

Louisa: Today is January 26, 1992. This is Louisa Weinrib talking with Sonja Bromberg in my house. Sonja we are talking today because I learned that you were a child in Nazi Germany, and we'd like to hear your story. Please start off telling a little bit about yourself, beginning with your date of birth.

Sonja: Well, I was born March 11, 1930. My father owned the business in Germany. I don't know exactly where the place was, but I do believe I think it was Magdeburg. And we lived in a house. That's what I can remember. And then afterwards Hitler came into power and my father lost everything.

Louisa: Was this town in the north or south of Germany?

Sonja: Russian sector.

Louisa: What became after World War II the Russian sector.

Sonja: (Murmurs affirmative)

Louisa: So it was in the eastern part of Germany.

Sonja: Right. Magdeburg.

Louisa: Do you know what the size of the town was?

Sonja: No. I think it was small town. Not a large town.

Louisa: Do you know the size of the Jewish community in the town?

Sonja: No, I don't.

Louisa: Well, continue then about your family. Your father had a business?

Sonja: A clothing store. I think he owned several, but I'm not sure. And it was just me, my father, my sister and my mother that were living there. My mother died when I was about three years old. That's what I can remember.

Louisa: so you lived with your father and your sister.

Sonja: And after my father, he started raising both of us, my sister Helen and myself.

Louisa: Did you have grandparents in the town?

Sonja: No, my grandparents were here in America. They came over earlier, I guess from Germany to America. Early.

Louisa: Early...after World War I?

Sonja: Probably. Or in between there.

Louisa: Between the two wars?

Sonja: Yeah. Somewhere. Then Hitler came into power, and my father raised us as best as he could after my mother died. Then my sister and I, my father thought my sister and I would...he says would be better for us to go to a Catholic home. Like a nunnery?

Louisa: Uhuh.

Sonja: And we did. And he put us in there.

Louisa: You were raised Jewish, is that correct?

Sonja: I was raised Jewish. Right.

Louisa: Do you know whether your family was Reform, or Conservative, or... do you remember?

Sonja: I think they were, you know, they kept the sabbath. My grandmother did. Orthodox. You mean Orthodox?

Louisa: Uhuh.

Sonja: My grandmother was. I don't think my father was. I don't think so.

Louisa: Was not that observant.

Sonja: No. I don't think so.

Louisa: And you were in school at the time he thought of putting you in the nunnery?

Sonja: My sister was, but I wasn't. I was about six years old, and I don't think they accepted six years...I think you started going to school when you were seven. I don't remember. I didn't go to school there. Then he just left us there, and he fled to Belgium. And we stayed in the nunnery, after we stayed there, my sister and I, and then we had to wait for our visa. So that became our permanent home.

Louisa: Did you know where your father went, or have any further contact with him.

Sonja: No, not that I remember. My sister told me that he went to Belgium. She remembered much more than I did, because I was a lot littler.

Louisa: How much older was she than you?

Sonja: She is six years older than me, and she remembers much more. She remembers most details. And there was a time, they had parades, you know, in Germany, when Hitler came in power, and I was very close to him, about ten feet from him.

Louisa: You were standing on the sidewalk?

Sonja: On the sidewalk with everybody else.

Louisa: With the children from the nunnery?

Sonja: Yeah. And I saw him coming, and he looked straight right to me, you know. Maybe he didn't look at me, but it felt he stared at me, and those grey steel eyes didn't look so good.

Louisa: The what eyes?

Sonja: Grey.

Louisa: He had grey?

Sonja: Grey steel eyes. I couldn't even see the pupil in his eyes.

Louisa: You were about how old then?

Sonja: About six.

Louisa: And you remembered that very clearly.

Sonja: Oh, like it was today.

Louisa: And was it a military march?

Sonja: Yeah, you know, with the goose steps.

Louisa: Uhuh.

Sonja: In the parade, you know how they do.

Louisa: And they were turning their faces to the crowd as they marched forward.

Sonja: Right, with the "Heil Hitler".

Louisa: Uhuh.

Sonja: And with their swastika on their arm. Oh, yes, I remember that so clearly. And then <sup>I</sup> also remember people being dragged out at night.

Louisa: From the nunnery?

Sonja: No. I think they had homes right next to the nunnery, and I can remember hearing screams in the middle of the night, threatening, dragging out people.

Louisa: Were these Jewish people or other people?

Sonja: I don't know. I never saw. All I remember was screams of people being dragged out. They must have been dragged out in the middle of the night. And that's what I heard all night long. Like I said, my sister remembers a lot more than I did. And then we stayed there, and it wasn't too long we got our visa number, and we...

Louisa: You and your sister together got visas?

Sonja: Yeah.

Louisa: Were there other Jewish children staying in the nunnery?

Sonja: I don't remember. I was so young. I don't remember.

Louisa: Uhuh. Okay. Well, you got your visa, and then what happened?

Sonja: We waited there until it was time to go, and they got us through the underground.

Louisa: Who's "they"?

Sonja: I don't know.

Louisa: Just some adults helped you out. Physically helped you out.

Sonja: Yeah.

Louisa: Do you know if these adults who helped you were part of an organization?

Sonja: I don't remember who. All I know is there were people.

Louisa: Men and women?

Sonja: Men and women, yeah.

Louisa: Were these...were they German?

Sonja: I think some of them were French. I think.

Louisa: Was the nunnery in the same town as you grew up in? Or was it in another city?

Sonja: I think it was in another city.

Louisa: Closer to France?

Sonja: I don't know where it was, but I think it was in another city, because my father, since he wanted to spare us so we wouldn't fall in the Nazis' hands. And I found out later on, which the Lord showed me later on, that we would have stayed there, we would have been burned alive, because they didn't take the little children, they didn't take 'em, they burned them alive. In a crematory. And they just, because...

Louisa: Do you think you would have been fingered as a Jewish child in the nunnery?

Sonja: I suppose so. Yes.

Louisa: You don't know whether the other children were safe there. do you?

Sonja: Yes, they were safe.

Louisa: They were safe.

Sonja: Uhuh. They were protected.

Louisa: But you think you might not have been protected, is that the idea?

Sonja: Oh, you mean in the nunnery?

Louisa: Right.

Sonja: Yes. We were protected, too. I believe there was many other children there too.

Louisa: Being hidden.

Sonja: Being hidden, yes. From Hitler.

Louisa: Did you have any further contact with the nunnery, once you left?

Sonja: No.

Louisa: Where did you go when you left?

Sonja: I think they put us on a train. In fact, yeah, on a train.

Louisa: To...where?

Sonja: I believe it was France. I believe it was France. From France I don't know, you know, it is sort of vaguely. And we stayed in this other place, I don't remember where it was. We waited some more there, until we got on the way, you know, to the States, to America.

Louisa: Were you always waiting in the same place, or did you move from place to place?

Sonja: Place to place.

Louisa: And do you think that the whole journey, until you went to America, it was a matter of months, or weeks, or what?

Sonja: I guess to a little girl it seemed like a lifetime.

Louisa: Uhuh. Oh, I'm sure it did. But, you haven't discussed with your sister...oh...I mean did she tell you, well, we were there for two months while waited? Or we were there for three weeks while we waited?

Sonja: No. There are too many bitter memories of her. See, my father came here later on to America, and he was deathly sick. He got remarried in Europe, to a French woman, and she was the sweetest step-mother I ever had.

Louisa: Oh, you were reunited with your father?

Sonja: Yes. Here.

Louisa: Oh, good. Well, that's skipping ahead. Let's go back to you and your sister are being, I guess, handled by adults who are helping you escape.

Sonja: (murmurs) Yes, escape.

Louisa: And did you go by boat to America?

Sonja: Yes, we went by boat, and you know, I remember the name of the boat?

Louisa: What was that?

Sonja: The Volkania.

Louisa: The Volkania?

Sonja: It's still around.

Louisa: It is?

Sonja: Yup.

Louisa: Whose ship was it?

Sonja: An Italian ship.

Louisa: And it's still in service.

Sonja: Last time I was in New York, it was still in service.

Louisa: As a merchant marine, or as a passenger ship?

Sonja: No, a passenger ship.

Louisa: I'll be darned.

Sonja: It's still in service.

Louisa: Was the ship loaded with children, or was it a mixed age group?

Sonja: Mixed. It was mixed. It was all refugees, and we were just...they put us on the ship. We got our visas, our passports and all of the papers we needed to get, my sister and I, and then we came here to America.

Louisa: And you landed in New York.

Sonja: Landed on Ellis Island.

Louisa: Uhuh. And do you have any momentos of your immigration? Any photographs, any passport, any stars you might have had to wear, or papers?

Sonja: I don't remember really. In fact, I know they asked us a lot of questions. And I was a little girl, you know, I was very scared.

Louisa: Did your sister do the answering for you?

Sonja: I do believe she did. She sort of kind of protected us...me...I mean.

Louisa: How old were you when you landed in New York.

Sonja: I was ten years old. It was in 1940; it was in January.

Louisa: Well, you got out just in time.

Sonja: Uhuh. It's also the Lord showed me...as when we came out, they did not let no more out after us. No more came out after us.

Louisa: Well, the war in Europe had started.

Sonja: Uhuh. There was one year, and then no more came out after us.

Louisa: You said you had grandparents in America already. Were you reunited with them? Did you know where to find them?

Sonja: My grandmother and my aunts and uncles were there to meet us.

Louisa: In New York?

Sonja: In New York.

Louisa: They knew you were coming?

Sonja: They knew...my grandmother sponsored us. See, you had to have a sponsor. So my grandmother scrubbed floors here in America for us to come. That's how she earned the money.

Louisa: So, she knew where you were at the convent, is that right?

Sonja: She said she knew, yes.

Louisa: She knew.

Sonja: Uhuh.

Louisa: And was able to have contact with you?

Sonja: Uhuh.

Louisa: Well, that's very fortunate, isn't it?

Sonja: Yes.

Louisa: What were your first memories of the United States?

Sonja: (Laughs). It was very big.

Louisa: Did you live in New York?

Sonja: As far as I can remember, I lived in New York, and I think we stayed with my grandmother. And I remember, one thing you know how you remember what a grandmother does?

Louisa: Uhuh.

Sonja: The one thing that I did was a sponge cake. (Laughs)

Louisa: That's funny. She cooked good sponge cakes, huh?

Sonja: That high.

Louisa: That high. You're indicating about 10 inches high.

Sonja: That was so good.

Louisa: Do you have a recipe?

Sonja: No.

Louisa: That's too bad.

Sonja: That and chocolate milk, that was the best sponge cake I've ever eaten. And that's what I remember about my grandmother; she was so kind.



Louisa: Was that your mother's mother or your father's?

Sonja: Father's mother.

Louisa: How long after you arrived did your father come?

Sonja: I was sixteen. Let's see, that is 1940...

Louisa: So he came after the War.

Sonja: After the War, right.

Louisa: Where did he spend the War?

Sonja: He spent the War escaping the Nazis in different places. He told me of several places, that my step-mother and my father had to sleep in caves, and they couldn't cook nothing because of the smoke, you know, and they ate the roots and drank the water from the walls.

Louisa: So, did he stay on the move in Belgium and France, or did he go elsewhere?

Sonja: In Europe. He went, you know, escaped from the Nazis in several different places. But my father said he was in Buchenwald, another prison camp.

Louisa: So they captured him.

Sonja: They captured him and my step-mother. That's what my father said, now. And he told us of the horrors that was in the concentration camps, that they used to throw the babies up against the walls, and experiment on women, and do terrible things, and, by the grace of God, I don't know how we got out of there, but he did. He got out of there.

Louisa: Well, was he liberated at the end of the War?

Sonja: I can't remember that, really. Can't remember that.

Louisa: Do you know how long he was in Bechenwald?

Sonja: No, I don't. But he was an awfully sick man, and so was my step-mother.

Louisa: For the rest of his life?

Sonja: For the rest of his life.

Louisa: Did he have tuberculosis?

Sonja: No. He had bad heart.

Louisa: I see.

Sonja: From the eating and, you know, from the cold. And they couldn't cook and they had to eat, you know, roots and stuff like that. It was rough on them. And hide from the Germans. It was not an easy life for both of them.

Louisa: And so, the bad health he had after the concentration camp was due to a bad heart.

Sonja: Right. My step-mother, too.

Louisa: Uhuh. How long did they live? When did they die?

Sonja: My father died in '70, and I think my step-mother died in the '80s, about ten years after he did. Or maybe a little bit earlier than that.

Louisa: And where did they live?

Sonja: First they lived in the Bronx, New York, and then they lived in Miami. They had a place there. They had a condominium.

Louisa: What sort of work did he do in the U.S.?

Sonja: My father was a paper hanger.

Louisa: He went from running a store to being a paper hanger.

Sonja: (nods affirmatively) He hung paper and painted houses. He couldn't do that any longer because his health was bad, and that's why we moved to Miami, and they retired there. And he had three, about four or five heart attacks, when the last one got him. My step-mother, too.

Louisa: So, your sister lived near them in Miami, is that right?

Sonja: My sister, yep...no she lived in Boston.

Louisa: Oh.

Sonja: And they put me in a private home, and we...well, at first they put us in foster homes.

Louisa: You mean, when you were a child, newly come here?

Sonja: Uhuh. They put us in foster homes, because my aunts couldn't take us. My grandmother, she wasn't able to take care of us, so they put us in a foster home, both of us.

Louisa: How did they find a foster home?

Sonja: Well...

Louisa: Through the city - county services or something like that?

Sonja: Well, they found, you know, with another Jewish family, put us.

Louisa: Oh, through Jewish charities, in other words.

Sonja: Uhuh.

Louisa: In New York?

Sonja: Uhuh. I don't know how, but...and then...later on we moved to Boston, my sister and I, and we went to foster homes there in Quincy. In fact, I remember only one family out of a whole bunch, named Marenz. Marenz.

Louisa: Marenz.

Sonja: Uhuh. Bella Marenz, I think was her first name.

Louisa: In Quincy.

Sonja: In Quincy. Massachusetts.

Louisa: And how old were you by then, a teenager?

Sonja: No. I was still...they put me when I first came here...they put me in the first grade, because I couldn't speak English. Period. And that's how I learned to speak English. And I think it only took me a few weeks, to pick up that language real fast. American language. Now I forget all of my...oh, I was going to say Israeli (laughs)...German language and I just completely forgot, and I can understand German pretty good, but I can't speak it. You know, like spoken.

Louisa: You get out of practice.

Sonja: I got out of practice, but my sister can speak it real good and she can read fluently. She's still got an accent. They say I have too.

Louisa: Very little.

Sonja: Yeah.

Louisa: So, you were ten years old and started first grade, and I bet you were rapidly progressed.

Sonja: Uhuh.

Louisa: And you went from foster home to foster home. Why so many changes?

Sonja: I don't know why, but they kept switching us into different foster homes. But the last family I remembered was Mr. and Mrs. Marenz. That's the last family I remember. And there, that was the nicest home we'd been in. The others, I...I...you know, weren't too good.

Louisa: Were there other children in these homes besides you?

Sonja: There could have been, but I can't remember. That memory is blocked out.

Louisa: So you finished your growing up in Boston, did you?

Sonja: In Boston, and then, you know, I was like a rebellious teenager. (Laughs) They couldn't handle me, and they put me in the private school - at Hawthore, Cedar Knolls, White Plains, New York. And that's where I stayed.

Louisa: Is that a regular school or a special school?

Sonja: Special school.

Louisa: For?

Sonja: Boys and girls.

Louisa: Is it for boys and girls a boarding school, or that have problems, or what?

Sonja: (Sigh) I believe...no, it was just a private school. They had cottages for boys on one end of the campus, and on the other end they had the girls' campuses, like houses. And then they had cottage parents. Do you know what a cottage parent is?

Louisa: Sure.

Sonja: One parent ~~that~~ took care of a whole bunch of teenagers.

Louisa: Well, did you have regular schooling there?

Sonja: Yeah. We had regular schooling there.

Louisa: Any vocational work, or college preparatory, or what?

Sonja: No, just regular school.

Louisa: And did you graduate?

Sonja: You know what? I can't remember that either. I hated school. (Laughs) I did.

Louisa: Did you quit school?

Sonja: Uhuh.

Louisa: At what age?

Sonja: I think that I was 14...13.

Louisa: Then what did you do?

Sonja: I went to work. I lied about my age. (Laughs)

Louisa: You said you were 16 or 18?

Sonja: Yeah.

Louisa: Did your sister go there with you to the school?

Sonja: No. She didn't.

Louisa: Stayed in Boston?

Sonja: Stayed in Boston. She met husband. She was working in a bakery and she met her husband there. They got married soon, not long after that, they got married.

Louisa: Well, when you left school and went to work, what did you do?

Sonja: I worked in factories.

Louisa: In New York?

Sonja: Yeah. Different factories. I worked in a jewelry factory. I worked in factories that...oh...different kinds of factories, greeting card factories, you know. All different kinds of factories. That's what I've done. That's all I can remember.

Louisa: Was that the end of your schooling, in toto, when you left the academic program and went to work in factories?

Sonja: Uhuh.

Louisa: You had no more further classroom instruction?

Sonja: No.

Louisa: How long did you do the factory work?

Sonja: Not long, and then soon after that I got married. I met somebody and we thought we fell in love, and we got married, but it didn't work out.

Louisa: How long did it last?

Sonja: It lasted a few years, and it just didn't go too good, you know.

Louisa: Did you have children?

Sonja: I have two children.

Louisa: By that husband?

Sonja: Uhuh. Two children. Two boys.

Louisa: Was your husband Jewish?

Sonja: No. He was Polish. No he wasn't Jewish.

Louisa: He was a Christian.

Sonja: No. I don't think so.

Louisa: He didn't practice anything?

Sonja: No. He didn't practice nothing.

Louisa: Was he an immigrant?

Sonja: I think he was. He said something to that effect that he was an immigrant. And he said that he, too, was in Warsaw, and he remembered one place where they were in a sewer in Warsaw, and the Germans were coming in, and he had his little brother there, and there were I don't know how many in the sewer in Warsaw. And his brother started crying, and he put his hand over his mouth...but he thought he put his hand over his mouth, but he put it further up, and his brother smothered to death. And he didn't know that, only after the Germans went over the bridge that he remembered that, and he couldn't forget that either, that he killed his own brother.

Louisa: What a nightmare!

Sonja: To save I don't know how many people.

Louisa: That's a horrible story. It's bone-chilling.

Sonja: It is.

Louisa: Well, why, if you are not sure...why if you think that your husband wasn't Jewish, that he was doing this? Why was he escaping?

Sonja: I don't know. I don't know. But he had a terrible time there too. His name was David Kolin. He had a...it was really coincidence, you know how

they are at Ellis Island. They can't pronounce the name. They give you another name or cut it short!

Louisa: Uhuh. Did this happen to you when you went through Ellis Island?

Sonja: No, it didn't happen. They know how to pronounce our name.

Louisa: It wasn't that complicated.

Sonja: No. Like my husband that I got now, when his family came in from Russia, they...uh...I can't remember what their name was...but they couldn't pronounce that name, so they gave him Bromberg. (Laughs) They did that to a lot of people!

Louisa: I've hear that. I've heard that.

Sonja: Either that or they cut it short!

Louisa: Did you become an American citizen as <sup>a child</sup> coming in? Did you have to do that?

Sonja: Oh, boy. That's another horse with another color. When I became American citizen, they told me at the...naturalization people told me...that if I married a citizen, it was the law, <sup>that</sup> I automatically become American citizen. So did everybody else. I believed it.

-----END OF SIDE A-----

Tape 1, Side B

Louisa: So you found out that that wasn't true?

Sonja: That wasn't so. See, I wanted to go to Israel.

Louisa: When did you want to go to Israel? From New York?

Sonja: No, from here. Montgomery. I always had a hankering to go to Israel. My heart. You know, a Jewish person wants to go to Israel. So, we went to the post office, the main post office downtown.

Louisa: You and your present husband?

Sonja: My friend and I, Beeda Smiths, my friend and I we went downtown and inquired about a passport.

Louisa: Your friend's name was what?

Sonja: Beeda Smiths. And so we get to the post office and he asked a bunch of questions, and he came to one question: Are you American citizen? I says "Of course, I am. I've been voting and I've been on the jury duty." I did all the things that an American citizen does. And then I don't know how it came out to be, but he said that I was not an American citizen, because when I told him what I knew, and then what he said what he knew. I was wrong.

Louisa: Well, how is it you could vote?

Sonja: I voted. I been on the jury duty several times here.

Louisa: Oh, I believe you, but how did they let you vote without papers? They maybe didn't know that you were born in Germany. Who knows!

Sonja: Who knows! (Laughs)

Louisa: Okay. So then what did you have to do to get a passport?

Sonja: That's not the thing. See, with this previous husband that I have now, somehow my sister sent me the birth certificate. The original. So I says, okay, I want to make a duplicate of the birth certificate and have two, just in case I lose one, and I lost both of them. Don't ask me how. We hunted that apartment up-side-down after we moved. Couldn't find no hair, no hide of the birth certificate. That's where the problem began. The guy at the post office said that I was a woman without a country.

Louisa: Okay.

Sonja: That kind of floored me, you know. No proof of anything. So my friend and I had to start from scratch one. It was a pain in the neck.

Louisa: Could you at least trace through Ellis Island?

Sonja: She called Ellis Island, wrote to Ellis Island. They didn't keep those records no more. In 1940 they didn't keep those records no more. They threw 'em out. The records were old. Then she says, "How about her sister? She came with her?" No, they couldn't find nothing in Ellis Island. They tried. They hunted every which way, through all the files, you know how long it takes them. And we just had to start from scratch.

Louisa: So, did you ever get papers?

Sonja: I got a stack of papers a couple of inches high. And so, I'm still waiting to get my citizenship, as soon as all the papers, you know.



Louisa: You still don't have it? Have you continued to vote?

Sonja: Yeah. (Louisa gasps) Why make waves, I mean...

Louisa: Right! (Laughs) But you haven't gotten to Israel, huh?

Sonja: Well, she called one place in Washington, D.C. where all the names are. People that are in the United States. I'm not even here.

Louisa: You are not here?

Sonja: I'm not here. I don't exist!

Louisa: Where do they think you are?

Sonja: I'm not here!

Louisa: So, have you ever gotten to Israel?

Sonja: No. If I ever gotten to Israel, I couldn't come back. They said I could get out of the country, but I couldn't get back in. What a mess, huh?

Louisa: Yeah. What a mess! Right. Did you practice Judaism at all during your married life?

Sonja: No. No. No. There wasn't much of a Judaism there. I went to a synagogue several times, but no. I wasn't Orthodox Jew.

Louisa: Did you carry with you, through your sister, or through your grandmother or any family any Jewish tradition?

Sonja: My grandmother did. She was Orthodox person. My aunts they were Orthodox. But my sister and I and my father and myself, we weren't. In fact, my father said he wasn't.

Louisa: He wasn't...what?

Sonja: Orthodox.

Louisa: Uhuh. Was he any other...I mean did he consider himself Jewish?

Sonja: He believed...well, he believed there is a God, and that's what he believed. God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He believed that. But he didn't was strict to the rules of the, you know, how you light the candles like my grandmother did, and said the prayers on Sabbath, you know (rest inaudible).

Louisa: Yeah.

Sonja: Did it like that? No. My father didn't do that.

Louisa: If someone would ask you what religion you identify with, or used to 20 years ago, what do you say?

Sonja: With Judaism, but we weren't Orthodox. We didn't do all those rituals, you know. We didn't do that. But now I trace back in my roots, I want to celebrate the Holy Days, which they don't call 'em that holidays in the real tradition of the holy days. They are biblical holy days that God told 'em to practice.

Louisa: Uhuh.

Sonja: And you get it from the Books of Moses. And Passover. And Christmas and all these other holidays, which we consider holidays - Christmas, Easter and all these other holidays - are pagan, taken from a Greek goddess, the Greek goddess, Easter, uh, has a name that sounds like Easter, but it is taken from that name.

Louisa: Is that right?

Sonja: Yeah. It's pagan. It's after a god.

Louisa: Uhuh. But you belong to a church, do you?

Sonja: I belong to a church now, yes.

Louisa: And what is it called?

Sonja: Grace Covenant.

Louisa: Uhuh. And what do they practice?

Sonja: They practice Christianity.

Louisa: Uhuh. And you feel good about this?

Sonja: Oh, yes. See, when a Jew believes in Jesus, he or she is completed in him, because Jesus was a Jew. And when a Jew accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior, he or she becomes a completed Jew.

Louisa: Uhuh.

Sonja: Do you understand?

Louisa: Yeah.

Sonja: And that completion is like a covenant. You know, like Jesus was a full Jew. There's a lot of Jewish people that just believe in Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob, but they don't believe that Jesus came and lived and died for them. They believe that he was a Christ killer, that's how they were taught, you know.

Louisa: Uhuh.

Sonja: A lot of Israelis - I'm taking Hebrew now - and and that's what a lot of Israelis were saying that the Christians persecuted the Jewish people, which is not true. That's how they were taught, and that's why they can't believe in Jesus. But yet, they do believe in something. The Jewish people. They believe in the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

Louisa: When did you convert?

Sonja: It was in the 1970's. I can't remember exactly the year, but it was in the 70's.

Louisa: And you were living here in Montgomery?

Sonja: I was living here in Montgomery. I met a girl, a young person and her mother led me to the Lord. Took me to church. And I accepted Jesus there. And ever since, I've just had a wonderful relationship with him.

Louisa: Uhuh. And your husband, too? Well, he came in later on. He was going to the Church of Christ. He didn't believe the way I believed, and he came in later.

Louisa: He grew up Jewish, also, is that right?

Sonja: Yeah. He's a Russian Jew. He's had...he's had a very interesting...thirteen, he had thirteen brothers and sisters, thirteen letters in his name, he was the thirteenth child, born the thirteenth hour.

Louisa: Wow!

Sonja: And his family is Russian descent, and his brothers...he was, I think, he and another sister or so, were born here, in America. The rest of the family was born in Russia.

Louisa: Do you think that your experience and your family's experience during the War affected your religious faith?

Sonja: No. You mean when I was little?

Louisa: No, I mean now, as an adult. Do you get strength from your religious faith in dealing with your childhood, and feelings about how things happened

in Germany.

Sonja: Yes. I draw strength from that, because the Lord showed me how he had his hand on both of us, even though my sister doesn't believe in the Messiah, but he had his hand on both of us at that particular time, and I know it. He did. Now I do, but then I didn't, because I was so little. And I know it now, that if it wasn't for him, for his wonderful love, we would have been dead, burned alive.

Louisa: Is your sister Jewish now?

Sonja: Well, she does believe in God, thank God. But she is not, you know, Orthodox. She goes to synagogue once in a while, but that's about it.

Louisa: So, she is not active in being observant, is that right?

Sonja: No.

Louisa: But she has not brought Jesus into her life, as you have?

Sonja: She don't even want to hear Messiah.

Louisa: Oh. Okay.

Sonja: She thinks the way everybody else thinks: that Messiah was Christ killed. That's how, you know...she needs to have her eyes opened, because God is not a killer. He loves. The God of love does not go around killing people.

Louisa: Have you...you have not gone back to Germany, then, because you don't have a passport.

Sonja: I can't even get out of this country!

Louisa: You can get out, but you said you couldn't get back in.

Sonja: (Laughs) Can't get back in!

Louisa: Did your family ever receive War reparations from the German government?

Sonja: No.

Louisa: Your father for the business taken away from him?

Sonja: No. Never.

Louisa: Did they apply?

Sonja: Yeah. I thought he did, but never. He came here with nothing.

Louisa: Yeah, but after the War, the German government paid refugees for their losses.

Sonja: I don't remember if that happened.

Louisa: Okay. Do you ever have flashbacks or nightmares about your family's experience?

Sonja: All I remember is about Hitler and them dragging off those poor people in the middle of the night.

Louisa: The neighbors.

Sonja: Yeah.

Louisa: Did you ever think about...have nightmares about this, or think maybe it will happen again?

Sonja: It can happen again, if people don't see the signs of times. It can happen again. Anti-Semitism (sic). It's already here.

Louisa: Have you felt it in Montgomery?

Sonja: Not here, but I've watched the "700 Club", and they did a thing on the Holocaust, and the things that are happening here, the anti-Semitism, and yeah, I see it coming if people don't wake up. Be the same thing here. Yes, it's in Russia, too. There's a great deal of anti-Semitism there.

Louisa: What is the "700 Club"?

Sonja: It's a program of news and you get the right kind of news. You don't get anything held back. They give you the news and everything. They have people and testimonies. It's a real interesting program. It comes on channel ...well, if you have cable it comes on channel 10, and if you don't have it, it comes on channel 45. And it comes on three times a day: morning, noon, and night. Very informative.

Louisa: How did you meet your present husband?

Sonja: I met him in California.

Louisa: How did you get to California?

Sonja: My husband was in the Navy, and he was stationed there, and that's how I got to (unintelligible few words), and, like I said, it didn't work out, and then later on we got separated, and he supported me and the children. Then

somehow, when of separation (sic), I was in a restaurant, I kept seeing my husband that I got now. Kept seeing him. He was a musician. I kept seeing him in different places, you know, when I...and later on I started...I was in another restaurant and um...and he came in and I was talking to the chef, you know, in a restaurant, and he and my husband-to-be said, "Who is she?" and this man introduced me. The chef his name was George, introduced me to my husband, and that's how we got introduced in a restaurant.

Louisa: And you were living in California?

Sonja: Northern California.

Louisa: You told me that you came to Montgomery in 1968, why did you come to Montgomery?

Sonja: My husband was working in Pensacola, and there were no more jobs the company found, and he started working here for somebody here in Montgomery, and he said it's time to move here. And so we came here.

Louisa: Do you remember who he worked for in Montgomery?

Sonja: Yeah. Red Lane.

Louisa: Red Lane?

Sonja: Yes. I don't know if he is still alive, but that's his name.

Louisa: Was he a musician?

Sonja: Musician.

Louisa: A Mr. Lane.

Sonja: Yeah. He plays piano. My husband plays piano.

Louisa: Does he do that now?

Sonja: He says he still plays.

Louisa: Where all does he play?

Sonja: He doesn't play regular. Only when he can find jobs. He plays real good piano. For weddings, anniversaries and so forth, and so on. Birthdays.

Louisa: Like nightclubs?

Sonja: Oh, he did, but he don't anymore. If he can, he would, but doesn't anymore. There's no work here in Montgomery. So he does just those functions

like weddings and birthday parties. Different occasions...anniversaries. Even parties at the home, you know, when they have special occasions, people call him and have him over, you know.

Louisa: The home?

Sonja: Any kind of home.

Louisa: You mean, like a nursing home?

Sonja: A nursing home, or a regular home where they have dinner parties.

Louisa: Oh, I see. Did you work in Montgomery? Did you have a job?

Sonja: I worked one time, and that was with wigs.

Louisa: You worked with wigs?

Sonja: Yeah, I sold them. Wig Place. It was right off Fairview Avenue.

Louisa: I see. Have you ever been with people, non-Jews, who have conversations that make you feel uncomfortable.

Sonja: No. No. Not at all.

Louisa: People don't make anti-Semitic comments?

Sonja: That don't even bother me.

Louisa: It doesn't bother you?

Sonja: No.

Louisa: Has anybody ever said to you, in effect, that the Holocaust never happened?

Sonja: No, never to me, but I heard it on TV, several people, you know, like on the "700 Club". They were interviewing people on the street, and some people, I think this was a big city and I think it was New York, and I couldn't believe it, they said it never happened. These were young people. It never happened.

Louisa: I guess they missed out on history.

Sonja: I think they did.

Louisa: If you are around people who tell a joke that makes Jews look in bad light, do you feel bad?

Sonja: No.

Louisa: Doesn't bother you.

Sonja: Doesn't bother me. No. Doesn't bother me in the least.

Louisa: Are you open about your background? Do you tell people?

Sonja: Yes. Especially when I'm taking Hebrew now, and I tell the Israelis about...we all do. We love them.

Louisa: Are Israelis teaching Hebrew?

Sonja: Yes. We have a new teacher every year.

Louisa: From Maxwell (A.F.B.)?

Sonja: The War College, yes. The War College.

Louisa: Is it usually one of the wives that's teaching?

Sonja: One of the wives.

Louisa: And where are the lessons? At your church?

Sonja: In different homes. We have them in different homes.

Louisa: Who organized the lessons?

Sonja: Well, it started off with Lolly Grunsky, she was a vivacious person. She is a vivacious person, that communicated from here to Israel. How it started...she was at T.J. Maxx and she saw this woman, Israeli woman, she walked right up to her and asked. And that's how [laughs].

Louisa: How did she know that this was an Israeli woman?

Sonja: She heard her talking!

Louisa: Heard her talking! Okay!

Sonja: She walked right up to her and just asked her would she be interested in having a Hebrew class, and she yes, and that's how it got started.

Louisa: That's fascinating.

Sonja: Isn't that fascinating?

Louisa: Uhuh. Have you...how old are your children?

Sonja: I only got one son here. I mean not here, in Buffalo. He's 30 years old.



Louisa: Have you taught him about your family's background?

Sonja: He asked me. He's been asking me. I tell him little bits and pieces because he is so busy. He works for <sup>East</sup> television advertising. He makes commercials.

Louisa: East television advertising?

Sonja: He does television advertising. He does commercials. He sells them. He produces them. He's in some of them. Things like that.

Louisa: He grew up in Montgomery?

Sonja: No, he...well he grew up...he was born in California. We moved from there to New Jersey. From New Jersey to Pensacola. From Pensacola to Montgomery. That was it.

Louisa: He's been a coast-to-coast child.

Sonja: (laughs) A coast-to-coast child, yes.

Louisa: Okay, so you're telling him gradually about your background.

Sonja: Yes, he's very...wants to know all about our background.

Louisa: Is he married?

Sonja: No not yet. He's engaged. They're going to be married I'm hoping soon.

Louisa: Is he Christian or Jewish?

Sonja: He's Jewish.

Louisa: He is?

Sonja: He does not believe yet either.

Louisa: In the Savior?

Sonja: No.

Louisa: Okay. If you had it in your power to create a memorial to victims of the Holocaust, what do you think would be a fitting memorial?

Sonja: I really don't know. Would it be something like Yad V'Shem.

Louisa: That's in Jerusalem?

Sonja: Yeah. It would be something like that. Show'em people, and the hideous things of the Holocaust. And people only should wake up. It

really happened.

Louisa: Do you have a network of friends who are like you, people fled Germany.

Sonja: No.

Louisa: You know a few, though.

Sonja: I only know one, Helga Stephens here. And Lolly Grunsky. Those are the only two. I did know Mr. and Mrs. Lieb. And they had a delicatessen on McDonough a long time ago. And they...she had a number on her arm. So did he. They were both in concentration camps. That was so long ago, though. I don't know if they still have records of him. He was buried in Jerusalem, I heard. I don't know about her.

Louisa: She lives in Meridian.

Sonja: She does?

Louisa: Uhuh. Do you have anything else to say about your family that I haven't asked you or we haven't discussed yet?

Sonja: No. No.

Louisa: Your growing up?

Sonja: No, I don't have nothing else to say.

Louisa: Your escape from Germany?

Sonja: It's about as much as I can remember. Like I said, my sister would remember a lot more than I did. It really pains her more. You know, when my father died, she said in that funeral that Hitler was the killer, he's the one that started killing our father. He's the one that killed him, all that he went through.

Louisa: Well, if your sister comes to Montgomery to visit you, I'd love to meet her.

Sonja: If she does.

Louisa: Well, if you don't have anything more to talk about, we'll stop now, and I thank you very much for talking with me on tape about your family.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

ADDENDUM

January 26, 1992

At the conclusion of our interview, Mrs. Bromberg told me that she brought a piece of paper with her mother's maiden name on it for me to see, which she had forgotten to mention. Her mother's maiden name was Frieda Prazatka.

On the drive back to her apartment Mrs. Bromberg told me she "used to hate", she used to be filled with hate for "that man", who I took to mean Hitler. I asked her if she ever felt the need for counselling to help her deal with the hate or with her difficult, uprooted childhood. She replied in the negative, and added (for the next three miles) that when Jesus came into her life "he erased all the hurt from my memory" and now she can't remember anything from her childhood except seeing Hitler in the parade.

INVENTORY OF ENCLOSURES WITH SONJA A. BROMBERG TRANSCRIPT

1. Photograph with negative of Sonja A. Bromberg, January 26, 1992
2. Tape recorded interview.
3. Department of Archives and History Gift Form.
4. Transcript of tape, 26 pages.
5. Addendum.