

Journeys South

A Project of the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program

Interview with Alice Freeman

Alice Freeman

Interview Date: 12/15/2009

Location of interview: Stiffel Center, 6th and Porter, Philadelphia

Interview conducted by Thomas Carroll with RA Friedman

Alice was 96 years old at the time of the interview.

Interviewer: Okay. So, we'll begin. I think the tape is rolling. And we'll begin at the beginning. I want to ask first your full name. Your family – your name, your family name.

Alice Freeman: Yeah.

Interviewer: It's Alice.

Alice Freeman: Alice Freeman.

Interviewer: **[Inaudible]**?

Alice Freeman: Oh, no, my family –

Interviewer: Yes, your parents. Yes.

Alice Freeman: My parents – this is what I wanted to tell you. When my father came over from Russia, when they interviewed him, he said – he couldn't talk English so he said Potler, Putler, Petler and they put down so many different names. So, my uncle – one of my uncles in Atlantic City, he went with Petler. I went with Potler, my brother's went with Peetler. We had so many names that when the mail came, we didn't know what to think. See?

And that's what happened. But, look, we got along. I went to school so I was Petler, what's the different. I had Alice – oh, and Alice wasn't my name. My sister, when she took me to enroll me in kindergarten, she this – see this girl here, she's like Alice in Wonderland. She's the most precious person so they put me down for Alice, but name is Esther Beulah.

Interviewer: Esther – what's the other?

Alice Freeman: Esther Beulah.

Interviewer: How do you spell that?

Alice Freeman: I guess it would B-E-U-L-A-H or something like that.

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Interviewer: B – [inaudible] all right, I see.

Alice Freeman: Yeah. That was my name and she didn't know. So, she said her name is Alice.

Interviewer: And, so, that's how –

Alice Freeman: And that's how I got my name as Alice.

Interviewer: Were both your parents from Russia?

Alice Freeman: From Kiev, yes.

Interviewer: And did they leave there and marry and come here together?

Alice Freeman: They married there and they came over. I think they came over with five children and then they had three of us here.

Interviewer: What was –

Alice Freeman: I was born here.

Interviewer: So, you were born – so, you're one of the youngest ones?

Alice Freeman: Yes, my sister and my brother, the three of us were born here.

Interviewer: Did they ever talk about why they came here or any of that? The story of –

Alice Freeman: Well, the only reason they came here is because my father came first and his family said you must bring in your wife and the children and that's how they came here. And they took care of him. They lived on 6th Street. I remember 900 on 6th Street and they brought him here first. They paid for him to come and then he brought my mother and the others here. Yeah. They lived on Ritner Street – Eighth and Ritner.

Interviewer: The same neighborhood you're in now?

Alice Freeman: That's right. And that's how I belong at 8th and Ritner.

Interviewer: You've been here really all your life.

Alice Freeman: I know. All my life. I never lived anywhere else.

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Interviewer: What kind of work did your father do?

Alice Freeman: He was an operator. He used to sell, make uniforms, coats, he used to sell.

Interviewer: Where? Do you know where he worked?

Alice Freeman: At different places in Philadelphia. He belonged to unions and of course he was always out of work, but at times, he got work. Yeah. And that's how we lived. And I want to tell you something. When I grew up, I worked on 7th Street. There was a lot of stores and I used to work different stores. They used to ask me to work for them, but when I worked out on a street with a big heavy kerchief and heavy gloves, \$1 a day. And that's how I saved up money so my boys can go to college.

Interviewer: You did that after high school – after school? Did you go to high school?

Alice Freeman: I went to high school, to South Philadelphia High School two years and I had to leave because my parents needed the money. I had to get a job.

Interviewer: Your mother didn't work? Did your mother work?

Alice Freeman: No.

Interviewer: At all?

Alice Freeman: Mother didn't work. She always had children. But she never worked.

Interviewer: And your father worked when he could find work.

Alice Freeman: And he would work interval work and that was it.

Interviewer: Did he ever do work out of the house, do sewing or tailoring?

Alice Freeman: Yes. Yes. Yes, he did. Different people wanted repairs on suits and skirts and different things. He did it.

Interviewer: They would bring it to him and he had his own machine and –

Alice Freeman: We had – yes, his own – that old fashioned sewing machine.

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- Interviewer: Where did he have it set up? Where was it in the house?
- Alice Freeman: In the back –
- Interviewer: Tell me about the house.
- Alice Freeman: – room, upstairs –
- Interviewer: What was the house like? When you walked in the door –
- Alice Freeman: You know how our house was alike, it's not like it is today. We had, like, steps in the living room and a big thing – a wooden thing, like an arch, and it was the kitchen. The kitchen was terrible because mother used to have to cook and she used to have to – the clothes ending up on top of the over, you know, it was –
- Interviewer: Meaning to dry them?
- Alice Freeman: No dryer, no nothing. We used to have to – no refrigerator but an ice box and we had to take the water all the time because mother had to buy ice.
- Interviewer: Did the kids –
- Alice Freeman: The man would come around and sell us the ice and that's how we had **[inaudible]**. There was no way.
- Interviewer: Did you have steps like a stoop going up the front – into the front door?
- Alice Freeman: Yes, yeah, there was always like a couple of steps.
- Interviewer: Just a couple.
- Alice Freeman: Yes. But the house was very old fashion.
- Interviewer: And, so, inside, you walked into the living room?
- Alice Freeman: Yes. Yes, it was like an arch, a little entry. And we would walk in, you know, but look, we had wonderful neighbors, we helped one another, not today. Not today. Don't have it.
- Interviewer: Did you have a garden in the back? I want to talk to you about that, what you just said, but let's –

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Alice Freeman: We had a yard and we had this big, big old tree of grapes and mother used to pick the grapes and make, like, – yeah, she used to pick the grapes.

Interviewer: And what did she make? Did she make pies with them?

Alice Freeman: She used to make – no, she used to make wine. She used to make wine and sell it.

Interviewer: Who did she sell it to?

Alice Freeman: People used to come and ask her about it. And she used to – some people she gave it to, some people they would give her a little bit of money for it.

Interviewer: Right. Why do you think she did it?

Alice Freeman: We had to have it.

Interviewer: It was for to make extra money?

Alice Freeman: We didn't have – it was very hard. And we had a grocery store two doors away and he was wonderful. We used to buy things on the book. Years ago –

Interviewer: Pay at the end of the month if you could or did you keep it going longer than month-to-month sometimes?

Alice Freeman: And he was wonderful.

Interviewer: Who was he? What was his name?

Alice Freeman: Mr. Shapiro. He was wonderful, wonderful. He was so good to us. And Mother believed – whenever they gave us a challah on Friday, Mother would help people if they didn't have it. She would share. That's how we lived. We were brought up that way.

Interviewer: Do you mind me asking – this is wonderful and I want to ask about the grape arbor, who planted that – those vines?

Alice Freeman: We don't know. It was there.

Interviewer: They were there.

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Alice Freeman: It was there when we got there.

Interviewer: That's so interesting. When did you move there?

Alice Freeman: I was born on Beulah Street. I was there only a couple of months and then our mortgage man, he said come to Ritner Street and that's how we got to 8th and Ritner.

Interviewer: Is he Jewish? Your mortgage guy.

Alice Freeman: Yes, he was a nice Jewish man. He helped us out.

Interviewer: And –

Alice Freeman: He gave us the mortgage, you know what I mean, and that's how we managed. We were poor. We couldn't get clothes, but look, we managed.

Interviewer: Had your parents been looking for a house then for their own place? Were you renting on Beulah?

Alice Freeman: Rented.

Interviewer: You rented.

Alice Freeman: First we rented and then the man talked him into mortgage it and get it for my mother and father. So, it wasn't bad afterwards, but guess what? I had four brothers and four sisters.

Interviewer: How many bedrooms were in that house?

Alice Freeman: And guess what, some of them slept in the bathroom because we didn't have enough room.

Interviewer: Where did they sleep, in the tub?

Alice Freeman: And – yeah, no –

Interviewer: Was the **[inaudible]** bathtub?

Alice Freeman: – like alongside mother would make something and they would sleep the girls – some of the girls – but the boys – father had the backroom and he used to sew so he had a table so the boys used to sleep on the table some of them. That's how we managed.

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Interviewer: Eight children plus two parents, 10 of you.

Alice Freeman: That's right, 10 of us. Um-hum. Four girls and four boys and –

Interviewer: And how many bedrooms – how many rooms were in this house?

Alice Freeman: Well, downstairs there was like a long living room and a kitchen and there was a dining room, yes, because there was a big table there. I remember that. Yes. And when it was a holiday, mother would try her best around the table, everybody would come, you know, that's how we lived. We couldn't do much. We couldn't do much because we were too poor.

Interviewer: What kind of a stove did she have? Did she have a coal stove or woodstove?

Alice Freeman: You know, we had – yes. Coal.

Interviewer: Coal.

Alice Freeman: That's right and big pots. And mother used to stir, you know, the clothes in there. We had a yard –

Interviewer: That's what you were saying about the stove.

Alice Freeman: Yeah.

Interviewer: She heated the big pot and –

Alice Freeman: That's right. And we had a yard and my boys used to put up a line – rope and that's how we'd hang the clothes up –

Interviewer: Oh, sure.

Alice Freeman: – to dry. But we had such wonderful neighbors. I remember them. If they got sick, they used to bang on the door for my mother to help them and she used to come with a bottle of alcohol and let them smell so they should be well.

Interviewer: Was your mother – did she know about medicines, herbs –

Alice Freeman: Nothing. Nothing.

Interviewer: Did she know any special healing practices?

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Alice Freeman: Nothing.

Interviewer: You know, sometimes you –

Alice Freeman: When they came over, they knew nothing. Nothing. I know mother didn't –

Interviewer: Some people know how to – when people are ill, they know how to diagnose that and drive it out. Sometimes they feel it's a bad **[inaudible]** –

Alice Freeman: The only ones that was wonderful to us was my father's sister. She lived near 6th and Girard and she used to help us out a lot. They were there longer than we were and when we came over, that's – she used to help us, you know, with clothes, you know, different things.

Interviewer: But it's so interesting that people came to your mother for wine and for healing, they came to your father for –

Alice Freeman: Sewing –

Interviewer: – sewing. So, your family – your house must have been a special place in that way and they –

Alice Freeman: And you know what, we had so much love. Everybody was so close to one another. I know there were times when my brother used to say to me, you'll do my handkerchiefs today won't you, Alice, and I'll give you money. He'll go to the Ideal Theater. It's 6th and Moyamensing. Oh, that to me was the most wonderful thing and I sat there all day.

Interviewer: At the theater?

Alice Freeman: At the theater. At the movies at 6th and Moyamensing. At the Ideal. Oh my God, I was so happy to have that little bit of money so I could go in there and mother used to make me a little – some kind of a little sandwich so I ate it there.

Interviewer: What kind – do you remember what they were? What was on the sandwich?

Alice Freeman: You know what the sandwiches used to be, bologna, salami, it was cheap and –

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Interviewer: On challah or –

Alice Freeman: That challah was the most delicious.

Interviewer: Did your mother bake that or did you always buy that?

Alice Freeman: No, she used to buy it at the grocery store. They used to save her one and she used to share it. There was families that were so poor – I know one family, he was an accountant years ago and he lost his job and mother used to go to the butcher and get like a pound of ground meat and bring it into him so they – they had children and everything though so they could have food. See, this is how we lived.

Interviewer: Right. Everyone looked out for each other.

Alice Freeman: That's it.

Interviewer: Where you needed something, someone –

Alice Freeman: Not the way it is today. No. Everybody looked out, everybody was concerned about one another. They were.

Interviewer: Is everyone Jewish or mainly Jews –

Alice Freeman: No, they were all Jewish. Yes, they were.

Interviewer: On that block of Ritner or –

Alice Freeman: All – Darien Street, [inaudible] street, Ritner Street, all Jewish.

Interviewer: And Russian Jews?

Alice Freeman: But we had a few across the street of us that weren't Jewish, but they were wonderful. They were so nice to us. They were wonderful people.

Interviewer: Do you remember their names?

Alice Freeman: Huh?

Interviewer: Do you remember their name?

Alice Freeman: No.

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Interviewer: Were they Italian, were they English, were they – do you know?

Alice Freeman: They were, like, English, yeah. They were concerned, you know what I mean? Because we were neighbors so they were wonderful. They really were. They were wonderful people. Yes indeed. So, that's how I grew up. I went to Thomas Junior High.

Interviewer: I was gonna ask you where –

Alice Freeman: That's where I went.

Interviewer: And what about grade school?

Alice Freeman: That was grade school –

Interviewer: First –

Alice Freeman: Kindergarten.

Interviewer: You started kindergarten. And then it was Oregon – 9th and Oregon was where –

Alice Freeman: and then I went to school there and then my sister took me to another school and then I went to Southern for two years but I had to leave. We had nothing. We were poor.

Interviewer: Your father wasn't working?

Alice Freeman: He –

Interviewer: Or wasn't working enough.

Alice Freeman: He was always – they always had strikes. Always.

Interviewer: When was this, in the 30's maybe, 40's, 30's?

Alice Freeman: In the 30's. They always had strikes. He was always out of work and it was sad. So I had to leave. I worked in the sweater factory, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did your father ever talk about the union, about whether he was pro union or –

Alice Freeman: Yes.

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Interviewer: What did he say?

Alice Freeman: He always talked about it. He was disgusted. He really was. He was hoping that someday, something else would turn up that he could do. The union was terrible years ago.

Interviewer: Do you remember what it was?

Alice Freeman: No. I know – he used to come home sometimes and didn't work maybe an hour or two because the union used to interfere, you know what I mean, and lay them off right then and there. So, we had to do the best. The boys went to work – I – I remember one brother, he – we had a little cart and he used to go on Oregon Avenue and he used to pick coal so we could have heat.

Interviewer: Where did he get the coal? From **[inaudible]** – when it dropped off the truck?

Alice Freeman: Somewhere there, I don't know what it was, but he used to come back with coal in his cart and that's how mother –

Interviewer: Sometimes the trains, you know, they'd come in on those big cars and they fall off the sides.

Alice Freeman: That's it.

Interviewer: You could walk along the tracks and –

Alice Freeman: That's it. He used to pick it. See, that's how it was.

Interviewer: Is that how the house was heated, too, with coal?

Alice Freeman: The heat –

Interviewer: Did you have a coal furnace?

Alice Freeman: The heat was always –

Interviewer: Did you have heat?

Alice Freeman: Oh my God, but look, we were happy. Yes, we were. At times we were sad, but at times we were so happy that we had one another.

Interviewer: You know, if I walked into your house in 1930, let's say, 1935, could I tell it was a Jewish house?

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Alice Freeman: Yes.

Interviewer: How?

Alice Freeman: Mother had candles – her **[inaudible]** candle – her thing that she –

Interviewer: But, like, –

Alice Freeman: **[Inaudible]** every Friday she used to light the candles and do the prayers. Yes indeed. You would know it was Jewish and we had different things that were Jewish. Yes. Oh, yes, definitely.

Interviewer: So, every – so, your family were observant?

Alice Freeman: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where – did you have a neighborhood – where was your synagogue? Where did you go – **[inaudible]**?

Alice Freeman: Eighth and Porter. Mother used to go there. She belonged to the synagogue there and then she belonged to 9th and – at 9th and Porter they had – a home for children that had no parents.

Interviewer: Oh, it was an orphanage for – was it for Jews?

Alice Freeman: Yes. Jewish and she was active there. She used to talk to the rabbi **[inaudible]** was his name.

Interviewer: **[inaudible]**.

Alice Freeman: That's right. And he used to bring clothes and bring the food to the home. They – she used to sit – my mother was the most precious woman in the world. She always cared for somebody else because she knows what she went through.

Interviewer: Was she special – were other women in the neighborhood like that or was she really more involved?

Alice Freeman: Well, she had maybe one or two but not too many. People I guess had their problems, you know, and we had ours.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you – I asked you about the Jewishness of the house, what about food. Do you remember any special dishes that your mother cooked?

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Alice Freeman: Gefilte fish, chicken soup and then she would manage to have enough for everybody.

Interviewer: Where did you get the chickens?

Alice Freeman: Oh my dear God, we had a butcher and he was wonderful.

Interviewer: What was his name?

Alice Freeman: Sam – Samuel. And he used to say, Mrs. Potler, my mother went under Potler, he says, “I’ll have a chicken for you. Go make soup.” Bottle water, you know, he was wonderful. Look, we got along terrific and that meant a lot.

Interviewer: Where was his poultry shop? He had a shop, I guess, with live chickens? Did he a shop with live chicken or did he come around and deliver the chicken to you?

Alice Freeman: They were – I guess they were live, but they used to cut the neck and they made them kosher.

Interviewer: Yes, very. So, he was a kosher – he was a kosher butcher.

Alice Freeman: They made them kosher. If you wanted to – didn’t care if it was kosher or not. You ate anything, but mother would put a lot of onions, a lot of carrots, a lot of celery because it was very cheap and that’s how we were.

Interviewer: And that’s very nourishing.

Alice Freeman: That’s right. Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: With chicken and the –

Alice Freeman: Oh, yes, definitely. We didn’t get much of the chicken, but whatever we got, we ate.

Interviewer: Did you have indoor plumbing? Did you have an outhouse or did you have a bathroom?

Alice Freeman: That’s what I wanted to tell you.

Interviewer: You said you had a bathroom –

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Alice Freeman: We had a bathroom upstairs, messy. It was disgusting, but look, we had to. We had to. This is what we had to do, but we did. We had wonderful, wonderful people that gave us the mortgage. Guess what? They warned it was – they gave the [inaudible] –

Interviewer: That's what I wanted to ask you.

Alice Freeman: They were the most wonderful people in the world and they loved us and we loved them and –

Interviewer: Who were they?

Alice Freeman: I don't remember their name, but oh God oh – it was so wonderful. They said, "Don't worry, Mrs. Potler, we'll give you the mortgage. Don't worry."

Interviewer: So, they actually made it possible for your parents to –

Alice Freeman: Yes, they – I don't know how they got in touch with these people. They had no children, but this is what they did. Even when one of my sisters got married, you should see the pretty little present they gave her. They were very close to us. And it was wonderful. Just that one family.

Interviewer: Right. They lived in the neighborhood?

Alice Freeman: They lived in the neighborhood.

Interviewer: And this wasn't the real estate guy?

Alice Freeman: No.

Interviewer: Who was the one that got your parents to go over?

Alice Freeman: No, he wasn't the – that wasn't the real estate man.

Interviewer: So, they stepped in and helped with the finance.

Alice Freeman: They stepped in and they helped us. They were wonderful. They were so wonderful people. It was a few there in the neighborhood, you know what I mean. But look, we were very close. Everybody was so close. It was wonderful. I'm –

Interviewer: You didn't become ba – you didn't have bar mitzvah when you were growing up?

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Alice Freeman: No, no, no. My boys, they were taught, you know, the boys had bar mitzvahs but the girls didn't have anything. No.

Interviewer: Why? I mean, I'm just curious?

Alice Freeman: My father, and well, he wanted the boys bar mitzvahed. I guess from Russia, he knew about all that, you know and he wanted them bar mitzvah 'ed, but look, we couldn't afford any parties or anything like that. They took them in synagogue, they said their prayers and that was it.

Interviewer: Right. So, you went to synagogue but not the Hebrew school?

Alice Freeman: No.

Interviewer: You didn't go to Hebrew school?

Alice Freeman: I didn't go to Hebrew school at all. No.

Interviewer: So, can I ask now about the neighborhood. Let's move out of the house –

Alice Freeman: Sure.

Interviewer: And there's more to talk about about the house, I'm sure, but let's go into the neighborhood a little bit. Did you wander far from your home? Did you have a –

Alice Freeman: Do you mean to go to school?

Interviewer: To go school – you went to Oregon, right? You said –

Alice Freeman: Well, I went to Francis Scott Key. **[Inaudible]** that was up to sixth grade and then you went to Thomas. That was on Oregon Avenue.

Interviewer: That was Oregon Ave.

Alice Freeman: Yeah.

Interviewer: And did you have – were all your friends right on the block or did you travel a little bit, did you walk, did you go places in the neighborhood for different reasons?

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Alice Freeman: **[inaudible]** too much. Had to come home from school, clean, my sister took one floor, I took the other floor. This is how we had to do things. We cleaned and helped mother. Had clothes that –

Interviewer: So you didn't play a lot?

Alice Freeman: No, no.

Interviewer: With other kids –

Alice Freeman: We didn't have too many friends either. We couldn't play a lot. No. We had to do things in the house.

Interviewer: You know, I've talked to – in that **[inaudible]** a couple of Jewish men who grew up in the neighborhood, very wonderful men, sat and talked to me as you're talking and they were telling me about all these things that they did, baseball and you know, –

Alice Freeman: The boys –

Interviewer: It was different for boys.

Alice Freeman: If somebody gave them a ball, they would know to throw it you know what I mean, but –

Interviewer: Didn't you have games that you played with your girlfriends?

Alice Freeman: Well –

Interviewer: Maybe in the evening when there were no more chores?

Alice Freeman: We used to go to the Ideal Theater. I would take – I mean, if they got their money to go, we used to go, but I never had time to do anything. No. I had to – my sisters, we had to hold in the house. This is the way it was.

Interviewer: Yeah, the girls had the house duty.

Alice Freeman: The girls had to help. Okay. If not, they had to get a job. Some kind of a little job so – to bring a little money in. Everything was about money because we didn't have – we had an ice box. We had to buy ice, you know, and even to – soap, they used to advertise it on a wagon with a house to buy the soap.

Interviewer: They'd come around?

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Alice Freeman: They used to come around and mother used to run out if she had a little bit of money and she used to buy – so we'd have it to wash the clothes.

Interviewer: Were they horse-drawn wagons?

Alice Freeman: Yes, a horse. Yes, it was.

Interviewer: And were they Jewish merchants also?

Alice Freeman: Yes.

Interviewer: Who made soap or –

Alice Freeman: I remember Mottel.

Interviewer: Mottel? Where was he – did he live in the neighborhood?

Alice Freeman: He was right in the neighborhood. He had the wagon and the horse and he would sell the javelle water –

Interviewer: What was it?

Alice Freeman: Javelle.

Interviewer: Javelle. What was that for?

Alice Freeman: That was to whiten the clothes when it was on top of the oven.

Interviewer: Oh, sure.

Alice Freeman: Yeah. See. That's how it was.

Interviewer: Where did he keep his horse and wagon? He must have had a little barn or something or carriage house?

Alice Freeman: Some kind of barn. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, he'd go get it and then he'd come to –

Alice Freeman: He used to get it and start riding around and he used to holler, "javelle water – javelle water." And that's how we used to run out and to buy it.

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Interviewer: Yes. And were there other peddlers who came around on wagons, too?

Alice Freeman: Yes, sometimes watermelon. When it was in the season they used to come and try to sell ya a little bit of watermelon. Yeah.

Interviewer: And they'd come right down Ritner?

Alice Freeman: Right down on Ritner Street. Yes indeed.

Interviewer: So, can we talk about work a little bit because I know that's something that we've talked about before and you mentioned it already about working on 7th Street. What was the first job – how old were you when you got your first job?

Alice Freeman: You had to be a certain age. I started I think when I was 15 and I might have lied about my age. You had to be 16. And I said I was 16 but I wasn't. But that's – everybody lied so I lied, too.

Interviewer: And you really had to get – you needed the money, right? Your family needed it the money.

Alice Freeman: Oh, we needed it so bad.

Interviewer: That's why you lied. We – did you wanted – was it something that you wanted to get out and work, too? To get out of the house?

Alice Freeman: Guess what, I did. I got a job on – they said Market Street. And I did. I got a job on Market Street. Guess what? Selling stockings.

Interviewer: Where on Market? Downtown [inaudible]?

Alice Freeman: Eighth and Market, 9th and Market. There was a couple of stores there and I went in there and they said, "Yes, come Saturday. We'll take you." And I did. I came Saturday. Whatever the – I don't remember how much they gave me.

Interviewer: And you were 15 years old?

Alice Freeman: Fifteen.

Interviewer: And what did you do? Just sell them –

Alice Freeman: Just sell to people that came in that wanted stockings. Years ago, they used to wear them up to here.

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Interviewer: Right.

Alice Freeman: I loved the job.

Interviewer: Oh, you did?

Alice Freeman: Only on Saturday. I had to go to school during the week.

Interviewer: Oh, you were in high school then? High school.

Alice Freeman: Two years, sure at Southern.

Interviewer: Right. So, you worked Saturdays at Market. How did you find that job?

Alice Freeman: At – guess how –

Interviewer: Did you go around?

Alice Freeman: You know what happened, I got off the – we had to walk. We couldn't even get money to go on the bus [inaudible] Number 9 – 5th and Ritner. Do you remember?

Interviewer: Well, yes. I know that – yes, I know the bus.

Alice Freeman: That's right. So, this girl, I met her and she said, do you really want to work and I said I would love to get a job and she told me about this place and I went there and they hired me. I hate to tell me what they did. They offered me –

Interviewer: Do you remember? What was it?

Alice Freeman: Oh my gosh, fifty cents.

Interviewer: A day?

Alice Freeman: A day.

Interviewer: Oh, they had a good bargaining.

Alice Freeman: We were so poor. Fifty cents. I said, "Fifty cents!" but I was happy I got the fifty cents.

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Interview with Alice Freeman

Interviewer: Right. But you know what's interesting. You talk about going to the Ideal Theater. I bet you could get in for a nickel, right?

Alice Freeman: Ten cents.

Interviewer: Or a dime.

Alice Freeman: We had to give ten cents. Yeah. I washed his hankies and pressed them and that's how he gave me the money and I went to the Ideal and I stayed there all day. Mother gave me a little sandwich and I stayed there.

Interviewer: So, this first job though, you were glad to get out and start working. You wanted to get out and work and earn a little money.

Alice Freeman: That's right. That's right.

Interviewer: How long were you there? How long would you stay in that job?

Alice Freeman: At that job? A couple of – just not too much. They would say we can't use you because we can't afford it, you know what I mean and so they laid you off right away. I mean, I was there a couple of weeks, you know. I was happy whatever they did for me. But it was poverty. All the places. It was sad.

Interviewer: And how old – you were 15 then you said?

Alice Freeman: Fifteen.

Interviewer: Did you get another job after that?

Alice Freeman: No. I was 16. I only stayed two years and then I did – I think I worked in a shirt factory for a little while and then they laid us – everybody off, you know. Everything seemed to be unions years ago. You had to belong to unions to get work. It's not like today when you apply for a job. Everything you have to belong to a union.

Interviewer: Sometimes you get a job and you join the union –

Alice Freeman: That's it.

Interviewer: Right. Probably when you worked as an operator that's what happened, right?

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Interview with Alice Freeman

Alice Freeman: Yes.

Interviewer: You got the job and then you had to sign onto the union?

Alice Freeman: That's right.

Interviewer: And you don't remember what union it was? Was it ILGWU by any chance?

Alice Freeman: No.

Interviewer: You don't remember?

Alice Freeman: I don't remember that – all that. No. But mother's gone, father's gone and when I was 22, I met my husband. He worked in an oil factory.

Interviewer: Where?

Alice Freeman: You know the big tanks –

Interviewer: In South Philadelphia? Yeah.

Alice Freeman: Yeah, in South Philadelphia. He worked there and then we got married and we lived with my mother. All the others started getting married, the sisters and the brothers, you know –

Interviewer: And they left the house?

Alice Freeman: And they left the house so mother was alone so I walked in – my husband and I, and I stayed with him – we stayed with her.

Interviewer: You were the last one to be –

Alice Freeman: I was the last one – I was the youngest one. All the others, they're not living today. They were all gone.

Interviewer: So, all of your brothers and sisters are gone now?

Alice Freeman: All gone.

Interviewer: Tell me about your husband.

Alice Freeman: My husband was raised in an orphan home. His mother was 30 something when she died and the father took the two oldest ones

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Interview with Alice Freeman

and put them in an orphan home. **[Inaudible]** they used to keep it up. And that's where he went.

Interviewer: **[Inaudible]** like the department store?

Alice Freeman: That's right. They bought this grand and they made it an orphan home.

Interviewer: Where was it?

Alice Freeman: It was in Strawberry Mansion.

Interviewer: Strawberry Mansion?

Alice Freeman: Yeah.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Alice Freeman: That's right and that's where my husband – when he was 16, that's when he got out and he got a job.

Interviewer: Did he get out – did they let him out or did he have to runaway?

Alice Freeman: No, well, 16, you know, but he got a job in this oil factory and that's how – I hate to tell you what he made, but look, it was nothing. We lived with mother, we managed.

Interviewer: How did you meet him?

Alice Freeman: Huh?

Interviewer: How did you meet him?

Alice Freeman: I met him through another girl. She made the date for me, you know. So, we met – the most precious man in the world. The most considerate person in the world. I was one of the lucky ones.

Interviewer: What was his full name?

Alice Freeman: Huh?

Interviewer: Your husband's –

Alice Freeman: Leon Freeman.

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Interview with Alice Freeman

Interviewer: Freeman.

Alice Freeman: Freeman.

Interviewer: Freeman.

Alice Freeman: That's it. And he was raised in an orphan home. A father that used to, well, what's the difference – he and his brother was raised there. The father loved his women and –

Interviewer: So, after his wife died he wanted to go out –

Alice Freeman: That's right. Even when the wife was living, but that's a big story. But as long as I had my husband, that's all I cared. And then he went into the police department. After that, we got a job at the police department. Came home with \$12 a week.

Interviewer: That was pretty good.

Alice Freeman: It wasn't bad. He had to pay for his uniforms, he had to pay for his gun, so he came home with \$12. It wasn't bad. It was better than the others. But, look, we were happy. That's all that counted. We were.

Interviewer: Right. And did you live – you lived with your mother for how long?

Alice Freeman: I lived with her all my life.

Interviewer: And then after she passed, you –

Alice Freeman: After she passed away, we took over the house.

Interviewer: Is that the – that's not the house that you're living in now, is it?

Alice Freeman: Yes, it is.

Interviewer: You're still living in that very same house.

Alice Freeman: I still live in that house.

Interviewer: I thought you lived in a – across the street.

Alice Freeman: No, I live in the same house all my life.

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Interview with Alice Freeman

Interviewer: Literally, yes. And –

Alice Freeman: 8th and Ritner.

Interviewer: Are the grapevines still there in the yard?

Alice Freeman: Huh?

Interviewer: What happened to the grapevines? Are they still there?

Alice Freeman: Guess what? No, we had to pull it out. Mother, years ago, they saw her – they found out that she was selling it, grape – she was selling wine and they made us pull it out. They were gonna lock her up.

Interviewer: Oh, when was that? What – do you remember when? Was it –

Alice Freeman: I know I was going to school at that time. It was a terrible thing, but look, we – they pulled it out and that was it. Yeah. We went through so much in life. It is a story.

Interviewer: Yes, it is. It's so interesting. So, when did – oh, go ahead.

Alice Freeman: But you know what, I have two wonderful sons, fabulous sons. One was a lawyer, he's not doing that now. He's in town, 11th and Spruce. My other son, he's – he takes care of children in his school from 1-3. They're both wonderful, wonderful boys. The most wonderful respect they give me and they love their mother and that means a lot.

Interviewer: And they're both in town?

Alice Freeman: Ones in –

Interviewer: Ones in Spruce and 11th and –

Alice Freeman: – and the other one is – no, far, it's – oh, I forgot the name of the school. But it's far.

Interviewer: Not in Philadelphia, it's out of –

Alice Freeman: Yeah, it's a little suburban. Yeah, suburban. But they call me every day, both of them, twice a day and that means a lot. My youngest son is married to Dolly. She's wonderful to me, my daughter-in-law. She's wonderful – a mother to me. And she – I

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appreciate that. She's my daughter, yeah. The other one, his wife passed away. She was very sick, so he still lives in the apartment in Germantown. Yeah. But that's okay. Calls me every day and sometimes he takes me shopping. And this is what I wanted to tell you. When I go to the Pathmark to do my shopping, that's at 3rd and Oregon, if I buy a lot and I can't go on the bus back to take me home, there's this one man and he takes me right home to the kitchen. I have to give him a few – \$5 but at least I have somebody.

Interviewer: Yeah. And –

Alice Freeman: And that's what I do.

Interviewer: Does he have like a little –

Alice Freeman: He has a beautiful car and he has a trunk and you'd be surprised how he puts my paper goods, different things that I need. I manage that. And I come here – I come here twice a week, Tuesdays and Fridays, and I love it. I do a little volunteer work if they want me to help with the tables or set the tables or give out the cake or whatever. I do it.

Interviewer: How – did you come here as a child?

Alice Freeman: And I – you know what –

Interviewer: Was this place here?

Alice Freeman: I've been coming here all my life. Oh my God. I'm the oldest one here. I'm the oldest one that's coming here.

Interviewer: So, what did you come for when you were young? What – why were you here?

Alice Freeman: Nothing.

Interviewer: Activities?

Alice Freeman: Stayed home, cleaned –

Interviewer: Oh, you didn't come here as a kid? You did come here but just for special occasions or –

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Alice Freeman: Well, the boys. When the boys came here to play ball, I came here. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And then there was a few neighbors, they were out of work badly and they used to say to me, "Will you watch my boys when I bring them here," and I used to do that. For nothing. Just to –

Interviewer: You didn't get paid?

Alice Freeman: No, I didn't want no money. I used to watch them. The Cooper family. I'll remember that.

Interviewer: Cooper.

Alice Freeman: Yeah.

Interviewer: They weren't Jews – they weren't Jewish?

Alice Freeman: Yes, they were.

Interviewer: They were Jewish.

Alice Freeman: Yes, they were. Attila Cooper. They worked – we had a place oh where they sold liquor, [inaudible] –

Interviewer: Like a state store?

Alice Freeman: Front store – no, it was a factory where they made the liquor and that's where a lot of women from my neighborhood got jobs there and that's where the boys came here.

Interviewer: Oh, so they work and their kids came here while they were working?

Alice Freeman: That's right.

Interviewer: It was like a daycare center.

Alice Freeman: That's right.

Interviewer: [Inaudible].

Alice Freeman: And I watched – I used to watch them when they came home I used to get them chocolate milk, you know, I used to try. But this was – it was happy, it wasn't happy, but look, we made it happy.

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Interviewer: Um-hum. Why did you decide to stay in the neighborhood? Was it that attachment to the house?

Alice Freeman: You know why, we did look at a house in the Northeast. That meant that mother would have to go with us and that meant that she would have to share with us. She didn't like the idea. She was afraid.

Interviewer: What do you mean share?

Alice Freeman: The money, the rent and different things. She was, like, a little afraid, so we just forgot about it.

Interviewer: You didn't push it –

Alice Freeman: No, we didn't push her and we stayed.

Interviewer: And then by the time your mother passed away, then you were not thinking about moving anymore?

Alice Freeman: Still there.

Interviewer: Right.

Alice Freeman: I'm not happy with a few of my neighbors, I'm not happy, but I'm trying to ignore it. My next neighbor, I'm not happy at all. I raised her and she's – it's sad even to talk about it. She's got two cats in there, no heat, no electric, nothing and she went – she's staying with her daughter in Jersey, but look, I don't report her or anything. I don't want to start because I'm alone.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah, right.

Alice Freeman: You know what I mean? I don't want to start. Her husband is nice, but I don't want to start. And the other side neighbor, they're bible people. They're lovely. Very wonderful, wonderful people. They always stay, Alice, if you ever need us, we're here. And they're wonderful.

Interviewer: Have they been there a longtime?

Alice Freeman: No, it's about six months that they're there. They fixed the house up and it's beautiful and they're there. And if – look, I don't try to be a nuisance or anything, you know, hello, how are you and that's it. I don't like to be anything, but they're wonderful. They are.

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Interview with Alice Freeman

They're nice people. Not the other side but that's okay. I don't want to start anything. But they left two cats in there.

Interviewer: And they're in New Jersey?

Alice Freeman: They come every three days and they feed the cats but there's no heat, no electric, nothing.

Interviewer: Oh, they shut everything off.

Alice Freeman: They must have. They're not paying, I guess. But I don't even want to ask –

Interviewer: Yeah, who knows.

Alice Freeman: I figure it's not my business, you know?

Interviewer: Yes, yeah.

Alice Freeman: Stay away, Alice.

Interviewer: Yeah, just – right, you don't want to start trouble up.

Alice Freeman: I said, stay away. I try.

Interviewer: You know, I think RA might have a question or two for you. RA, do you –

RA: Yeah, I had a couple if you would indulge me.

Alice Freeman: What?

Interviewer: He has a couple questions.

RA: I have a couple questions.

Alice Freeman: Oh, sure, I'd be glad to.

RA: Well –

Alice Freeman: You just have to say it a little louder because, you know, my hearing is getting a little bad –

RA: Okay. I'll try to project. I was wondering if your parents brought any songs over with them?

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Interview with Alice Freeman

Alice Freeman: What's that?

Interviewer: Songs?

RA: Was there any songs – any singing that went on in the house?

Alice Freeman: Guess what? My mother. My mother used to sing.

RA: Do you remember any of those?

Alice Freeman: Jewish songs, I don't remember them.

RA: Do you remember any? Were they Yiddish?

Alice Freeman: I remember she used to sing a little bit. Yes, she did. Yes.

Interviewer: In Yiddish or Russian?

Alice Freeman: In Yiddish. Yes.

RA: Yeah. Yeah.

Alice Freeman: Because she didn't know how to talk English. Mother didn't know how, neither did my father.

RA: So, you spoke –

Alice Freeman: They didn't know how to talk English, but the boys – look, the boys went to school a little bit, but they used to hear them so they knew just what they were saying a little bit.

Interviewer: Your brothers?

Alice Freeman: Yeah.

Interviewer: How about you?

Alice Freeman: I used to try to tell my mother, like, a few things.

Interviewer: Do – what was your first language? Was it Yiddish or English?

Alice Freeman: It was English because I went to school so we spoke English.

Interviewer: But how about before –

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Alice Freeman: But we spoke Jewish, too. Mother used to talk to us in Jewish and I used to answer her in Jewish. Beulah was my Jewish name. Beulah – [inaudible] the chicken, you know what I mean? She used to – with her hand, so I knew just what she was thinking about, you know, what she's saying, you know. That's how – she didn't know how to talk English.

Interviewer: So, what –

Alice Freeman: Neither did my father.

Interviewer: What about the songs? Do you remember any of them? Anything?

Alice Freeman: I don't remember.

RA: Anything for any special occasions? Anything that you have singing at Hanukkah or Passover?

Alice Freeman: She loved Hanukkah. Oh, to her, Hanukkah was just wonderful. She didn't have many – much money to give to the children, but she used to make a line and she used to give them pennies and that was for Hanukkah. That's right. Oh, yes, pennies but they – we were all happy, even to get a penny. And it was Hanukkah. We had candles. That's one thing we did have and she used to put that in the living room and we used to light the one candle, the second and then the third and the fourth, like here. Yeah. Oh, yes, we did.

Interviewer: How about [inaudible]? Did you have [inaudible] in the outside? The [inaudible]? Did you do that? Your family –

Alice Freeman: No, we didn't have that. I know that time they used to make [inaudible] but mother was [inaudible], that was our synagogue.

Interviewer: Sharon –

Alice Freeman: Sharon Elijah.

Interviewer: Sharon Elijah.

Alice Freeman: And she used to go there, you know, I don't know how much she [inaudible] you know what I mean? But look, she went, you know, she loved it. And father used to go downstairs, the women

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Interview with Alice Freeman

were upstairs and father was downstairs. So different holidays, you know what I mean? They went. Yes they did.

Interviewer: Did you go, too? Children go, too?

Alice Freeman: We used to go when it was almost over, you know what I mean.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah.

Alice Freeman: And we had no place to sit so when it was almost over, when she would come down the steps already, we were happy. Yeah. But look, I'm here. I'm here.

Interviewer: Yes. What else do we need to talk about? We talked about a lot of things.

Alice Freeman: We did.

Interviewer: But I wonder, what else? You know, like, we didn't talk about – for example, [inaudible] avenue in the neighborhood, like, you worked on 7th Street.

Alice Freeman: It's very [inaudible].

Interviewer: Then, you know, going back.

Alice Freeman: Yeah. When I worked on 7th Street, the people were wonderful. There was the Lillian's, it was a man's shop. It was so many different shops, a ladies' underwear shop, it was wonderful. Everybody, you know, if you didn't have the money, okay, when you get paid, if you're working, don't worry about it. Everybody was so wonderful. It was a pleasure to work.

Interviewer: When were you working there? Did you have kids at that time?

Alice Freeman: No, yes. I did. I did. I had my oldest son. Oh, yeah, my husband took sick. He died very young at 65 with a heart condition and I wanted my boys to go to school and to become something and I worked hard. I did. I worked hard.

Interviewer: And the money went to their tuition?

Alice Freeman: That's right.

Interviewer: You paid their school and books.

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Interview with Alice Freeman

Alice Freeman: Definitely. For their clothes, too. To buy for a coat and a hat, you know, I did. I worked very hard.

Interviewer: Where did you work besides 7th Street, where did you work?

Alice Freeman: Hell, I worked in different stores. I worked in a bakery. I worked in a hosiery store. I worked in so many different stores. Whoever needed me, I went to work.

Interviewer: All on the avenue here? Seventh?

Alice Freeman: All on the avenue. Yeah. And I worked in the maternity for nine years. For Bernie, oh, yeah, he was wonderful.

Interviewer: Who was Bernie?

Alice Freeman: He was the owner of that maternity store. He and his mother. The mother made the outfits and he used to sell them and I worked in there. He was wonderful to me.

Interviewer: Where was that located?

Alice Freeman: Seventh and Moyamensing. The first little street.

Interviewer: Oh, did he –

Alice Freeman: Yeah, it's a little –

Interviewer: Is it still there? Is the building still there?

Alice Freeman: No, it's all Italians. It's all foreigners. No more. No more. You don't see one more Jewish – it's all foreigners.

Interviewer: Yeah, well, now there's a lot of Asians there in that area, right?

Alice Freeman: Yeah, they have.

Interviewer: Yeah, but you say Italians, too? There were Italian businesses there?

Alice Freeman: They're there, too, a lot of them.

Interviewer: And, so, Bernie had a shop with a sewing – like a workshop that his mother made the stuff?

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Interview with Alice Freeman

Alice Freeman: The mother used to work in the back and make maternity dresses and sell them in the front and that's where I was.

Interviewer: What did you do there? Selling?

Alice Freeman: I used to sell. Yeah. People came in, they needed – a lot of people came in, they needed outfits, you know, maternity and some of them they didn't have money to buy panties and bras and I said, "I'll buy it for you honey, honest to God." God be it. I used to say to them, "Don't you worry about it so Bernie used to say to me, no, you're not. You give it to them," and they'd he'd give it to them. I was willing to buy them panties and different things, you know, you hear sad stories, that was me. Any sad story, I was there.

Interviewer: And they knew you, did the customers know who you were?

Alice Freeman: Sure.

Interviewer: Did they know your mother?

Alice Freeman: They didn't know my mother but they knew me.

Interviewer: Right. Yeah, because your mother wasn't on the avenue. She never worked and –

Alice Freeman: No, no, no, she was always a busy lady, cooking, cleaning, cooking, cleaning, cleaning, cleaning, you know. This one had grandchildren, this one brought in carriages that the neighbor brought in her little baby. This is the way it was. We were this way. We were so close to one another.

Interviewer: Did you work for Bernie for a long time?

Alice Freeman: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: And when – what time, like, what decade was that? Was it the 50's, the 40's?

Alice Freeman: I imagine in the 40's. Yes. First, I worked in the hosiery and I worked in the bakery and then I worked for Bernie and then I used to help Lillian's Lingerie. All stores. Whatever they needed me, I'm there. I used to work for Sonya. Do you remember Sonya?

Interviewer: No, no.

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Interview with Alice Freeman

Alice Freeman: You bought everything in there. Kerchiefs, everything under the sun. You know what I mean, buttons –

Interviewer: Is that general –

Alice Freeman: – buttons – oh, there was a lot of stores, the buttons. Everybody used to buy buttons, you know, for coats. You know –

Interviewer: Yeah, and everybody did a little bit of their own sewing –

Alice Freeman: Oh, a little bit of everything. Now, you see Sue here –

Interviewer: Okay. Thanks.

Alice Freeman: You see Sue?

Interviewer: Yes.

Alice Freeman: You know the head one here?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Alice Freeman: Her boys were bar mitzvahed and I had skull caps that I had – my niece made them – crocheted them, gave them to her. Her boys – one of them still wears it.

Interviewer: Oh, nice.

Alice Freeman: Isn't that nice?

Interviewer: Yes.

Alice Freeman: I love people. I do. I love people.

Interviewer: That's what's kept you alive. It's one of the things, right?

Alice Freeman: Now you said it.

Interviewer: But it's one of – love is one of the great –

Alice Freeman: I love my grandchildren. I love my family. My boys. We hug and we kiss, all the time. And my granddaughters a doctor, oh, I love her so much. She's so good. Yes.

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Interview with Alice Freeman

Interviewer: Well, you're lucky. You're fortunate.

Alice Freeman: I'm lucky. I'm very lucky. I am lucky that I have nice children. Bubbe – they call me Bubbe. They don't call me grandma. I like Bubbe.

Interviewer: Bubbe.

Alice Freeman: That's right.

Interviewer: That's very – that sounds like –

Alice Freeman: That's a Jewish name. Bubbe –

Interviewer: Jewish – Russian?

Alice Freeman: Grandmother. That's how they call me. "Bubbe, we love you so much." "I love you, too, mamala." I call them "mamala."

Interviewer: Mamala. Well, RA tells me the tape is about to run out so I guess we should stop.

Alice Freeman: Okay.

Interviewer: Thank you so much. It was good talking to you.

Alice Freeman: Did you enjoy me?

Interviewer: I did.

RA: Thank you. Thank you so much. It was great.

Alice Freeman: Okay.

Interviewer: It was very – you're very charming.

Alice Freeman: Oh, good.

Interviewer: You have a very good life force.

Alice Freeman: I love people. I do. I enjoy them so much. It could be anybody. Now, there's a few black people here, I love them. We kiss and we hug. It doesn't matter.

Interviewer: You're right, it doesn't.

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Interview with Alice Freeman

Alice Freeman: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, we – I wanted to talk about the blacks in the neighborhood – not –

Alice Freeman: We don't have too many.

Interviewer: – as you were brought up. I know there were some black people around.

Alice Freeman: Yeah.

Interviewer: Different – Italians, white – you know, English or whatever. We didn't really talk about any of that. Next time maybe.

Alice Freeman: Okay. Okey doke.

Interviewer: All right. Thank you.

Alice Freeman: It was so nice.

Interviewer: Yes, it's been good to meet you.

Alice Freeman: Okay. I enjoyed it.

RA: Thank you. I did, too, very much. Thank you.

Alice Freeman: Okay.

RA: Thank you.

[End of interview]