

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH BERTHA BELL

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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MONROE TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Susan Yousif: This begins an interview with Bertha Bell on June 23, 2005 in Monroe Township, New Jersey with Susan Yousif and ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

SY: Thank you Mrs. Bell for having us here today, we really appreciate that.

Bertha Bell: You're welcome.

SY: I'd like to start the interview by asking if you could tell us where and when you were born?

BB: I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana on June 21, '22.

SH: Can you tell us a little bit about your family background? Perhaps start with your father and tell us about what you remember the stories of his ...

BB: Well, both of my parents came from Hungary and they came before World War I. My mother stayed in New York and my father was in Indiana. So, one day he decided he wanted to get married, so he goes to New York to a matchmaker, and he says, "I want a Jewish woman who's a good cook," and my mother had signed up with the matchmaker, so they got together. That Saturday night they got married. He took her to Indiana and that was the story. My mother had two children. Joseph, who is exactly two years younger than me, and I was born in the Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana.

SH: How did your father get to be in Indianapolis?

BB: He had a brother. He came from a very large family, with seven or eight brothers and couple of sisters, and he had a brother who lived in Chicago, and I think [that's] the brother [who] went to get him and he said that Indiana was a good place and so he came to Indiana.

SH: Which of your family, was it your grandparents who emigrated from Hungary, or was it your great grandparents?

BB: No, it was my mother and my father that came from Hungary. Then, my mother's mother came over and lived in New York with a daughter there and ...

SH: How old was your father when he came?

BB: I would say he was in his middle twenties.

SH: Did he already have a profession or trade?

BB: Yes, he was a tailor, and he had a small little place that he did a few things, and when he married my mother, he built a house, had a house built, and there was a store front, of the house. It was like a candy store, and my mother would run the candy store, and he would have a tailor there.

SH: In your mother's family, did she have a profession when she came from Hungary?

BB: No. My mother came when she was about sixteen years old. She came and nobody was sponsoring her, or anything, and she had a choice of either working at one of the factories, or to be a maid. She decided to be a maid, which was the smartest thing to do. ... Because, at that time in New York, the first Jewish families that came were Germans, very wealthy, so she decided she got a clean room, all the food she wanted to eat, and she just had to clean and she got one day off a month and she graduated to become the head cook. She was a very good cook. So, it was better than working in one of those places, you know where they were sewing and everything, and then you had to get a room, and then you had to get your own meals. She was very smart. But she had a problem meeting somebody so she went to a matchmaker and at that time, you know, remember, *matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match, buy me a catch*.
[Laughter]

SH: You talked about her mother then coming over. Did any other members of her family come?

BB: Yes, her father did come over and they lived in Brooklyn, or on the Eastside.

SH: They had come over before your mother married your father?

BB: No, and we did make one trip to New York to meet my grandmother and my grandparents and my aunt, and my aunt also went to a matchmaker.

SH: That was very common.

BB: But many years later and she married a man from Indianapolis, who was a peddler, and he built her a very nice house but she was already in her late forties so they had no children. I don't know too much about his family, I really don't know.

SH: Over the years, did any other members of the family come from Hungary?

BB: My mother had a brother and he came and lived in New York and he lived in the Bronx and he married a woman from New York by the name of Esther and they had two children and he was an iron worker. He would work on these big skyscrapers and bridges and things. That is what her brother did.

SH: Do you remember anyone talking about either wanting to go or actually going back to Hungary?

BB: No, nobody wanted to go back because my mother's family came from a small town in Hungary called (Marte Solka?) and they were treated very badly. They lived in a (Pogrom?) if you know what a (Pogrom?) is. They lived in a pogrom, very, very bad. She only had three years of education. When she came to America she taught herself English, to read and write, but she only had three years of schooling in Hungary because they wouldn't allow Jewish people to

go to school. So, her brother, I guess, he got a job working on the big skyscrapers and the other sister who came, she was into sewing or something like that. But my father came from Budapest, so he considered himself smarter and he was a tailor and he provided a fairly nice support for us.

SH: Tell us about growing up in Indianapolis as a young girl.

BB: Well, growing up in Indianapolis, it was a very segregated town, high schools, grade schools, buses and where you had to live. All the blacks had to live in a certain area, and we never had any problem with them, because at that time they understood, so that's where they lived. They lived in a certain area and, of course, after the war, that was different. Even the USO was a Jewish USO, a Catholic USO, a Protestant USO, a black USO, and officers' USO, all different.

SH: Really?

BB: Isn't that something?

SH: Before we get into talking about the USO, tell us about what you would do after school, and were you required to work in the store, or, you know, just growing up as a young girl?

BB: Oh, well, I did work in the store for a while and then as I grew up I wanted more money so I went and got a job in a department store and I became head salesperson there and then I became a complete manager of the store, and so I thought that was great. I went two years to Indiana University, because if you went to school and you had even a B grade, which I had an A grade, you could go to school and they would pay for it.

SH: The department store paid for it, or the university?

BB: No, no, the government paid for it.

SH: Oh, really?

SH: Yes, but they only paid for two years, so I couldn't afford to go anymore. That's okay, by that time I was manager of the store, so I liked that.

SH: Going to school, did you have the sense from your parents that education was very important?

BB Oh, yes, yes, but, unfortunately, I didn't live in a Jewish neighborhood, and so the school that I went to had maybe ten Jewish students and the rest were mostly Lutheran. I had a very best girl friend who was Lutheran and I would go to church with her every Sunday. My mother was afraid I was going to change to be a Lutheran. I still correspond with her. [laughter]

SH: Wonderful. Now, was your family active at all in the synagogue?

BB: Oh, yes, my mother and father, yes, they were very active in the synagogue and I used to, after school. For many years, I used to walk three miles, it's called (Talmud Torah?) that means Jewish School, and I would work there and I did learn to speak and write Hebrew. I can't do it now.

SH: Did your mother keep a kosher home?

BB: Yes, my mother kept a kosher home, yes, she did.

SH: Because there were so few Jewish pupils in your schools was there any sense of anti-Semitism?

BB: No, we really didn't have any; the only thing that I regretted was that I did not live in a Jewish area. There were quite a few Jewish areas, which were only about a mile away from my house, where they had the Jewish butchers and grocery stores and even the department stores, you know.

SH: Now, did you have to travel there to get the kosher products?

BB: Yes, I [would] take a trolley.

SH: When did you start working in the department store? Were you still in high school then?

BB: I was still in high school, yes. I would work on weekends or during the summer, yes.

SH: Did you always work for the same one?

BB: Yes, the place was called Three Sisters. I don't think they're in business anymore. They were in business for a long time.

SH: So, what were your favorite activities as a young high school student?

BB: As a young high school student I would go to the USO, yes. I told you there was a Jewish USO but, I mean, it wasn't a USO then, it was called Kirshbaum Community Center and it was a YHCA. Yes, Hebrew Association, yes, I would go there with my girlfriends and we would, you know, have all kinds of games to play there. We had a swimming pool there; we had everything we wanted. We also had boys. [laughter]

SH: Was there a certain subject in school that was your favorite?

BB: Yes, it was home economics; yes, I liked home economics and music, yes.

SH: Your father had told the matchmaker that he wanted someone who could cook well and, as you said, your mother was the head cook in the home that she had worked in. Did she continue with that skill and pass it on to you?

BB: Well, unfortunately, I did watch her for a while, yes, and I could do a lot of things that she did, but I wasn't interested, until I went to college to take home economics, but there they didn't teach Hungarian cooking.

SH: That would have been my next question, did your family keep some of the traditions?

BB: Oh, yes, we had Passover and we had all the holidays, Rosh Hashanah, yes, yes, we did.

SH: Were they able to bring any mementoes or things with them from Hungary?

BB: My mother did bring candles, you know, candlesticks, so did my grandmother, and they brought a featherbed. It was very important, but they didn't bring very much, very much.

SH: Sue, I'm sorry.

SY: That's okay. ... We can move onto college. What activities did you do in college, were you able to actually go out and do extra curricular activities or was it just school?

BB: Oh, no. Indiana University, even sixty years ago was a very big university, and a beautiful university. It is really well known for music. No, we had sororities, you know, we had parties. ... I didn't have any money, but you didn't need a lot of money at that time. You didn't need a lot of clothes either.

SH: Were you still working when you were in college?

BB: During the summer, yes, and holidays I'd come home and I would go to work.

SH: How far is Indiana University from where your home was?

BB: Quite a distance, yes. I stayed in the dorm, yes.

SH: You graduated from high school in ...

BB: 1942.

SH: Spring of '42. What do you remember about December 7th, what was the reaction in Indianapolis?

BB: It's surprising, we really didn't hear too much in Indiana. We really didn't. The only thing that we did hear, that there was a USO, that there was a war. We would read the newspapers you know, the big headlines but we really didn't hear too much. We really didn't.

SH: There were no young men who were gung ho to join?

BB: All the young men were very gung ho to join, oh, yes, yes. They all joined and besides they had a draft, oh, yes, yes, and they would draft all the men. They really had to go. Like I said,

my husband wanted to go into the Navy, well, this was before he was my husband, he's telling me this, and he is deaf on, totally deaf in one ear and the Navy would not take him. The army said he's fine. They took him.

SH: Now, you have a younger brother, two years younger?

BB: Exactly two years.

SH: Now, was he anxious? Do you remember him ...

BB: He was drafted and he went to the European Theater. He was mostly in Italy. We didn't hear too much from him. He would just write a few letters.

SH: Really?

BB: Yes, evidently he didn't have too much fighting wherever he was.

SH: What bases and what were the military installations that would have made a USO necessary in Indianapolis?

BB: Indianapolis had Fort Benjamin Harrison, which is one of the largest United States Army camps, and, I think, it closed just recently. They had over one hundred thousand men so Indianapolis had a lot. Then, they had Camp Atterbury, which was mostly, he [Mr. Bell] was in Fort Harrison. Camp Atterbury was mostly infantry and there they had another one hundred thousand men. Then, they had a Navy base between Chicago and Indiana. So, you would walk down the street and you just saw soldiers from one end to the other. I've never seen so many men in my life, so they would come on Saturday night, over the weekend. Now, during the war, my mother and all the other Jewish women would have the soldiers stay at their house for the weekend, treat them for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

SH: Really?

BB: Oh, yes, and every Sunday at our USO the mothers would get together and make a great big dinner.

SH: Oh, really?

BB: Oh, yes, a full dinner and, naturally, all the boys would come, all the Jewish boys would come, you know, because it was all Jewish cooking. They had a wonderful time. Also this place was called Kirshbaum, because a man named Kirshbaum donated it, and we used to have all the big bands come there. We had (Woody Allen ?), Kay Kyser, Glenn Miller; all the big bands would come. Tommy Dorsey, that's how I met him [Alexander Bell].

SH: What do you remember about meeting Mr. Bell for the first time?

BB: Yes, I do. I was up on the dance floor and, at that time, the guys would tap you on the shoulder when they want you, even if you are dancing with somebody else, they tap you on the shoulder and you go dance with that other person and he tapped me on the shoulder and wanted to dance with me. But to be very truthful, he wasn't a very good dancer, and I loved to dance. So, I just said, "Would you like to go for a walk?" So, we took a walk, it was in September, we took a walk around the building, you know. Actually, we weren't supposed to do that. We were not supposed to leave the thing, but he looked like a perfectly harmless man so we took a walk, and we're just talking, and he said to me, "You know what?" He says, "I'm going to marry you," and I said to myself, "Oh, my gosh, these guys from the East are so fast." [laughter] Don't forget this was sixty-four years ago, you know.

SH: Right. This was 1942, right?

BB: 1942, in September, yes.

SH: At this point then, in that fall, you're at the University of Indiana, you're already in ...

BB: Yes, I had already, yes.

SH: Were there any military units going to the University of Indiana at that point?

BB: I'm not sure. I'm sure there were, yes, there was training there.

SH: ASTP program or V12? Do you remember what Mr. Bell was doing? Was he in training?

BB: He was training as a medical, I have pictures of him, when I find them I'll send them to you.

Alexander Bell: We're registered pharmacists.

BB: Yes, well, you see, he had graduated from Pharmacy School, but he was not a registered pharmacist as yet but, anyway, they sent him to a school at the camp to learn to be a pharmacist.

SH: A military pharmacist.

BB: A military pharmacist, yes.

SH: How long was he stationed there and how often were you able to see him?

BB: I saw him every weekend for about three or four months and he told me, he says, "I'm going to marry you," and I said to myself, "Hmm, hmm." He was shipped out then to Tennessee and then he came back one weekend to see me and then he was shipped, from Tennessee. He was shipped to San Francisco, all those in the medical, and then from San Francisco he was shipped in one of these hospital ships that would go over into the Pacific and pick up wounded and then he would come back. They would take supplies over and bring the sick ones back to San Francisco, but they would go to all the different islands, and that's what he did.

SH: Now, we are looking at this wonderful box full of letters, which will be a wonderful addition to our archives. But what do you remember as a young woman who's on the home front? What are some of the things that you remembered hearing and doing that were indicative of that era?

BB: Yes, we really didn't hear too much about the war. We would read it in the newspapers, you know, but when we would go up to the USO, the soldiers were so happy to have a wonderful band. They have all these girls there, I mean, each girl had ten soldiers [laughter] and they just wanted to, see, don't forget these fellows had not been overseas yet, because this was a staging area, and they took all the boys from New Jersey and New York and brought them to Indiana. They took all the boys from Indiana and took them over, too, and so the fellows were very happy to be there, to have a wonderful meal, to have pretty young girls, you know, to have all the fancy bands and so they had not been overseas yet.

SH: Did you do any of the organizing for these events, or these get-togethers?

BB: Yes, yes, yes, I worked with a committee and there were a lot of mothers there always chaperoning. Oh, yes, a lot of mothers, chaperoning because these fellows were, you know, young.

SH: Did your father ever come?

BB: My father never came. No, my mother did. Oh, yes, she loved to come. She loved to cook a big fancy meal for these guys, but she would only come on Sunday. On Saturday they would have different people. She always came on Sunday with a whole group of women. They would do the cooking.

SH: Did they have services there?

BB: They had services on Friday night, yes, but they could also go to the temples there. We have, as a matter-of-fact, when I was a young girl in Indiana, they had six different, in Indianapolis, six different temples. That's a lot.

SH: That's a big congregation.

BB: Yes, yes. They had six; four orthodox, and one in between, and one very reformed. The in between is called conservative and one that was very reformed but the other four were orthodox.

SH: Now, was your family part of the orthodox?

BB: No, we went to the conservative one because if you go to the orthodox, the women sit on one side, the men sit on the other side; they don't have anything to do with each other.

SH: There wouldn't have been anybody at the USO.

BB: No, I don't think so. No, they didn't come to the USO but their children did, I mean, you know, but they didn't because that's ...

SH: Were there any drives or was anybody doing anything towards the war effort, the war bonds and bandages? Did you participate in any of that?

BB: Oh, yes, yes, yes, I did. I worked for the Red Cross and when the troop trains would go out, you know, we would stand there and give the guys doughnuts and drinks, you know, and when they come in they would tell us when to go and we would go. They would pick us up and take us over to the train station, yes, but we didn't have any, it was just to help the soldiers feel welcome. They did have war bonds, yes, they did, because, you know, we didn't have television but we had radio. Yes, we had radio and it was always talking about that and in the newspaper there was always a big sign with Uncle Sam, you know, "I want you."

SH: Did your father talk about if there was any work that came out of the war that he was able to take advantage of?

BB: No, no. He just had the neighborhood, you know.

SH: Did anything change in the neighborhood, I mean, with so many of the men being drafted and going off to war, did you notice any changes at all in the neighborhood?

BB: No, not really.

SH: Indianapolis is quite mid-western so ...

BB: It's a very big town, very, very, big, very large.

SH: Did you have to worry about blackouts or anything?

BB: No, we never had a blackout; we never had anything like that, no. The only news that we could get was either from a newspaper, or from the radio, and, as I said ... all the soldiers that were here, they had never [been overseas], so they couldn't tell us anything about the war and they never wanted to tell us anyway.

SH: That wouldn't have been done, right, there was all those "Loose Lips Sink Ships" and things like that.

BB: Right.

SH: One of the things that I wanted to ask you, because of this troop movement in and out, Indianapolis was on major rail lines.

BB: Oh, absolutely.

SH: You were probably very busy with the Red Cross giving out doughnuts ...

BB: Oh, yes, yes.

SH: Did they charge for the doughnuts?

BB: No, no, no. They liked to see us get all dressed up, the pretty girl, you know, and give them doughnuts.

SH: Did you ever help anyone write any letters or ...

BB: No, no, I never did.

SH: You talked about the segregation of all the different USOs, did you ever have the opportunity to see how some of the others ones operated?

BB: No, no. As a matter-of-fact, one soldier come into our thing and he was Catholic, Italian, adorable, and I dated him and I brought him home to my mother and I didn't tell her that he was not Jewish, you know, and the reason I liked him was he was a marvelous dancer, because he came from Brooklyn, or the Bronx, you know, he really danced. He was a cute guy and so he liked to come up there. He says, "I come from Brooklyn," or the Bronx, he says, "I know more Jewish than some of these guys," [laughter] and he did. He did because, but I never told my mother.

SH: Did anybody keep up a correspondence during that time? I mean, obviously, you did.

BB: I did with him [Alexander Bell] and I did with two fellows that I dated from Indianapolis, yes. One got killed, and one was only shipped to another part of the United States, so he never got out, and one never left Indianapolis, and that's the one that my mother wanted me to marry.

SH: Oh, really?

BB: David Glazer, because he was there all the time, yes. He was at Fort Harrison, but they never shipped him out. He worked in one of the places; I forgot where he worked in, at the camp. They never shipped him out.

SH: Mr. Bell was in Tennessee and in California, was there any thought that you might go and visit him there?

BB: No, no, no. No, I didn't go. He came once from Tennessee to visit me and [then] I didn't see him for three years.

SH: ... He'd made a pronouncement that he was going to marry you but when did he propose?

BB: Right away, you know, all the letters, you know, reading all the letters.

SH: You just waited to answer?

BB: I never answered him.

SH: What was difficult to get then, while there is the rationing going on? How did that affect a young girl?

BB: The rationing really wasn't too bad. I mean, they rationed butter, and we had kosher meat for cooking; now we, really didn't seem too horrendous. Sugar.

SH: What about nylon stockings?

BB: I don't remember.

SH: Many of the women say that was what they missed most.

BB: It could be, I don't remember. I don't remember. I don't remember too much rationing. I think they rationed sugar and coffee and something like that.

SH: You talked about taking the trolley so you really weren't dependent on a car.

BB: Yes, never had a car. I didn't learn to drive until after I got married, never drove. I would always take a trolley; we had trolleys from all over the place, just like San Francisco, except Indiana is flat.

Mr. Bell: You had no cars.

BB: My father never had a car.

SH: Really?

BB: No.

SH: One of the questions then, you talked about all your news and everything coming from the radio; prior to World War II had your family voiced any political opinions as to Franklin Roosevelt and some of the New Deal programs that he'd put in?

BB: I don't think so.

SH: Were they Republicans or Democrat?

BB: I don't think so. I don't really think so.

SH: Were you involved at all in politics?

BB: No, not at all. Don't forget, I was quite young and I really wasn't interested in politics.

SH: Some people are and some aren't and that's quite all right. Tell me then about as the war is progressing in Europe and the war in the Pacific, when you think back at the news coverage because I'm assuming that you went to the movies as well ...

BB: Oh, yes. Ten cents it cost to go to the movies.

SH: What kind of coverage did you hear? Did you hear more about the European Theater or do you think it was equally divided, from what you heard?

BB: Well, I really can't remember. They would have a newsreel. You know, they would come on and with the crawling and they would show a few things and they would show Hitler, you know, all that stuff, but in Indiana they didn't really have that much. It's surprising, it really is.

SH: In the community that you grew up in and around there, the YH ...

BB: Well, there was a YH, United Hebrew ...

SH: YHWA, right? I think it's the right one.

BB: Yes, right. Yes, they had a Christian one, you know, nothing really to do with the blacks in Indianapolis and I'm sure that they were, you know, drafted, of course, but we really had nothing to do with them because we didn't live in a black neighborhood. There was no school for the blacks. There was a few blacks at the university but very few. They had to be really, really smart and they were really kept down, but they didn't know the difference at that time, not until after the war.

SH: Really? What kind of changes did you see after the war then?

BB: Well, I mean, they could go to all the schools.

Mr. Bell: They have the same privileges.

BB: They have the same privileges that everybody else had, oh, yes, everything and they became independent, you know, more and, you know, it was better the other way, but not really, not for them, but they were treated well. They had their own high school but, you know, they didn't know the difference. Once the war came and once they fought in the war, and they fought in the war, but I had nothing to do with that. I wouldn't have been allowed to go into the USO. So, I really didn't know anything about it.

SH: Tell us then as the war is developing and President Roosevelt passes away and Truman takes over, did you have any doubts about Truman's ability to ...

BB: No, I really didn't. I thought he was a very good president, I really did. I was disappointed in Roosevelt for a couple of things. You remember that ship that came over, the *St. Louis*, and he would not let them dock. He only allowed a few people to come, to migrate, in there, so he wasn't a very good friend of mine.

SH: When were you first aware as a young Jewish woman of what was going on in Europe, the atrocities that were being committed?

BB: We didn't hear too much about it, we really didn't.

SH: Until after the camps were liberated.

BB: Yes, yes, because nobody believed that they were doing those things, you know. It was kept very quiet.

SH: No one from your family that stayed in Europe tried to call you?

BB: I lost members of my family but we were not real close. My father had a very large family and I think only two people were alive. My mother had very few. Most of her family had come over here. She did have a cousin who worked in the Underground, and she and her boyfriend escaped and would take several people and they went to Israel. So, they didn't fight in the war. They went to Israel very early.

SH: So, no one in your families in Europe tried to contact you to sponsor them?

BB: No, no one. I'm surprised that nobody from my father's family, no, nobody.

SH: You would have finished at the University of Indiana then in '44 and then you went back, continued to work full time for the department store?

BB: For the department store, yes.

SH: Now, tell us then how the story unfolds and what you were doing?

BB: Well, I was getting a letter from him [Alexander Bell] every day, every day, and he came home after three years, I had not seen him. Now, when I first met him, you know, he was a young boy and shy and when he came back three years later he was a man, good looking. I hadn't seen him then he appeared, you know, he'd been through a lot, and we got engaged ...

SY: Even though he couldn't dance that well?

BB: Oh, yes. When we got married I made a bet with him. I told him that I would learn to drive a car before he learned to dance, and I did. He could waltz, that was it, you know, but that's okay, I used to dance with all the rest of the guys. I love to dance. So, you know, he was grown up. I mean, he'd been through a lot and he looked very good. He put on some weight and he stood real straight. He was handsome. So, he wanted me to meet his parents and so I did. I got on the train, we went on the train, we went back to East Orange, New Jersey and we met his parents. I couldn't get over the house that they had and the house, with thirteen rooms, five bathrooms, five car garage, and I never seen so much food in my whole life. [laughter]

SH: Were you well received?

BB: Yes, yes, yes, they were very nice to me. They were very nice and we went down into New York, on 42nd Street, 14th Street, he had a cousin who had a jewelry store and he got me a ring, and then he left, and I didn't see him for another whole year.

SH: Where did he go then?

BB: He went to the Philippines.

SH: So, the war is still going on. What year did you get engaged then?

BB: This was '45, because we got married in '46. The war was just about ending but he was still, don't forget the Asian War was longer than the ...

SH: I was just trying to get the chronology right, that he went back then to the Philippines.

BB: I think so. I think he went back to there and I know he went back to the Philippines because he found his cousin.

SH: Was he working on the hospital ship then?

BB: Yes, a hospital ship and he found his cousins and he liberated them, helped liberate, and took them back to their house.

SH: Now, they were in the Philippines, please continue.

BB: He took them back to the house, which the Japanese had been living in it, and they had a lot of antiques, and a lot of wonderful things, which they had dug into the ground and covered it all, not the Japanese, his cousins, money, gold, jewelry. They dug it and buried it, because the Japanese were living in their house, and, of course, they had to clean it all up and everything, and then because the war was just about over, I think, yes, once they dropped the bomb the war was over. But they didn't take out the stuff, out of the ground right away, no, they waited. They were fairly wealthy there, because we went to visit them twice.

SH: How big was the family that was there? Was it a mother, father

BB: No, it was a sister and brother. The sister was married to a man named Hackett and he was president of York, you know, they made refrigeration and things like that. He was president. She was an artist and she had a studio there and you see that water buffalo there, that came from her.

SH: Now, the family name was ...

BB: The family name was Steinberg, and she had two brothers of which one was president of the *Manila Tribune*. He never got married, she also had a sister, I forgot, and he never got

married because he had polio, but brilliant, and then the other one was, he had something to do with politics, or something. And then she had a sister who was married, had no children. Her husband died and she was a concert pianist. So, we visited them and they had a beautiful house, because we visited them about twenty years ago, and they treated us really royal.

SH: How did the family come to live in the Philippines before World War II?

BB: World War I. They were spies for Russia, and they were interpreters for Russia, since they came from Russia. They were very smart, and when they came to the Philippines that was their job but then, of course, he became the owner of the *Manila Tribune* and the other one was some kind of big shot, I remember but ...

SH: So, they were spying for the Russians you said?

BB: Yes, I don't know if they were spying for the Russians. I'm not really sure, I'm not really sure.

SH: Did they talk at all about what it was like during the Japanese occupation?

BB: Not too much. It was already twenty years after the war and they had this beautiful house, with all these gorgeous antiques, and all, just buried and he, as I said, he was also president of York and ...

SH: Did Mr. Bell show you around the places he'd been stationed?

BB: No. We did go to Santo Tomas, the hospital there, because that's where he was stationed, in the hospital. He did take us to the hospital, but the Philippines is a, number one, a very dirty place, a very populated place, and not a safe place. They lived in this beautiful house in a compound. They had guards with guns that went around the house. They had three maids because you could get a maid there for ten dollars a month, you know what I mean?

SH: What year was this that you were visiting?

BB: Let's see, we visited twice. It was '72. It was quite a ways from before the war, you know, I mean, after the war. No, they didn't talk too much about the war, no.

SH: Was there any discussion as a young woman in Indianapolis when Truman dropped the bomb?

BB: No, we were very happy. Should have dropped it on Germany. I shouldn't have said that, I shouldn't say that.

SH: You married then after the war?

BB: Yes, in '46.

SH: You married in Indianapolis?

BB: Indianapolis, yes.

SH: So, did all the families come out?

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SH: Please continue. You were talking about the wedding.

BB: Oh, yes. He came back and I made up arrangements to have the wedding, a week later, in the rabbi's study. I told him, "You go home and get yourself some civilian clothes and bring your mother and father back with you." Meanwhile, while he was gone, I decided that I wanted to have a wedding, not in the rabbi's study. I went to this hotel called the Washington Hotel, very beautiful one. I borrowed a wedding dress from one of my girlfriends with the same size as me. I called up seventy-five people and told them that we're going to have a wedding, but we're not going to have a dinner. It was going to be just a sweet table, because how could I, you know, and I hired one of my girlfriends to play the piano and I called his brother up, who lived, who did come, he was best man and one of my girl friends and her husband, she was the bride's maid. He didn't even know this was going to happen. But a week later, he came, but his mother and father didn't come. Well, they had two drugstores; she had a drugstore, he had a drugstore, and they couldn't leave the drugstore, too bad. Anyway, we had a beautiful wedding and it's funny, we went upstairs after the wedding, you know, we get upstairs and there's a bottle of champagne in the sink with ice, and everything, and we poured a glass for him and glass for me. I never drank except kosher wine at Passover. He says, "This is terrible," taste terrible. "Yes, mine taste terrible, too," so we poured the whole bottle of champagne down the toilet. [laughter] That's funny. We just didn't know. We just did that.

SH: What were your plans? Had you made any plans to move, or were you going to stay in Indianapolis?

BB: No, we were going to go back to East Orange and live with his parents. Now, I told you his parents had a great big, big house and we lived on the third floor. We had our own bathroom and everything. You see, he had graduated from pharmacy school but he had to intern for a whole year, so he worked for his parents and I worked for his father in the drugstore, and his father wanted to send me to pharmacy school. Now, I could have gone, I would have to only go two more years, but I looked at my mother-in-law and I looked at my father-in-law, and they worked from seven o'clock in the morning until eleven o'clock at night, seven days a week, and I said, "I don't want that." So, I said, "Thank you, but, no thank you." I could have gone and it would have been easy because I was quite bright, I could have done it, and I'm very glad I didn't do it.

SH: What did you do as a young wife to keep yourself busy?

BB: Well, I worked for his father, in the store, for a while and I didn't care for that, and so I loved to sell, I really loved to sell, and one of the customers that came to the store had a shop in South Orange and I asked if she needed somebody. She said, "Oh, yes, I need somebody." So, I

said, "Oh, fine." So, I took the Lackawanna Railroad everyday. My father-in-law says to me, "Where are you gonna get a job?" I said, "Don't worry, I'll get a job." I worked there for a year and a half, or two, and then we moved to Maplewood. Yes, Maplewood and I got pregnant and that was the end of working.

SH: So, did Mr. Bell continue to work for his family then after his internship?

BB: He did for a while and then he wanted his own store, but his father said, "Well, if you work here a couple of years, you can have the store his mother had," and so he worked there and then he said, "Well, if you pay me \$25,000.00 you can have the store," and that didn't work. Then, she says, "When I die you can have the store." I says, "All right, let's get out of this." So, he had an uncle, Uncle Sal, who was a pharmacist who lived in Rahway, and he put everybody in business, and he says, "I'll put you in business. I'll open up a store for you. I'll put everything in there. You can pay me every month and in five years the store is yours." It was a goldmine from the very beginning. The two brothers didn't talk to each other, Uncle Sal and his father didn't talk to each other, but it worked out fine.

SH: Was this in Rahway?

BB: No, he was from Rahway, it was in Edison. It was a small shopping center and Uncle Sal opened it up for us and, at that time, we bought a house on twenty-seven, Route 27, for \$9999.00, a three bedroom house, one bath though, and a garage, kitchen, everything, and it was only a block and half from the store, so he would ...

SH: Wonderful

BB: Meanwhile, I had never learned to drive yet, and I said to Alex, "I'm going to learn to drive," and so I did and I passed it. I got my driver's license and I passed it. Anyway, I had the two children, you know, I was busy and I worked in the store. I loved working in the store, I did, but not in the prescription department.

SH: Tell us about your children if you like.

BB: You mean, now, what they're doing?

SH: No, just, you know, growing up, what you did as a mom or ...

BB: Well, the usual thing, you know, ballet, softball, all that stuff, you know, PTA. I was president of PTA a couple of times and, you know, the usual thing, nothing exciting, the usual thing.

SH: How do you think your life as a woman coming up through the '40s, the '50s, '60s and on, was so different from your mother. I mean, here was this woman, who had enough nerve to immigrate ...

BB: Well, I had a much better life than my mother did, I did. I could, if I wanted to work in the store, see, that was the advantage of not being a pharmacist, because do you know there's a law that if you have a pharmacy and there is no pharmacist there, you had to close the store? You cannot run the store. That's why lots of times when you go into one of the supermarkets and you see the pharmacy is closed, it's because there's no pharmacist there. So, I worked in the store quite a bit and I used to get a babysitter and I played cards with the girls, you know, the usual thing and we went on a lot of nice parties, he was president of every solitary pharmacy society that existed and president of every association, you know, the Moose and the Elks, and whatever. He was president of everything and so we used to go to all those different affairs and then he became president of the Middlesex County Pharmacy Association. Then, he became president of the New Jersey State Pharmacy Association and so we would go to a lot of parties and all these, and we had a lot of friends and it was nice, it was very nice, and my children grew up. My daughter graduated and she went to Boston University and she became a, she worked for Young and Rubicon, that's an advertising agency, and she was a senior vice president there. She worked herself up. She's retired now, and my son went to the University of Rhode Island and he has his own business. He's doing absolutely fantastic in Rhode Island. He's an environmentalist. He started off as a pharmacist. He was going to take pharmacy school, and I knew it wouldn't work out, and so he took one course, he took on environmental science, and he loved it so much he says to his father, "I don't want to become a pharmacist." I think he was very disappointed, but too bad. Anyway, he got a job in Rhode Island as head planner of the environmental department of Rhode Island. He worked there for fourteen years. He lives in Rhode Island. He met a girl from Rhode Island. He says, "I'm never coming back to New Jersey," and he has a beautiful house there, eighty-foot sailboat, a ski house in Vermont, you name it he has it, and my daughter, too. She lives in Connecticut on forty acres of land. She's retired. She has a penthouse on Park Avenue, in New York, and she has a place in Florida. So, I think that my children did pretty good.

SH: I think it sounds that way, too. Do you have grandchildren?

BB: I have two grandchildren, by my son. My grandson just graduated at the University of Nevada and he worked on one of these clipper ships that takes people all over the world, that's what he's doing right now. He's very young. She, you'll never guess where she's going, she just finished her first year; she's going to the University of Denver in Las Vegas. So, I said, but what she's studying, she's studying hotel management, that's what she wants and when you have a big conference, she likes to set those all up, and it's either Cornell or Las Vegas but Cornell would never have taken her. You got to be a brilliant person to go to Cornell. She's very good though.

SH: How has your involvement been at Rutgers? You're almost a Rutgers woman.

BB: Oh, well, when he started to work, I did not want him to sell the store. We sold the store and we took a trip around the world for three months, around the world, and one of the stops was the Philippines, that was in '72, and so he starts working at Rutgers and I told you I like to sell. So, I got a job in a jewelry store. I love to sell, it's really great, and then I would work at Rutgers as a receptionist. I did the cashier work. I did, you know, whenever he needed me, he'd call me up, "Can you come down?" So, I took care of all the money that was there. He had a couple of

secretaries that got very sticky hands, oh, yes, and I caught them. But because I caught them, I had to do all the work, so I was secretary for a while, [and] cashier. They had three cash registers there which I had to clear up and count the money and make sure that it balanced, everything, you know. I did that.

SH: Now, this was at ...

BB: Hurtado, yes, I only worked in Hurtado. Every once in a while, I would go to one of the other places ... if the receptionist didn't show up, or something. He would call me up, "Can you go there?" "Yes, I can go there." That's it.

SH: Thank you so much. You are a wonderful storyteller.

SH: Just for the record, there is a wonderful box full of letters that were sent by Mr. Bell to Mrs. Bell and wonderful souvenirs, photographs, postcards, Christmas cards, all that will become part of our archives. We thank you so much for taking time today and for talking with us and for this wonderful contribution to the archives. It's been wonderful.

BB: Well, when I was at the meeting [Rutgers Living History Society] the other time and I was talking to Tom Kindre, he says, "You have got to speak to Sandy," because I told him I had this box and it's been sitting here, it's all tied up with ribbons and everything, and I said, "Maybe she would." "Oh, you got to call her, you have to call her." "Okay." He gave me your phone number and everything.

SH: It's been marvelous and, again, I thank you so much.

BB: Well, if I find the other box, I have another box. The funniest thing is I have a brochure from the Empire State Building. On our honeymoon, we went up to the Empire State Building and we had lunch, or something. A cheese sandwich was ten cents and I had this and I've been looking for it. It's driving me crazy, I can't find it, and a ham sandwich, I think, it was like twenty cents and it wasn't a big restaurant but isn't that funny?

SH: So, was New York exciting for a girl from Indianapolis?

BB: Yes, I had never been. As a matter-of-fact, he had never been to New York, no, but, you know, he was busy working in the store, busy going to school, and his parents really never went to New York, I don't think, maybe to visit a cousin or somebody. They had relatives all over the place. But, oh, yes, it was very exciting.

SH: One of the questions that I know that Sue wanted to know was if you could tell her if there was a connection to Alexander Graham Bell, the name?

BB: Well, his father was Alexander Bell and I don't know, I think, he was about eleven or twelve years old, he decided that he wanted to have the same name as his father. He was Alexander Bell, but he went down to the town and changed it to Alexander Bell, Jr. In the Jewish religion, you're not a junior. Did you know that? They don't have juniors, or thirds, or

seconds, because you're always supposed to be named after somebody that has died and, actually, he was named, his mother had a friend that was a doctor and his name was Alexander, so he wasn't named after his father. So, he went to the municipal building and changed it to Alexander M. Bell, that's the middle name of his father, M. Bell, Jr. So, a lot of people when I moved, or if I go the synagogue, or I go to the temple, or something, "Is your husband Jewish?" "Yes." "What's he doing with a junior on his name?" I say, you know, because you're not supposed to do that. Did you know that?

SH: So, there is not any connection to Alexander Graham Bell?

BB: No, no, there isn't. Actually, I'll tell you the truth, Alex's father came, there were nine brothers and two sisters and their last name was Belski. Now, all eight brothers changed their name to Bell, but the oldest brother kept Belski; he wouldn't change his name. The oldest brother still was Jacob and Jacob was always Jacob Belski. He would not change his name but all seven of the other brothers, or eight of them, there were nine brothers and two sisters, all the other brothers changed their name to Bell. So, no, we're not related to Alexander Bell who was a Scotsman. Did you know that?

SH: No.

BB: Yes, he was a Scotsman. We went to his house near Nova Scotia.

SH: Now, your maiden name was ...

BB: Moskovitz.

SH: Well, like you said earlier that's why you chose ...

BB: That's why I married him, no, I'm only kidding.

SH: Well, thank you so much.

BB: Oh, you're entirely welcome.

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Reviewed by Diane Watson 11/15/05

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 11/30/05

Reviewed by Bertha Bell 3/6/06