children from the orphanage?

MS: How many she could. Yes. But the older children, they took away the older children so she really had to take care of the younger ones, and like she used to tell as we saw on “Sound of Music,” how they were carrying the children, she says they gave something for the kids to sleep, and they would carry them. The older kids would carry them on the shoulder, the children, and trying to hide in different places with the children.

But it was very, very difficult, and of course, after the Russians came in, then she finally got a job as a teacher. So not only that she was teaching but she also wrote textbooks because she was very, very dedicated. In 1967, when they came here first to visit us and we begged them to stay here, "No, no, we have to go back and the children waiting for us. The Russian trusted us, and they let us come to see you. We have to go back." So they went back and then finally in 1970, all three of them, my sister, my brother-in-law, and the son, they came out to Canada. Left everything behind. Everything. A beautiful big apartment with everything like a library, so many books, because my sister was and my brother-in-law too, and everything with Persian carpets and everything. But before they left Hungary, they painted everything camouflage, in case they can stay in Canada in 1970, then the housekeeper who was with them for sixteen years agreed that if we will write to you a letter that we are arriving in this and this time with this and this plane, please wait for us. That means we are not coming back. So she went to the airport and waited for them and very upset they didn't come. The housekeeper, they were asking did you know, did you know, so she was very – I didn't know, but I'm glad they did it because now they are with the family.

RB: What made them decide to move to Canada in 1970?

MS: Because her brother-in-law, my brother-in-law's sister's husband, was already in Toronto, Canada since 1956, and he was established already as a heart specialist. So because of his connection, my brother-in-law who was already a radiologist in Hungary, with the brother-in-law's recommendation, started in a hospital over there. You know, go to internship, residency, and so on. And he became in Canada a doctor.

RB: Well, I wonder at this point if you could tell us what happened as things started to escalate between '39 to '44. What started to happen to your family and loved ones?

MS: After '44? Well, as I said, they took us away from our home and on April 1, we had to put on the yellow star and then from that apartment building, again we had to leave the

place and they put us in our synagogue in the social hall belonging to the synagogue. And must have been some time – middle of May, they took us away from our hometown, they kept my father back because they put him down in a coal mine to work with other Jewish men so he didn't come with us; only my brother, my mother, and myself. And my sister was in Budapest. So, we were taken to another city, and we were there for about ten days – no food. By that time, I just didn't know what to do with my mother because still somehow we got some non-kosher food but she wouldn't touch it. I remember, somebody gave me a cup of flour, and we were taken to an old, old military fort where you know in the olden times, they had big baking ovens so they heated them up somehow, and some people baked bread. So I took that flour and the water, made little patties, and I put it in the oven and baked it. I took it out – a piece of rock. I said to my mother, "Please take a glass of water, put it inside, make it soft, and try to eat it." Because I thought maybe, maybe it will give some energy for her. So then about middle of June – no, this must have been the 18th, they put us in the cattle wagons to be taken away. But we didn't know again where they are going. We are going to work somewhere. So as you probably heard already, they put people in one cattle wagon, about one hundred, one hundred- twenty people. As I was pushed inside, it just happened that I was standing in front of that little window like you see on old-style cattle wagons and as I looked out the window, I saw my father standing outside and I yelled out through that window, "Dad." And he heard my voice, and he tried to come up, and he had a little package in his hand. I tried to push myself through that crowd but it was impossible, so I saw that they grabbed my father and they asked him what he wanted to do, and he said he wanted to give that little package to his family. And unfortunately, they took it away from him, and they started to beat him and kicked him, and I never saw my father again. Finally, about two o'clock in the afternoon, the train started to move so we went during the night, next day all day, and on 21st of June, which was my brother's fifteenth birthday, we arrived. Well, of course, people died on the way, old people, they had little babies with the mothers, but it was impossible even to sit down.

RB: On the cattle car, is that what you mean?

MS: Yes, yes. And they gave two buckets, in one corner, the other corner, that's where you're supposed to do your business. I remember my brother needed, so I had in my little suitcase some cups, I don't know why, but so I gave it to him to use. I had to give him another one. I was very angry at him. So I remember going – I had my menstruation, so I put one panty over the other. Finally, when we arrived and we saw the name Auschwitz, we didn't know what that mean, Auschwitz. Never heard of it. Finally, thank God – we thought – they opened up our doors and we're going to go out and we're going to have fresh air. But first thing, they yelled out, "Separate the women and the men." And they took my brother away. My mother of course was devastated. So again, we had to stand up five in a row. So, my mother, in Yiddish, asked somebody – because already on the side, people were working from Czechoslovakia or Poland, working there to take the luggage and whatnot from the train. My mother was asking in Yiddish, "Where are you taking my son?" "How old is your son?" My mother said, "He is fifteen." "Oh you don't need him anymore, you don't have to nurse him anymore." And my mother was just crying, and I tried to comfort her but at that point, I practically had to hold on to her; she was so weak. So, of course, now it comes to the point that we have to go in front of Mengele, and of course, again my mother was sent on his left, and I was sent on his right. I tried to run after my mother, and they grabbed me back and they said, "Just go ahead. She will go take a shower, and you will go take a shower and you two will meet." So again I yelled out, "I love you mom, and I'll see you later." That was the last I saw my mother. So and then, the rest of it, I don't know how they took us in a big hall and again we had to undress all naked, and they said again always with a lie, "Fold very nice your clothing," and they will – handbag, my diploma in there, and some official papers, my pictures, well put everything down, you are going to take a shower and you come back and take your belongings." So, of course, then we had to turn on the left, and there were men standing and they shaved our head, underarm, by our privacy, and here they put us in an ice-cold room, waiting, standing in a line, five in a row, and then finally –

oh, I remember, on the side of that big hall, they had toilets, so we rushed, went inside, and we were so thirsty that we bent down and we took with our hand the water from the toilet bowl, and we drank the water until the SS noticed what we do and then they started to beat us. So then finally they said, “OK we are going to take a shower.” So we had to run, again, big room, and from above, ice cold water came on us, and we got all wet and again in another big hall, ice cold, by that time already the sun coming up because when we arrived, must have been about one o'clock at night. You know, at that point, I always have to remember – and my husband used to tell that because he came from Greece, of course in Greece they came already two years before, and he was saying that when they arrived, which we saw too, from the chimney, the black smoke came out, and it stunk. They asked, “What is that smell?” And my husband used to say that those people working on the side said, “Okay, if you will see tomorrow this smoke and you cannot have the smell, then your mother, your father, your brothers, sisters, grandmother, grandfather is being burned, and that's what you smell.” And, of course, my husband said, “We thought that he is just making us scared.” But unfortunately, later on, we found out that was true. And you know they would grab from young mothers the little babies, toddlers, and give them to some old woman that they will take care of them until we get together again. And they took the children to the gas chamber. We stood in a line, in the hot, hot sun until finally, they decided to give us something to eat. They brought a potful of hot soup, and they said, “This potful of hot soup has to be enough for 10 people.” So we started to drink that but it was hot so after we were able to drink it, we thought, “We couldn't believe – what is this?” Because it felt like you have sand between your teeth.” So then the younger mothers who were with us, and we always tried to stay together from my hometown, said, “Kids just drink it, drink it, something, maybe some vitamins, something warm in your system, just finish it.” OK, we finished it. So next morning, they took groups out and gave us a wheelbarrow, and they took us far away to a field. We had to pick the grass and fill up the wheelbarrow, and we had to take that grass to the kitchen. This is what they did. They put it in boiling water and one day they put a lot of

salt in it, the next day no salt, and then we found out what we were getting. Every second day, they had a “selection,” we had only one piece of clothing, and we had to get all naked, and between SS men, SS women, we had to run. And the person who couldn't run fast enough, they always said, “We will send them to the doctor.” Of course, we found out there is no such a thing as a doctor, but they went right away to the gas chamber and crematorium. So, after ten days, I was taken away with a big group to Krakow-Plaszow.

RB: Why is that? Do you know what –?

MS: In Poland. And Plaszow is the place where Schindler had his factory, but of course, I didn't know anything about his factory until I saw the film. And I can't even tell you how terrible, terrible life I had in Krakow. In Poland, again, what they did, they let out from the jail the hardcore murders, and they said they were charged to take us to work and so on. And more you will make them suffer, they will have a better life. And of course, why not? So then also in Krakow, they had what they called political prisoners, Polish people who did not get along with Hitler's idea. If somebody found out that they had one bad word against Hitler, then they were taken also in concentration camp. And so I had one foreman, and every morning I would go in his group – very, very gentle gentleman and felt very sorry for us. What we had to do, for instance, they said there's a hill, and we have to level the hill. So they gave us shovels and picks and wheelbarrows. So we had to fill up the wheelbarrow and push it down the hill, and the next day, we had to fill up the wheelbarrow down below and push up with the dirt and the top of the hill. So this foreman said to us, “ I know it's very hard work. It's hot, hot day, and you can not stop on the top or at the bottom, but if in the middle of the hill, going up, if you see that the coast is clear, then just stop and rest.” And again, as I said, we were always together from my hometown, the four of us, and each of us pushing a wheelbarrow. We looked around, and there was a fence but not electric fence like in Auschwitz. Nobody was around. We stopped. Suddenly, we saw one of the SS officer coming to the fence with his German

Shepherd dog, and he yelled out something. The other girls had more knowledge with the German language because they had German nannies at home, and they pointed at themselves and said “No, no.” So finally I pointed at myself, and he says, “Yes”, and he pointed to come close to the fence, and he yelled out something . I didn't understand that word even though I studied German, and I said to him in German, “I'm sorry. I will work hard. I will be diligent, I don't understand German.” I repeated everything, and he repeated again the same word. So finally, I understood he wanted to know who is my foreman. I said, “I don't know.” I wouldn't give a name. And so he called over another foreman, which was not my foreman, and he told him to take me to the gate. So we walked to the gate and we met face to face and the first thing that he did – I don't know why – he turned around, and he gave a slap on this guy's face. So then he started again to tell me the same word, and again I started to say, “I'm sorry, I don't understand, I don't understand, I will work hard.” And he started to beat me. He hit me in my face. He kicked me with his boots in my stomach. I tried to cover my face. But finally, I could feel my eyes are swollen and blood from my mouth coming, and he's still yelling the same word. The dog next to him, he is already growling, waiting for the command to attack me. So finally some of the Hungarian girls who were working on the side just took the courage and went up to him and told him that I don't understand German, that she would like to help me. So he looked at her, and he says, “Ask her why did she smile.” And I looked at him, and he said, “Look, she is smiling again.” So I still don't know what he saw on my face that he thought that I was smiling, and then he gave me one more in my face, and finally he let me go. Then he said, “I will make your life miserable.” And every morning, he would grab me from the other group and took me in his group, and he gave me the hardest, hardest work as possible. What other person had three people to work, I had to work by myself. It was terrible. Until he decided that he wanted to meet me at night behind the barrack, and of course, my answer was no. And I always say that the hardest horrible life I had in Krakow. We were there for six weeks. And by that time, our hair started to grow back. Then the Russians were close to Krakow to take over, so they

had to empty the camp. They took us back to Auschwitz. So and that time when they took us back, then we had a tattoo put on. Again, of course, in Auschwitz, we really didn't work much. But every morning at four o'clock we had to get up. Cold, it was very cold, stand in the line, five, five, five, and waited to be counted. Finally, about eight o'clock, between eight and nine o'clock, they came and counted us, and that point, already again, the sun came up; it was burning hot. And we got so-called coffee. We tasted – if it had a little sweetness, then we drank that liquid. If not, we used it to wash our face. So the sleeping condition – you probably heard already that from other people. It was bunk beds. In each barrack, I would say there were about 1,500 people. And the ground was dirt, and the bunk beds were three-layered, and the size of a good size queen size bed – ten people, eight to ten people had to sleep on it. So we were body to body. And, of course, the electric fence, it was so strong that if somebody was about a yard away – it was so strong that just pulled the body and killed him. And unfortunately, there were a lot of people who committed suicide that way. The woman who was in charge of the barrack was a very, very cruel Jewish woman from Czechoslovakia, terrible, beating us with the whip and yelling dirty words because she knew some Hungarian language also. On the opposite side of the fence were the men working, and they yelled over to her, "Why you are so cruel? Why are you beating them?" And so she just yelled back something dirty, dirty word for them. But I heard that she was liberated in Czechoslovakia and nothing happened to her. Because I talked to somebody who went back to Hungary and found out. So then again, every second day, we had a selection. When we were still in the last ghetto in Hungary, there was one young lady – they brought her in, and they took her off the train because she didn't have any ID card with her. Because she didn't have an ID card, they thought that she is Jewish, which turned out she said, "Yes, her mother was Jewish, and her father wasn't, but she didn't admit it to them," she told us. And she was married, and she was pregnant. She was at that time pregnant about, I think, two months. And so she was all, all by herself, crying, so my mother told her, "Look, we don't have nothing for ourself, but if you want to stay with

us." So she stayed with us and she came all the way – we were together in Krakow and back to Auschwitz. Of course, she got shown more pregnancy. So when they took – in August of 1944, in Germany one of the factories needed five hundred Hungarian women, and because her pregnancy was showing, she was held back, and I was among the five hundred, and we had some of the mothers from back home and the daughters from back home, which also among the five hundred. So they took us to Augsburg, Germany, and Bavaria, and we were taken in a factory to work. At the beginning, they were groups they took to different places to work, and in my group, I had to go to work and outside to clean a bombed factory. So separate bricks, separate the steel, and so on. And came Yom Kippur. Even in the factory during Passover, it just happened that Passover was the same time as the Christian Easter. So the second floor, the third floor, I should say, the civilians were working the same job what we did on the second floor, so when they didn't work on the weekend, they took us up and we had to scrub the factory ground. I decided no, I'm not going to eat any bread. So, for three days I tried, but then I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it, I had to eat the bread and whatever. So now we go back again to Yom Kippur. Now the Germans they knew that Yom Kippur is a fast day, and they sent out food, big container of food, and they prepared the best, nice-tasting soup. And of course, I just couldn't touch it because just to think back about my parents, just the memory of my parents, I couldn't do it. So we had two ultra, ultra-religious girls with us, both fathers were very famous Hungarian Rabbis. So now, as of today, I don't know how they did it, that they had a little siddur. How? I don't know. Because we had to undress entirely naked, nothing, nothing. I don't know how. So, of course, they said every morning, every night the prayers, and the night of the Kol Nidre, one girl who had beautiful whistle, could listen, and she knew the melody of the Kol Nidre. She was whistling the melody, and these girls were praying the Kol Nidre. Anyway, what we did during daytime on Yom Kippur – we took the two girls, each of them we put in one barrel. It was a big metal barrel, and we put them inside, and we said, "You just pray, and we will work." And that's what we did. All day we worked. We came back at night, so I already eat whatever they

gave us, these girls couldn't eat because even that soup that they prepared was cooked on that day. So anyway, then some of the women who worked in the kitchen were stealing potatoes or raw potatoes, raw carrots, and so they gave to them to eat. So this is how we tried. Also, it was very interesting in Augsburg – there was a mother and daughter. She was also religious woman. She was working inside – oh, then later on, I have to say, one of the girls from my hometown went to her foreman and said that I was supposed to be the sister because only the number we had – that my sister is working outside, could you please do something for her to work inside a factory, which finally I worked inside a factory. We lived inside a factory also, and so – what I wanted to say from that?

RB: Something very interesting, you said. You started it with, “Oh, this is interesting.”

MS: I forgot, but anyway. So in the factory, we also had the SS women and SS men who were in charge of us, and our hair started to grow back again. Among so many Jewish women, there were all kinds of profession. So when we were taken to Augsburg, we got a dress, a very long dress. One of the girls who was back home-made bras and things, so cut off a piece of material, made for me a bra, and the thread – we pulled out from the blanket the thread, and we used that. And then, from the others, she made for me a little panty, so I had a bra and a panty and still, the dress was below the knee. And then every Sunday, we didn't work. They would take us to a shower, and we washed our clothes. Afternoon was quiet, and many times, we put on some plays. Singing and telling jokes, and then we thought, “Well, who knows what tomorrow will bring?” So as I always say, because I was in this factory, maybe I'm still alive. And even though I don't know how – we got lice in that factory. Body lice, head lice. The bunk bed had straw mattress, and we got bed bugs. We don't know how. And so we were always so worried when from Dachau they came in a control, and we'll find out we have lice, who knows what could happen. So, this friend of mine who was pregnant – I found out. It's very, very interesting. After the liberation [break in tape]

[END OF CD 1]

RB: This is Roz Bornstein, and I'm back with Magda Schaloum. The date is still June 5, 2001. And we are still at Magda's home on Mercer Island, Washington. This is mini-disk number two. We're continuing Magda's oral history for the Weaving Women's Words project at the Jewish Women's Archive. Magda, do I have your permission to continue interviewing and taping you?

MS: Yes.

RB: Thank you. Where did you leave off before? Where would you like to start up again?

MS: I think I was talking about after the liberation, we lived in a DP camp, and I was already – my husband and I, we dated, so I'm talking about a month after the liberation when one young Polish man came up to me, and he was all excited because he recognized me from Auschwitz. Because sometimes, when the bunk beds broke, then they brought in some carpenters, or they called themselves carpenters, to come to the women's section to see maybe they found somebody from the family. So he said he remembered me. In Auschwitz at that time, I had a dress which was cut in the front, and in order to cover myself, I picked up the bottom of the dress and held up like that. He says he always, always remembered, and he always said, “I have to meet this girl, God willing.” And lo and behold, here he saw me in Feldafing, and of course, I was already committed to my husband, and I asked him, did he remember my friend, remember the pregnant, and he goes telling yes. And she had the baby in that barrack, and I guess that bad woman who was head of the barrack felt sorry for her, and she took her inside her little room, and he said that she was liberated with the baby. So also, then in Augsburg, there were two sisters, where the older sister was married, pregnant, and unfortunately – I mean, she was already ready to have a baby, and they took her away to Dachau because this factory was a branch of Dachau. After the liberation, we found out

that she delivered the baby, and the two sisters got reunited and the baby. So miracle happened. So then, in that factory in Augsburg, we had SS people, and one day came one high officer, a Wermacht officer, higher than the SS officer. Of course, now if I think back, when he came – he was such a good man. I mean, we always said he was like a father to us. Whenever he would come inside the factory to check on us, and when the SS came, we didn't know how fast our hands should work, fast enough for him not to get angry. But this officer came in, says, “Just take it easy, take it easy, no rush.” But then I found out, of course, he knew already that the Germans are losing the war. Then before they took us away from Augsburg, he stood up on a chair, and he said, “If you will have to die, I will die with you. If you will be liberated, I will be liberated with you. And he was liberated with us.

RB: Excuse me. What was his name?

MS: No, I just entirely forgot his name.

RB: So he was an officer.

MS: Yes. But he stayed in Feldafing with us. So from Augsburg, they took us to another DP camp – no, no, called Muhldorf, in the concentration camp, and this is where my husband was also – a lot of Greeks were already in Muhldorf – with his brother. And when we arrived in Muhldorf, we found out that the opposite side of the fence, there were a lot of Hungarian men, and so I went to the fence, and I asked if, by any chance, my brother or my father – I gave the name, but no, they were not there. But at that point, when I saw the Hungarian men, how they looked, skin and bone, dirty, hungry, I just – it was terrible. But they took us out still working over there, we had to dig some holes for telephone poles or work on a potato field. So when they put us again put us in a cattle wagon, and we were going back and forth, back and forth, with the train, at one point they yelled out from one of the stations that the war is over. Somebody must have known from the Germans that the whole train – I don't know how many thousand Jews,

were Jewish people, and so they opened the doors, the gate, and a lot of them started to run and to see which way to go home, home, where are we? So soon as they ran over behind the station, they waited, the Germans waited for them, and they shot them. So this Wehrmacht officer yelled out, he yelled, “Everybody go back in the train.” And if he will tell us that we are free then we can believe him. Then that was another case during that train ride – the night before we were liberated, May 1, we had all the SS women, SS men, with us on the train. In the morning, must have been about five o’clock in the morning when somebody yelled out that the American Army is here and again we were afraid to go out, but some of them did go out and yet they came back with the cigarettes and chocolate and chewing gum. So the American Army. All the SS were gone. All disappeared during the dark night. Only this Wehrmacht officer and two of his girlfriends stayed with him. So they were taken the same place where we were taken, to the DP camp, and they all stayed until they got papers and they went home. So about a month later, after the liberation, I went with my Hungarian girlfriend, who had a Greek boyfriend, and the Greeks, they were in a different barracks. We were in different barracks. And she decided to go to visit him. So I just waited for her at the entrance. And suddenly, my husband walked in, and he stopped. And, of course, he couldn't speak my language. The Greeks, they speak five languages, and he hardly could speak German, so he asked me my name, and I told him my name, and we set up a rendezvous. And so we couldn't speak the language, but we had a great time, and he always – when we said goodbye, he would blow me a kiss. When we came to the United States, he would say that I do it here, he said when he spoke already the language he says, “You know I should sue them because that was my trademark.”

RB: Excuse me. What languages did you speak? Or do you speak now? But back then, what did you speak?

MS: We got married in June, and we still couldn't speak the language.

RB: What did you speak?

MS: Well, I was ready to go back home with transport because I thought that my father is still in Hungary, and my sister. But he wouldn't let me go, and he used to say in German, "*Ich Liebe Dich*," and "*Zusammen.*"

RB: What does that mean? Together?

MS: [Speaks German] Together. But not [Speaks German]. That's how we started out the language. "I love you." And so we got married. And he had a brother and when he told his brother that he is going to marry. He couldn't – but he was very nice about it and what happened – when couples decided to get married, once a week, the burgomeister, which the mayor of this little town where we were, would come to the office and we would go and take two witnesses and get married. And, of course, that was the civil marriage. And I had one cousin – he found me because what they did every day – they had a list put up to each DP camp, so we would go to look up the list if we find anybody, and he found me in another camp, and he came to Feldafing. So he was my witness that I was not married at all. So when he had to sign, he just didn't want to sign. I said, "Why don't you want to sign?" He says, "What am I going to do? I will go home, and I have to tell your father that I signed your marriage license?" And I said, "You just sign it, sign it." So finally, he signed it. And he did go back. So anyway, I said to my husband much as I could explain to him, "I don't want to have baby. No. No. No." Because thinking back, the life that we had to go through. Of course, my husband was about four years older than I, and he was telling – he's expert, expert. No babies. No. I was one of the first Sephardic wives who got pregnant.

RB: [laughter]

MS: So we were very scared, unhappy, and we went to a German doctor to have an abortion done.

RB: You really did not want to be pregnant.

MS: No, no, no.

RB: Oh, I'm so sorry.

MS: So the German doctor wouldn't dare to do it. We went to a Jewish doctor. He was ready to kick us out because after being so many children killed, you want to kill another one? So, that's my son.

RB: How did you manage at that time?

MS: Meanwhile, you know, my husband and his brother started to do black marketing, and I would sew inside a pajama jacket cigarettes, and they put it on, and they would go with the train to different cities, Hamburg and Frankfurt, and did some black marketing. And meanwhile, my brother-in-law was with him, and of course, when he found out that I was pregnant, he was the happiest. Oh, he was so happy that finally, they're going to have either their brother's name or sister's name. But when Henry was born, he was born exactly just starting in the eighth month. And they were gone, black marketing because we went to the doctor, and the doctor said, “Oh, you have two months more.” And so they left, and when they came home, I had already my son. And my husband decided the Hebrew name is from his father, Pinchas, and his name had Endre for my brother, so we called him Amrico. And when we came to Seattle, they said, “Oh, Andrew, no, no, no.” And the social worker from the Jewish Family Service talked us out of it, and his name became Henry.

RB: Why did she do that?

MS: I don't know. But of course, Lucia also was born in Germany, and of course, we wouldn't change because Lucia was my husband's little sister's name, so we kept the name Lucia for her. So then the youngest one was born already here, and he got the

name from – okay, my husband's brother, Jacob, in 1946 in August, they had a motorcycle accident in which my husband was driving the motorcycle, my brother-in-law behind him, and there was on the side another Jewish man sitting there. My husband was driving. He saw coming toward them a big American truck, and it was going back and forth, so he decided suddenly to stop at the side of the road. As my brother-in-law wanted to see why he stopped, the truck came and hit him on the head, and about three hours later he was dead. So my husband, same time, his leg got injured, and therefore that's why we were so long in Germany, until 1951, December, because he had very difficult time to heal the leg. My younger son got his name. Jack, Jacob.

RB: What a time. What a time.

MS: But then we came here.

RB: Why Seattle?

MS: We were supposed to come to San Francisco, and it was December, so we all packed all our summer clothes, and everybody had two big, big wooden boxes where we put some belongings and so all the summer clothes we put in and kept the winter clothes thinking that we are coming to New York. But instead of New York, they took us to New Orleans, and it was hot. So when we arrived already on the ship, they said that in San Francisco, the quota is closed, and they are going to send us to Seattle, Washington, thinking that we are going to Washington, DC. And when we arrived in New Orleans and the Jewish people, people from the JCC, waited for us. They took us to the JCC and a long, beautiful table set with food, and they gave everybody some summer clothes, and then they put us back on the train at night, and we got between the four of us forty dollars.

RB: What four?

MS: To buy something to eat.

RB: No, I mean, what four people? Who else were you with?

MS: My husband, myself, and the two kids.

RB: That's right. So they were babies.

MS: Yes. So anyway, now we were really hungry, and so we saw that people are going in a dining room on the train, and I said, “Okay, we have to go to the dining room and eat something.” So I had my little dictionary with me, and I opened my menu, “Chicken salad.” Okay. So we sat down, and the first time my kids and myself, they saw a Black man. A big Black man who was a chef. And he was always so nice to little kids, especially Lucia was crying, scared. So I pointed out on the menu “chicken salad.” They bring the chicken salad, big pile of salad. Ate it. The chef came and asked, “What are you waiting for? Eat. Chicken. [laughter] Chicken.” Oh. Little pieces of chicken. [laughter] So that was our first meal on the train. And then we saw again at one point a lot of the American people, they get off the train, they come back with food. So there was a non-Jewish woman with their daughter, also refugee, and she could speak a little bit of English. We decided to get off the train and see where is this store where we can buy something. Well, the only thing we saw is a little cafe. So we walked inside, and we said, “Bread. Bread?” [laughter] And I said to the girl, “They think probably we don't have money.” So I take out my money. I said, “Bread.” She went in the back and says, “Okay, okay.” So then we said, “Butter?” No, butter, in German, butter. Because it was written in the same way you write in German – butter, butter. Looks at me. So I wrote down “butter.” “Oh, butter! Butter! Yes.” So we bought the butter and as we looked out the window, lo and behold we saw the train is leaving. Nothing on us. So what are you going to do? Just to find out, while we were bargaining, another train came in the front of our next lane. So finally, we got back. We got the bread, like Wonder Bread, and we had butter, and I had in my purse one can of sardine, so we opened the sardine and made sandwiches. Oh, the bread did not taste good at all. Like cotton. But we had that

to eat. So then, when we – finally, we arrived in Portland, first. In Portland, we had to change trains. As we came closer to Seattle, the weather was cold. Then we went inside in the bathroom, and we changed again the clothes from our bag. When we got to Portland, the kids saw a store over there and chocolate and candy. We had the money to buy because we didn't spend much. Anyway, the kids got the chocolate, candy. And then we arrived in Seattle, and the lady from the Jewish Family Service, probably a volunteer, was waiting for us. And she took us with her car down to Third Avenue, to a place called Hotel Haddon Hall. Across the street was a Security market. So they put us – all the newcomers they put first in that hotel. So we had a little kitchen and dishes. I would go across the street to the Security market with my little dictionary. I just couldn't believe that I am waiting to be served and the other people are already paying, and still, nobody's serving me. Then I realized it was self-serve. Well, I paid, left, and I cooked. We arrived end of December. We stayed until February, until we found a house to rent on Capital Hill. We had to go every month to the Jewish Family and Child Service called that time to make the budget. And we got so much for rent, so much for electricity, so much for this, this, this. And we had our social worker, a woman. She was not married at that time. She spoke a little bit Yiddish so she spoke Yiddish to us, and she's the one who convinced us that we have to change the name. And every time we would come to make the budget, “Why did you have to buy that, why, why?” So one day, my husband was very sick with an ulcer, so I took him in a taxi to Harborview Hospital at about two o’clock afternoon. One of my neighbors took care of the two kids. And I was sitting with him. He was bleeding, and it was terrible. Until they settled him in a room, and by ten o’clock at night I took a taxi to come home. Well, when I went back to show what I spent, she saw that I took a taxi at ten o’clock at night, “Why didn't you take a bus to go home?” And I never forget. I said, “You don't understand. I had two children with the neighbor from two o’clock in the afternoon.” And I said, “I left a very sick husband.” I said, “But you don't understand that because you are not a mother,” I told her at that time. My husband came home after the surgery, and I decided to get a job. On 7th and Stewart,

there was a men's clothing factory, and I saw an ad in the paper. I went and introduced myself, but I didn't tell the Jewish Family Service that I'm working because they would have deducted the money. And during lunchtime, I rushed home, running to give my husband his lunch, and the children came home for lunch from school, run back again. They paid me – I think I started out with fifty cents an hour, and because I didn't want to join the union and postponed it – but still, I brought in some money, extra. So then my husband already was a little bit stronger when one of Jewish women called that on the First Avenue there is a cleaning and tailoring business, and the place belonged to Warshal's sporting goods. So she said, “Why don't you go and see if you like the place.” My husband was a tailor from back home. And this woman knew because my husband used to work at Friedman's surplus store, and my husband was sent from the Jewish Family Service to work to repair Army clothing which they bought from Fort Louis, big pile of clothing, and they separated what had to be repaired. So my husband worked. And this Jewish man, Mr. Friedman, really was very nice to my husband. I remember during Passover he would give money, extra, to buy food. High holidays he would give him some money. In 1953, we opened the store. We made the agreement with Warshal's Sporting Goods, with the two brothers, and so we started out. First of all, my husband had to clean up the whole place; it was so run down because the guy who rented the place was a drunkard, and the business was run down. Cleaned up everything, so we started to work, and lo and behold, I got pregnant. It came the worst time when we tried to just get up on our feet. But I still went to work and my two kids – I never had any problem with them. They came home from school, they called me, because I went to work with my husband. And came home at night, and I had a routine that night before I prepared a dinner for next day and so on. And my daughter had to peel the potatoes or cook the spaghetti or something, whatever, or just start to heat up the food, and I never had any problem with them. Never. So as I said, we were very unhappy when I got pregnant, but still, I went to work every day. Matter of fact, I went to work on a Monday morning, and I just didn't feel good. At night, we went and wanted to buy an area rug.

We picked out the area rug, came home, and it was almost time to have my baby. So Tuesday, I had to stay home, and late at night Tuesday night, went to the hospital, and Wednesday morning at nine o'clock, our son was born. So I was working up to the last day. But again, we were happy, and the kids, we never neglected the kids. All the newcomers, we were all kept together like one big family, and on the weekend in the summertime, we would go picnicking. Even while my husband was working, I would prepare in the summertime the dinner, put it in a basket, go on the bus, go to either Madison Park or Madrona Beach, and he would meet us over there, and on the weekend, we always went someplace for a picnic and in the wintertime we got together with friends in their home. I mean, we practically had the same-age children. And so the children were playing separate, and we had a great time.

RB: Was this organized through Jewish Family Service or just amongst yourselves?

MS: We found each other, and we kept together.

RB: Became close.

MS: And then, of course, when the kids were older, and it came time for the bar mitzvah – bar mitzvah and weddings, showers, and we helped plan and prepare them. It was beautiful.

RB: At what point did you join the Sephardic Bikur Holim?

MS: Immediately when we arrived to Seattle, we were still in that hotel downtown, and the following day or two, a couple came, a Polish Jewish man who was married to a German girl. So my husband and this man, they decided they're going to go to find a synagogue. And first they gave the name Temple De Hirsch. Now just imagine this. The place where we lived was on Third Avenue. And this man and my husband, they went walking around. On the Second Avenue, Second and Virginia, there was a church. But the church had a Mogen David outside, and what it was written they didn't

understand, but because they saw the Mogen David outside, they thought it's a synagogue, so they went Saturday, and it was closed. We asked at the hotel desk, "Where is a Jewish synagogue?" They said Temple De Hirsch. Now from Third Avenue, my husband and this man and my son, who was at that time about six years old, walked all the way to Temple De Hirsch only to find no tallit, no kipah inside this synagogue. So finally, they found somebody who spoke German, Yiddish, whatever. They said, "Oh, you are looking for Orthodox." Yes." So the Ashkenazic and the Sephardic synagogues were on Yesler, and the two synagogues were practically three blocks away. Again, we were walking all the way. So by that time, we moved already to our first house, which was right behind Butterworth Mortuary.

RB: So this is near Boren? Is it near Boren in downtown Seattle?

MS: It's Bellevue Avenue and Pine. That's where we lived. So we walked from there all the way to the synagogue, and we joined the synagogue. As soon as my husband made a little money, we started to pay dues. And from that time on, we are members of the synagogue.

RB: That's remarkable.

MS: And I would say very strong members of the synagogue. When my husband died, I bought a brand-new Torah in his memory.

RB: That's beautiful.

MS: And they are using it practically every Shabbat because it's a modern Torah and a lighter weight than the other one. It was ordered from Israel.

RB: It's really beautiful. Wow.

MS: Yes.

RB: Can you tell us what it was like to be in the Sephardic community as a Hungarian woman? What was that like for you?

MS: Well, it was very interesting after the liberation when we were in that displaced person camp. The Polish Jews didn't think that the Sephardics were really Jewish, and the first high holiday, they gave a big hall for the Sephardics and, of course, a big hall for the Ashkenazic. One survivor was about sixty years old, and he survived the Holocaust. And they called him Barba Morris. He led services as a rabbi, and he was very religious. And there was a young man, and he was like a Hazan. He had a beautiful voice. He knew all the prayers. Now I still don't hear the melody here what they used that time, the Sephardics with a Turkish melody. So when the Ashkenazic heard the prayer, and they came inside, and they saw that we are reading the Hebrew we got from the military, little prayer books, then finally we were accepted by them, the Turkish Jews. So now, from that time on, I was involved only in the Sephardic services. Today, if I go to the Ashkenazic synagogue, I cannot follow the prayers because it's an entirely different pronunciation.

RB: Isn't that something? What was it like learning new customs for you?

MS: So the first thing they ask us when we arrived to Seattle – “Where do you want to live?” Because there was a big, big apartment building, I think they called Monument Apartment, it was on Yesler Way. And mostly, the newcomers moved in that place, and we decided we didn't want to live with them. We wanted to live among American people. This way, we can learn the language faster, the customs faster, and that's what we did. We moved in that house which was owned by a very nice Greek Orthodox man, Mr. Angel, and he remodeled the house beautiful and gave us a very reasonable rent. So we lived only with American people. Therefore, I learned faster the language, and of course, I went to evening classes to which is now the Seattle Community College. It used to be Edison High School. So we used to go evening classes to learn the language.

RB: Wow. And you were working and had children, and you went to school. That's amazing. How did you do it all?

MS: Because you have to make a living. It's different than if you go on a vacation in Europe. But if you have to learn that language, you have to. I mean, for a long time, we spoke half Yiddish, half German because, in Feldafing, I learned more the Yiddish, living within the Ashkenazics mostly. So I had to learn the language and go on.

RB: What did your husband speak to you? What language?

MS: When we came here, we spoke German to each other, and slowly, we turned to speak only English. Yes.

RB: That's amazing.

MS: And so my older son, when he joined the Army, it was during the Vietnam War, and of course, he knew the German language still remembered, and when he put down on his application or whatever you call that he speaks German, luckily he was sent to Germany in the Army and not to Vietnam. He is still today, the two of them, if I speak to them German, slowly, they understand what I'm saying but very little they know in German.

RB: Were there Sephardic customs that you had to learn or that –?

MS: At the beginning was really even, let's say, a Seder, I did the Ashkenazic way because I didn't know the Sephardic way. I didn't know how to cook Sephardic food. And I remember when one Seder we were invited to Fannie Roberts – you know her – and the first time I really saw Sephardic food. And then she gave me some of the recipes, so I started to make for my husband the Sephardic food.

RB: Who taught you how to cook? Did your mother or you learned here?

MS: No. Absolute. Because my mother said I had to go to work. Only Sunday, she wanted me to take care of my stuff, and I didn't learn anything – cooking, nothing. But then, in Germany, just thinking about the flavor, I started to cook. I mean, as the kids, I always tell the kids, “I hate to cook.” Still, today, I hate to cook.

RB: Why?

MS: I don't know. I would wash dishes. I'd do anything. And anybody cooks for me, I don't care if they say oh, it doesn't taste good. Tastes good to me because I didn't have to cook it. I just don't like to cook. And the kids say, “Mom, don’t say that because you are an excellent cook.” So, I still bake some. Everybody likes my kourabiedes.

RB: What's that?

MS: Well, that's a little Greek cookies.

RB: Could you describe them for people outside of Seattle who may not know about these cookies? Can you tell us what they're made of? How do you spell the word?

MS: Oh, it's a Greek. Kourabiedes. Anyway, it's unsalted butter, or if I want to make that should be parve, I'm using unsalted margarine. And you melt the butter or the margarine very slowly until you see that the pure butter, I'm talking now butter or margarine, the yellow, beautiful gold color butter comes on the top. And even on the top, you see some foam, you take this off. And the bottom settles like the milk. So you use only the pure butter. You let that stand until hardened enough that you can beat with the mixer. So I would say one pound butter. I don't know exactly now. It's in the cookbook. Powdered sugar and vanilla flavor. You mix it all together until you can make little balls, and then shape it oval. And what they do usually – they put a clove in the middle and bake it very careful because it takes about eight to ten minutes and it's baked. And then you roll it in powdered sugar and put it in a box and put on the wax paper or foil paper, you put sugar, and you put these cookies on it. Then you can put it in cool – don't put it

the freezer or refrigerator. Cool place, it stays for two months. So whenever somebody has a wedding or bar mitzvah, I still make it for them. And I used to make excellent baklava.

RB: When did you make your first baklava?

MS: I had a Christian Greek friend, and she taught me about thirty-five years ago. I used to make excellent baklava. But again, nowadays, too sweet. I made the kourabiedes, I made for the Bazaar. Oh yes. And I made that with margarine so they can eat with meat because it's parve.

RB: Could you tell us about the Bazaar? That's an important part of the synagogue, so tell us.

MS: Bazaar, it's a beautiful, beautiful affair. But unfortunately, we have a very difficult time to find people to work. Because the older ones, and I'm talking about when they were my age, for me they were older, like Mrs. Benaroya, Maimon – what was her name? Jack Maimon's wife. Your grandma, Rose Calvo, and Eda Mezistrano.

RB: Louise Azose?

MS: Yes.

RB: There's so many.

MS: And Donna Baruch. I mean, when I used to come and help on the Sundays, they were so wonderful. They really tried to teach us because they wanted the next generation to take over to know everything. And, of course, the most difficult is to make the spinach bulemas. And I mean they could make the dough – your grandma was an excellent, excellent dough maker. And even I think two years ago she did that. And so the way they stretched out that dough. And then, I would work with one of the ladies.

They'd say, "Don't look over there. Just look at me. I know how to do it. Just learn from me. I know." "Okay, okay." Everything was exciting. Now I'm still very, very much, I guess, helping for the Bazaar. Now we are trying to make a different way this – even the bulemas – because our back is hurting so what – [Recording paused.] So, we are still baking bulemas, borekas, bizcochitos, baklava.

RB: This is for the Sephardic Bikur Holim?

MS: Yes. Sephardic Bikur Holim. If they would just know, the younger ones, how much fun it is. I was the President of the Ladies Auxiliary in 1983, and I didn't know anybody. Then, just to listen to the people – "Oh, this is my cousin. Oh, this is my second cousin." Everybody was related to each other. And here I was, I didn't have anybody except for my son-in-law, the family, and I was just listening. Even now, last time, before December, still I found out how they are related, related. There's a very nice article at the end of La Boz, which Judy Amiel wrote because even the mother and daughter function – so many of the young mothers didn't even put an effort in it to come. And the same thing with the Bazaar. I mean, this is the most important fundraiser for our synagogue because what we're making, the Ladies Auxiliary, how are we going to use it? Are we going to take a trip or what? No. To support our synagogue. We have to buy a van. We put new carpeting in. We help to put in the air conditioning.

RB: Major fundraising.

MS: Yes. And it is so difficult to find young people to come to work. So I don't even know what will be this year. We take orders.

RB: What do you mean by taking orders? Is it for baking?

MS: Yes, like you want bulemas, or you want bizcochitos or you want bourekas, then you call the synagogue, and I would like to order so many and so many, and then we would get together and bake.

RB: So the women will help bake and fill the orders –

MS: Yes.

RB: – of Sephardic food for people.

MS: Even the mother and daughter, it's so difficult. And luckily you know we have a young boy, the Varon [inaudible].

RB: Frank?

MS: No, no. Oh, forget. No. Eli Varon. And he is still at the Yeshiva, and he wants to be a cook. And what a sweetheart. If he has to work all night in the kitchen to prepare for a function, he will be there. Anyway, so mother and daughter. They prepared such an elegant, elegant dinner. They had prime rib. You can imagine. I think they had too much food, and they had delicious dessert. They had so much food left over. Karen Adatto, she finally, the only young one who offered, they ask her and she volunteered to do the decoration. See this flower over there? Still, from the first Sunday in May and she got each table that flower and then after, we bought for ten dollars, and still beautiful, alive. It was so, so much work put in it, and then all the young mothers didn't even show up with the kids.

RB: So, it's a smaller group. Over time, what you've seen is that the younger people are not coming.

MS: It is so sad because I suggested that what we should do when they send out an invitation for a certain occasion, to put down all the past “Mothers of the Year.” We call it now “Woman of the Year,” “Daughters of the Year,” and to wake them up. “Oh, that was my grandmother. Oh, that was my great-grandmother. That was my mother.” And maybe that will [work]. But I hate when young people say, “Oh, I want to sit with my husband.” “When you go to play mahjong for hours and hours, are you with your

husband? Can't you sit for an hour and a half, two hours separate from your husband? Look down on him." This is the one thing when I hate when they bring up that subject.

RB: Can you tell us about that struggle in the synagogue that people have not joined because of the seating arrangement? Can you describe it?

MS: I tell you, the first, talk about the seating arrangement, and they don't think that we have enough socializing.

RB: The younger people think that there's not enough socializing?

MS: Yes. And it's true. I have to admit that Herzl has a much stronger Sunday School and prepares them for bar and bat mitzvahs. Of course, the other one, in Bellevue, they moved it.

[END OF CD 2]

RB: This is Roz Bornstein, and I'm back with Magda Schaloum. The date is still June 5, 2001, and this is mini-disk number three of Magda's oral history that I'm gathering for the Weaving Women's Words project of the Jewish Women's Archive. Magda, do I have your permission to continue taping?

MS: Yes, definitely.

RB: Thank you. You wanted to spend some time talking about your husband, Isaac, in his later years. Why don't you describe what he went through and you went through together at that time.

MS: Which part?

RB: Let's see. You wanted to talk a little bit about his illness and its impact on you and so why don't you tell us when he first became sick.

MS: We started our business as I said earlier in 1954 and then we started out as a cleaning laundry and tailoring. And with the help of the brothers, the Warshal brothers, we saved a little money and then opened up possibility to rent across the street the surplus store. So anyway we started again over there with secondhand clothing and then inexpensive slacks and shirts, and one day, my husband heard that in Fort Louis there's a big auction and he bought a huge truckload of surplus merchandise. And every penny what we have saved, he had to spend. So we didn't even know the names of the surplus merchandise and so we hired somebody separating everything, military clothing and equipment. So we started to have a surplus business. Between the two of us, we managed and we started to build up our business, and then we could buy our home on Mercer Island. Then my two sons, whenever they had vacation time or after school, they would come to the store to help out. And so we built up a really reputable business and whenever we went for a buying trip, our credit was always excellent.

RB: Could you tell us the name of your store?

MS: The name of the store, Federal Army and Navy Surplus. And so anyway, then when my son, older son Henry, came back from the Army, he decided that he's going to school to become a dental technician and he went through school and he was an excellent student and he had a job waiting for him but he decided that he's coming into the business and work with his father. And then when Jack was old enough, then both of them slowly they took over the business and my husband semi-retired. At that time we had a chance to travel and enjoying really our life. We had my daughter's marriage first, and she married a very nice young man, Marco DeFunis. His name is very famous because for two years they didn't accept him to University of Washington Law School and we didn't realize why and that was during the ’70s and so one day one of his friends who was already a lawyer said, “Well are you going to law school?” And my son-in-law said, “No, because I wasn't accepted.” So anyway one of the older lawyer, Joe Diamond, he took the case in his hand and we went to court and court said that he has to be accepted

to University of Washington so my daughter went to work as dental assistant and of course with her working and of course we helped them to go through school and then he became a lawyer and they bought a home on Mercer Island and later they had a son, Bension, who was named for my husband's older brother who died in the Holocaust. And then later on they had a daughter, Ariela, and her middle name is Miriam for my husband's mother. My husband was a very, very good businessman and he finally arranged and he bought a building for the business which is now 2112 First Avenue. Our two sons took over the business. Henry got married to a very lovely Jewish girl from Salem, Oregon, and they have three daughters, Stephanie, twenty-seven now, and Davina is twenty-four, and Louise, twenty-one. And then Jack, who got married to a lovely girl, they have a very wonderful son, Michael Isaac. I am a very fortunate grandmother. They love me and respect, me and I have to say, so the daughter-in-laws and my son-in-law. My husband got ill in 1989 in December. And we were ready to go to Hawaii; we were packed and we would leave on the 8th, and on the 2nd of December he had a stroke. And we took care of him for five and a half years. We kept him at home. After I couldn't manage by myself, we had only for daytime a caregiver and later on I had to have day and night caregiver. And even during that time, we still took him to places. He loved to go to the synagogue. We got him beautifully dressed, his nice suits, and we pushed him to the synagogue and then the caretaker would come and help to bring him home. And Rabbi Benzaquen was very, very nice and he would come twice a month to visit him. I remember I served him Pepperidge Farm cookies and banana and fresh water and you know they talked and then he gave the blessing. So I will never forget that. We would take him to the synagogue and the last time, when he was sick already, very sick, it was Passover and I said, “OK, everything else but every morning I had to give him Cream of Wheat because that was easy for him to swallow.” And one morning he said, “You know I don't want Cream of Wheat” and his speech was very difficult. He wanted matzah. So I had some egg matzah and I put the butter on it and slowly, slowly I fed him. Passover was finished by Saturday night and the Saturday night, he couldn't eat

much so late at night I remember my daughter and my daughter-in-law, they went to Coco's, the restaurant, and they told her they would like to take out a baked potato. They couldn't figure out why a baked, so they explained why and they didn't even charge them, and so we fed him. We had butter from the kitchen and we fed him a baked potato and butter and that was his last meal. And the following Wednesday morning he died. So after he died, as I said, the kids still managing the business and thank God they are making a good living and having the six grandchildren, even they are pretty much busy with their lives and I'm still very close to all of them.

RB: So, your family has been, it sounds like a very close, loving family.

MS: Yes, yes. Really. When somebody asked, "How did you survive the concentration camp," I used to say, "With my faith and my hope." And when somebody asked my husband, "How did you survive?" He would say, "I wanted to see the end." That was always the answer.

RB: Isn't that something? When you think about all of the historical events that you've been a part of, what is important to you in life at this point?

MS: The most important would be in my life, as long as I live, that my kids would be close to each other and love each other.

RB: Your family is very important to you.

MS: Yes, oh yes.

RB: It's very important to you.

MS: Like I say, my family as a child, we had so much love that my sister used to tell that my father, as I told you, he was kept back. And not knowing what happened to the family, thinking that I'm together with my mother and my brother, because when my

brother arrived to Auschwitz and when I arrived to Auschwitz also, they gave out some different cards. I didn't get one. It was printed card and it said on it, “We are doing well and whatever, we're working,” and just sign the name. No address, nothing. So my brother got one when he arrived to Auschwitz and sent to my father. So he thought that we are together. And when the Russians came close to Hungary to take over Hungary, in December they decided to take the Jewish men out also. Take them to concentration camps. And my sister was telling me that first they were taken to Budapest and he had a chance, my father had a chance to send somebody to tell where he is. And my sister said, “Quick, quick, I made some soup and I gave the man to take it to my father.” By the time he came, they were gone already. So he was together also with a man, a Jewish man, who had a non-Jewish wife and children, and because the wife wasn't Jewish, the children stayed behind at home. Now this man knew that the wife and the children were waiting for him in Hungary. So when they finally arrived in Buchenwald and my father found out what happened and there's no such a thing as family. The man said to my sister, because my sister went to see him, that my father got so disappointed, discouraged, that he couldn't eat and he couldn't sleep and crying all the time, and he said to my sister that our father died of a “broken heart.” So, it's like I said, money is not everything. So I don't know what else can I say, I'm just still hoping that we will be together as a happy family.

RB: In the last couple of minutes here we have, and I wish we didn't have to wrap it up right now. I'm so sorry, it's been so wonderful to be with you this morning. I wanted to know if you had any, if you wanted to tell us anything extra about what you're doing now with the Holocaust Resource Center.

MS: What I'm doing now, we have the Holocaust Center Speakers Bureau. The schools now are obligated to teach during their history classes about the Holocaust. Some of the teachers who are really interested about the subject, they call the Holocaust Center and ask for a speaker. And then we are going out and speak to the students, and we usually

get a very nice letter from them. When I went to Auburn and there were about one hundred and fifty students and also the staff from the office and some of the teachers sat in and they said to me afterwards, “These benches, that was in a gym, the benches are so uncomfortable to sit on,” but she said, “I could not believe that they didn't even move, they were so mesmerized.” And I got beautiful letters from them. I said, if I just go through them, that they really will remember because I try to explain to them that after fifty-five years, we are still talking about the Holocaust. I try to explain to them that the reason what we are doing that, just in case they meet somebody who tries to deny the Holocaust or belongs to an organization where they hate, and then they can say that they saw and they heard a survivor of the Holocaust. And then I also tell them that there are not too many survivors around here anymore. A lot of them died. And I said like I give them an example, my husband for five and a half years had a stroke, hardly could speak, so I said I am here to speak for all of them and I'm trying to as long as I can speak and I can use my brain, I feel that is my obligation to do it.

RB: That's interesting. Magda thank you so, so much.

MS: Well, you're welcome. You know we could sit here for whole day and another day and you still coming back, things to my mind.

RB: Yes, I would love to come back any time. You let me know.

[END OF INTERVIEW]