

Interview of Noyma Appelbaum

By Daniel Matz

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Audio file 1:

MATZ: Hello, it is March 10th, 2011. I am Daniel Matz. I am here to interview Noyma Appelbaum in his home. Thank you so much for doing this. May I have you permission to record?

APPELBAUM: Yes.

MATZ: Thank you so much for doing this. There is some valuable information in the stories of your life that I enjoy hearing and I think that the historians that are researching this will enjoy hearing as well.

To spell you name it's N-o-y-m-a?

APPELBAUM: Correct.

MATZ: A-P-P-E-L-B-A-U-M

APPELBAUM: Correct.

MATZ: Can I get your age please?

APPELBAUM: 82. I'll be 83 in May.

MATZ: When and where were you born?

0:57

APPELBAUM: I was born in Philadelphia. May 15th, 1928.

MATZ: What neighborhood were your parents living in at that time?

APPELBAUM: At that time, West Philadelphia. It's called the Parkside section between 40th and 44th and Parkside, Girard Avenue. We lived in that neighborhood when I was born.

MATZ: Can you tell me a little bit about your family's migration to the United States?

APPELBAUM: My father came from Lithuania in 1911. He came here on a ticket bought by a young woman he knew in his hometown. He had had a tragedy and a fire consumed all his goods. He was 17, almost 18. She sent him a ship ticket on the premise that he would marry her when he arrived here and he did it. My mother came here with her sister, about 1913, just before World War One started. She came from the Ukraine. They both came together from the Ukraine and entered the United States at Philadelphia.

MATZ: Your father and mother came separately?

APPELBAUM: Separately they didn't know each other. They had no connection at the time they came.

MATZ: Your father was already married?

2:40

APPELBAUM: He married here and had five children. This was his first wife.

MATZ: And her name?

APPELBAUM: [pause] Ida Schwartz.

MATZ: Your father and mother, even though they came separately, they both ended up in Philadelphia?

APPELBAUM: Yes.

MATZ: They didn't come through New York?

APPELBAUM: No, my father came through Baltimore and came to Philadelphia from there. Someone escorted him from Baltimore to Philadelphia. My mother came, the ship docked here in Philadelphia. She lived here right after landing.

MATZ: What was your mother's main reason for coming to the United States?

APPELBAUM: She and her sister came because her family was unable to support them. They were very poor. Her father was a miller but despite that he didn't have enough money to support them. They came for economic reasons.

MATZ: You never really knew your grandparents or did you ever know your grandparents?

3:58

APPELBAUM: I didn't know any of them and I know a little bit about my grandfather on my father's side and my grandfather on my mother's side. I just know a little bit about them but I never met any of them.

MATZ: What do you know about them? What stories have been passed down?

APPELBAUM: My father's father was a blacksmith. He was very poor. Over a number of years he had four wives. I don't mean simultaneously, he had four different wives. They died of disease and childbirth, I don't know exactly. He had a lot of children to support- his own and the children that some of his wives brought from previous marriages. He came to the United States for a short time in the early 1900s. His family helped him establish a grocery store in Atlanta, Georgia. It didn't work out. In a year or so it failed and he went back. When he went back he continued struggling to make a living. He was one of the 150,000 Jews who were uprooted from Lithuania during the First World War. In 1915 the Russian Imperial government was worried that all of those Jews along the border with Germany would undermine their war effort so they transported Jews into the interior of Russia, about 150,000 of them. Many of them came back after the war but he didn't. He died of typhus. I think it was in the city of Nishnynovgerod. That's all I know but I do know that many Jews died in exile and many others came back after the war.

MATZ: Did you hear this from your father?

6:12

APPELBAUM: My father told me that. I've since read about it but my father told me that story first. My grandfather on my mother's side, my maternal grandfather, was a miller. He was apparently a very kind, likable man. He was known for his honesty. He gave honest weight to the peasants who brought their grain to him for milling. He gained a reputation as an honorable guy. He died in 1927 in his town Zvenigorodka, which is a town southeast of Kiev. That's the only story I know about him. About my grandmother's I know nothing. My mother's mother died when she was about five years old. That would be about 1903. She was born in 1898. I know nothing about which one of my grandfather's four wives was my father's mother. I don't know which one it was. He had a lot of half brothers and sisters.

MATZ: Let's talk for a minute about your father. He was already married and then he met your mother. Let's talk about how they met.

APPELBAUM: Well, they met in the socialist movement. They were both socialist. My father was unhappy with his marriage. He had five children and apparently, from what I've heard, he approached a number of women to live with them, or marry them so that he could leave his first family. Apparently most of the women didn't want any part of it. Finally, my mother avoided him knowing that he wanted to do this so she moved to New York to get away from him and (cough) they happened to bump into each in New York at a socialist gathering, some kind of convention or something. That renewed their relationship and she finally decided to live with him. They didn't divorce. He didn't divorce his first wife.

They just lived together. I didn't know this until I was about 18 my parents broke up. They lived together and had a family and my brother and I and the two of them constituted a family and it lasted for about 20 years.

9:17

MATZ: The fact that he didn't divorce his first wife, was there a political reason why he didn't do that?

APPELBAUM: Money reasons. They didn't have much money, couldn't afford a lawyer so they just did that. They just lived together. Now that was not uncommon in the left wing movement. It wasn't like everybody did it but it was not unheard of for people to live together without being married. This was unusual in terms of the general community but not that unusual among left wingers. Technically, he was still married and then he had two children with my mother. To all intents and purposes it was a rather normal nuclear family that we had during my growing up years.

MATZ: Considering that you didn't even know that they weren't married-

APPELBAUM: Yeah, I didn't know. Apparently some other people knew. I met a friend that knew when he was a kid because apparently on our doorbell on our apartment house it said Meyer Appelbaum and Esther Kandinsky. He told he asked his mother how come Mr. Kaminsky is on there. She told him that they were not married. I didn't know any of this at that time so when I saw him many years later- many years later he told me that he knew that. He said yeah, he knew it. That was that story.

11:03

MATZ: Your mother, did she have an occupation?

APPELBAUM: Yeah, she was a sewing machine operator on women's clothing. Mostly blouses. That was many Jewish women who when they first arrived in the United States became sewing machine operators or worked in some way in the garment trade. That's what she did for many years- she was a sewing machine operator.

MATZ: Did she share with you stories of her becoming radicalized? At what point did she become radicalized?

APPELBAUM: I don't know exactly when she became radicalized. She was already radicalized when she was living in New York. One of the things that happened- this was in the early 1920s. The union, which was the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union was conducting a unionization campaign. They had a strategy of sending union members to various garment factories and what they called "take the shop down," meaning they would ask all the workers to join them in a group and go to the union hall and sign up, leave their jobs temporarily and go sign up in the union and come back. They did this as a policy and they did it in one place after another. They came to one particular shop and the boss, in anticipation of their coming, had hired gangsters to lay and wait for them under tables, behind the bundles of cloth, and so on. Three of them, my mother and two men, came to urge the workers to leave their jobs and go back to the union hall and the gangsters attacked then and they had a big fight. My mother would tell

13:15

me that one the men was rather passive but he held an umbrella so she, being a kind of fiery person, grabbed the umbrella and started swinging and gave as good as she got until they overwhelmed her. They called the police and the police came and they were arrested. She appeared before the judge the next day and her head was bound and bandaged. She was a very small woman, I think at the time about ninety-eight pounds. The judge looked her over and decided that you can't blame this fight on her. He dismissed the charges. I don't know about the men involved but I would assume that they were all- the charges against all were dismissed. Then that night they held a big rally- a union rally. Thousands of garment workers came to protest this beating up of union organizers and they put her on their shoulders and carried her around because she was a heroine. She had fought, tried to uphold union principles. That was one of the stories she told me and it was characteristic of her because I've seen her do other things like that over the course of time. where she expressed militancy. That was one of the most important stories.

MATZ: Militancy in fairness.

APPELBAUM: Seeking justice and fairness she expressed in various ways in a militant manner. I would say that she had imbibed militant principles of unionization and social activism and it was almost intuitive of her after a while to fight back in situations that she seems to think it would require. It was characteristic of her.

15:48

MATZ: Let's go back and talk about her time in New York. Do you know about when she moved to New York?

APPELBAUM: In the early, the twenties. I don't know too much about it. Except that she and her sister split an apartment and she spent a lot of time aside from union activities she spent time working at a cooperative camp. It was a left-wing Jewish camp that was cooperative in that all the participants contributed their labor to running the place. It was on the outskirts of New York. I don't remember exactly where.

MATZ: Do you remember the name of the place?

APPELBAUM: Yeah, Nitgedaiget was the name of it. Nitgedaiget, in Yiddish, "daiget" means worry. What it really meant was no worries, Nitgedaiget, don't worry about it or forget your cares, come out here and relax it was it meant.

MATZ: For the workers in the industries in New York?

APPELBAUM: Yeah, come for your weekend, take your vacation. It's a place where you don't have to worry. Your daily cares, the things that you worry about every day, just forget them while you're here, so the place was called Nitgedaiget. Apparently, it was well known. I don't know the details but I know that other people have written about Camp Nitgedaiget.

17:39

MATZ: So your mother was—

APPELBAUM: [Banjo music in background from downstairs room where interviewees son is giving a banjo lesson] Oh! Other things- she apparently became active with women's matters. She was very much taken about the new ideas about women. One of the things she did, she had long dark hair. She cut the hair and had her hair cut in a boyish bob. She made a big deal about this boyish bob because it was a way of expressing women's independence of the former roles that they had. Cutting your hair was a symbolic act. I heard her talk about that many times. It was a big thing.

MATZ: This was in the 1920s?

APPELBAUM: Yeah, there was a women's movement of that day that this was part of. She also spent time trying to enrich herself culturally. She spent apparently a lot of time at the opera. She didn't have much money so she bought tickets for standing room only- where you could stand and watch the performances. She spent a lot of time doing that and attended lectures and so on. She also spent time at night school. I think that was here in Philadelphia, to learn English, to speak and read and write. She did learn but not well. In other words, she was never fluent in English but she could read the paper and she could write her name and so on. When it came to interpreting documents or something that required a more rigorous understanding of English she used to

call and have me interpret things for her. She spent a lot of her time trying to cultivate herself.

20:01

MATZ: What kind of schooling did she have in Ukraine?

APPELBAUM: I'm not sure what she had, I really don't know. The only thing I know is she knew how to read and right Yiddish well. Somebody must have taught her. I never heard her talk about that. Just by sheer deduction, if she knew how to read and write Yiddish well so somebody must had to have taught her. There must have been some system of teaching. I know that in Jewish towns all over Russia, the practice was for the community to hire a teacher to teach the boys. Where and how the girls got involved I'm not sure. Many Jewish women of her generation were illiterate. For her to be well read in Yiddish and for her to read and write and speak well it meant that somebody had to have taught her. She was different in that respect. Not that she was the only Jewish woman who knew how to read and write but there were few and many of them were illiterate.

MATZ: Maybe that was part of her drive was to make sure she was educated and learning those things when the boys were learning those things.

APPLEBAUM: I don't know about her job [interviewee misunderstood "drive" for "job"] but she made a point to try and cultivate herself.

[Approximately two-minute pause as banjo lessons become quite loud]

21:29

MATZ: Let's take some time to talk about your father. Your father came here from Lithuania. What were his first jobs when he came here?

APPELBAUM: He had served an apprenticeship in his hometown, Zagare, Lithuania, as a harness maker and he came here and his immigration papers listed his occupation as harness maker. He worked various jobs. Apparently, there weren't all connected with harness making or leather working. He came in 1911 and it was just about then that horse drawn vehicles were giving way to trucks and cars. He was poor his ability to make a living was limited. He wasn't the business type. I know that he had some kind of job for a while hammering metal for some company out near the Ridge Pike, somewhere near the Alan Woods Steel Company¹. [car alarm] I don't know the details of that job but that was one job he had. He had to travel from South Philadelphia all the way out there and do some hammering of things and that was his occupation for a while. He did a lot of different work on harnesses with leather. He got some work making saddles for military men on horses. Therefore, for their horses, which was up his alley. That was the kind of work he did. I don't remember the details

23:38

¹ Alan Woods Iron and Steel Company of Conshohocken, PA (www.hsp.org)

of that but it was one of the better jobs that he had. None of the jobs lasted long. He was not like he got a job and he would work there for years. He worked for Belber Luggage Company, which was a well-known luggage maker here. He was one of their workers. That was one of the jobs. Sometime he became an auto trimmer. In those days an auto trimmer worked with the upper part of an automobile because much of an automobile, up to 1935, automobiles had extensive leather, canvas, other kinds of cloth. Upper bodies were made of those materials. An auto trimmer had a lot of work and was important in the maintenance and repair of a car. He became a citizen in 1920. He was naturalized in 1920. He listed his occupation, I've seen these papers in the National Archives, as auto trimmer. When he came here he was a harness maker. Somewhere, sometime between 1911 and 1920 he transformed himself into an auto trimmer. There work was directly connected to harness making. The various skills that he had as a harness maker were easily transferable to automobile work, trimmers work. He finally got a job with the Darien Body Company which made trucks in South Philadelphia, in 1920. It was at 26th and Moore Streets. He worked there for about fifteen years. That was a pretty steady job. What he would do for them is trucks at that time had the back, canvas curtains on the open backs of trucks, truck seats, anything connected with the upholstery of trucks and canvas and so on he did. He worked at that occupation for 15 years. He must have had other jobs in the field because he had to have gotten that in order to call himself an auto trimmer but I don't know the details of that. There were a lot periods of unemployment. This is between 1911 and 1920

we're talking about. Once he worked for the Baldwin Locomotive Works at some unskilled job shoveling sand or something. Baldwin was a big Philadelphia employer. Many people got jobs with Baldwin when they couldn't get a job anywhere else. I don't know how long that job lasted but he did work there. Over the years he did a lot of work as an auto trimmer, a truck and auto trimmer. He also did upholstery for furniture but that was not his main occupation. He could do it and he did do it but that was not the main thing that he did.

27:42

MATZ: Why do you think so many of these jobs didn't last so long? Was it just the climate of the time?

APPELBAUM: The climate of the time, that was it. You have to understand that he didn't have professional skills or a professional background. Many of the jobs were hand labor that were very often were needed for short periods of time. The truck trimmer job lasted for a long period of time because production of trucks was steady; the need for a man like him was steady. One thing about it was that he had skills that many people didn't have. When his type of work was needed he was available and others weren't because he knew how to do this stuff. I once ran into a place, a rich estate in New York State where they had carriages of the early 1900s. I immediately recognized the kind of work that he used to do in the carriages, the seats, with buttons that he used to put in. These were leather seats, padded, and obviously with cotton batting and springs and other things like isinglass windows and leather straps and leather tops. All of which was part of working on a carriage were immediately transferable to the first

automobiles. A lot of them are imitations of carriages, but motorized. Gradually they changed into their own type of automobile oriented upholstery. But I recognized immediately the kind of work he must have learned as a harness maker and how it was transferable to automobile work. I could see where he got it.

30:17

MATZ: Did he have any other formalized education?

APPELBAUM: No. He had the typical education of Jewish boys. [cell phone beeps] The Jewish community would hire what they call a melamid, that was a teacher and he would learn Yiddish, Hebrew there- but I don't know the details. He never told where he learned or how he learned this. He was quite fluent and very literate in Yiddish. All of those books there [points to a stack of books] are his books in Yiddish. I kept some of them out.

MATZ: So he had a library?

APPELBAUM: Yeah. Many of these books are dated 1917, 1916, 1918. It was right in the period of his first nine or ten years in this country that I could see these books were dated and he was trying to cultivate himself. But all in Yiddish.

31:39

MATZ: Most of the books that he was reading, what were they about?

APPELBAUM: They varied. Some are political books, left wing, socialist. Like here I have a copy of [reaches for book] *Das Kapital*, in Yiddish. They weren't all political. Here's another that's dated 1920 this is a biography of Nikolai Lenin [interviewee hands interviewer book; interviewer opens book]. It's upside down. Those are the political books. There were others in there that deal with psychology, economics, he has several volumes of poetry by Heine² all in Yiddish, he wrote in German- all kinds of topics. When I go through some of these books I see, he had a very thick fingernail, his hands were very big and he would mark a place in his book with his fingernail. I can still see some of the fingernail markings in his book. It's an odd way of relating to your father a hundred years after he did this, not quite a hundred years, but I can see what he's doing. How much of this he truly learned I don't know. When I saw truly learned, I don't know how learned he was in these friends. He was more than just a dilettante but not a scholar. He was well read a lot of books and recommended a lot of books to me in English.

33:52

² 19th century radical German poet who was exiled from Germany and spend the latter part of his life in Paris. (www.britannica.com)

MATZ: Where does his political involvement in the Socialist Party begin?

APPELBAUM: He was socialist sometime prior to 1920 but I don't know the dates of when that happened. But he was active. My understating of his activity comes about around 1920, thereabouts, when right after the Russian Revolution when there was a split in the socialist movement, whether they should support the Soviet Union and the Third International as opposed to the old socialist Second International. There was a split. He was among those socialists who went into the Third International and he was a founder of the Communist Party of the United States. He was one of the first members. Many of the people that founded the Communist Party were foreign born at that time. The overwhelming majority were foreign born. It was a heavy Yiddish, Jewish participation. A lot of Finns, Finnish people, a lot of Greeks, a fair number of Italians, people from the Balkans, and so on. In fact, there was a Russian section of the Communist Party, I'm talking 1920s, early twenties, 1920 itself. I know that he was active to the point where the Jewish communist movement produced it's own daily newspaper at that time called the *Freiheit*³. He was the first manager of the *Freiheit* here in Philadelphia. It was published in New York but it was distributed in big cities around the country. He was the local manager when it first began publication. This was not a full time job this was his part time political work. All through the twenties he was active. The party was illegal; it wasn't even called the Communist Party at the time. It was called the Worker's Party. Then it was called

³ *Morgan Freiheit*, A Communist Party magazine produced in New York but distributed nationally. Not to be confused with the turn of the twentieth century anarchist publication, *Freiheit*. (<http://morgen-freiheit.co.tv>)

the Workers- it had various names until they emerged in the late twenties as the Communist Party. It was underground. It was illegal. There had been persecutions. A lot of people had been deported. If you remember the, what was the, I forget the name of the guy who lead the deportations of the- [pauses]

37:21

MATZ: Palmer?

APPELBAUM: Palmer⁴, Yes. There was concern especially if you were foreign born there was always concern that you would be deported. He became a citizen so I think that he was kind of protected in that respect. My mother never became citizen so she was always concerned about deportation. After living here for so many years she became a de facto permanent resident of the United States. His political activity- they were both active. Now he was definitely a member all through the twenties. She was active but I'm not sure about her membership. I don't exactly if you would say she was a member. She certainly was active and supported the causes.

38:21

⁴ Attorney General Alexander Palmer who conducted *The Palmer Raids* of 1919-1920, a forceful and rapid arrest of many radicals in the United States. Many of which were deported.

MATZ: At this time to be a member was it just going to be meetings? I would imagine there wasn't much paperwork.

APPELBAUM: I'm assuming you're right. Being a member meant going to meetings, participating in the distribution of literature, educational classes and a lot of organizing of workers into unions where the unions were either non-existent or there was a struggle with the established unions which weren't doing much. The AF of L⁵ was scattered among various industries but would not knock itself out to take the lead in organizing the unorganized. There was a strong communist influence in the coal mining areas. There was in the twenties a real struggle for control of the United Mine Workers between Communist, John L. Lewis⁶, and others like that. The Communists had a sizable membership in the mineworkers but they lost out in terms of leadership around 1926. There was some big election and they lost that election. I don't know the details about paperwork and so on. I don't know of any membership cards.

MATZ: Your father becomes involved in the Party, becomes manager of the paper and then he starts organizing members where he is working at Darien as well?

40:28

⁵ American Federation of Labor. Formed in the late 19th century and lead by Samuel Gompers, this collection of smaller unions represented skilled workers. (www.britannia.com)

⁶ Lead the United Mine Workers of America from 1920-1960. (www.aflcio.org)

APPELBAUM: That didn't happen until the early thirties. He was active in his community and other types of activities. For example, before I get to that, there's a book of photographs called Philadelphia 1920-1960⁷ and it has a picture of a communist rally on City Hall Plaza in 1930 where the communist had had trouble demonstrating and holding meetings. So they pulled a surprise demonstration. My father was the one who set up a rostrum on the North Plaza of City Hall. Other communist started immediately surrounding it, started handing out literature, and so on. It was illegal to do that but they did it anyway. It so happens that somebody was taking pictures and there's a picture of that event. From way overhead in city Hall of that and you can see where people are milling around on the north plaza of city hall. There were a lot of demonstrations like that and a lot of activities. The other activity that he did was before there was a camp in Lumberville, Pennsylvania on the Delaware⁸ on a hillside above the Delaware which he helped found. It was called WIR, Worker's International Relief, it too was to be a resting place for workers for vacations and holidays, weekends. He was the manager, it was not like it was a personal business of his, it was an organizational activity.

MATZ: Was it directly affiliated with the Party?

42:41

⁷ *Philadelphia Stories: A Photographic History, 1920-1960*

⁸ Delaware River

APPELBAUM: Well, I'd say communist organized. It was one of the ancillary activities of the Communist Party, I'll put it that way. He was the manager of that camp and I spent a lot of time as a child there. I have pictures of myself at the age of 18 months or so sitting on a pile of rocks crying. I remember specifically details of some of the activities of that. I remember swimming on the Delaware River. There was an old covered bridge. One of the oldest bridges of that type right at Lumberville crossed into Jersey. At the foot of the bridge is where we went in swimming. I didn't swim; I would splash in the water. I was five years old at the time. We had other activities. I remember going out into the woods in the daytime. Collecting huge amounts of firewood and having these huge bonfires late at night and other kinds of group games. Of course, I was five years old so my memory of that is limited but I remember being there, I have some pictures. My father made the tents that we slept in. he was good with canvas.

MATZ: He made the tents himself?

APPELBAUM: He made the tents himself. He had a lot of skills of that kind and he did a lot to work. Then the business about the Darien Body Company.

The NRA⁹ became law and it allowed workers to organize unions so that there was a wave of union organizing around the country. He became the organizer for the union at his place, the Darien Body Company. There was a strike. Finally, there was a strike, now, I might have the years a little mixed up but I think that the first strike was in 1933. They went out sometime between January and March, [smiling] it's probably the worst time to hold a strike. The first year they lost. In 1934 they struck again and they won. My father was the organizer of the strike and he held them together and they succeeded because of his work. Except that when the strike was settled and all of the men were ready to go. They were going back in, they were filing in one by one, and the boss stood at the door and when my father came he said "*everybody can come back except Appelbaum.*" He was kept from returning to his job. The men had a belly full of strikes. It was bad times. Even if you had a job in 1933 or '34 it wasn't great. They weren't going to go out on strike for him and he had to just accept the fact that he couldn't go back to work there even though he was the guy who led the strike. Of course, the boss knew that he lead the strike so, of course, he was out for him. I have his union card from back then [shuffling through stack of memorabilia] it's one of the few things that I have that is very tangible. He couldn't get a job anywhere because of that. He was blacklisted. [hands interviewer the union card] Here's the union card. If you look on the side, the

47:15

⁹ 1935 law that empowered unions with collective bargaining and organizational rights including striking. (www.ourdocuments.gov)

date, the stamps. It was the Automobile Workers' Union which preceded the CIO¹⁰, United Automobile Workers. This union was one of the few Automobile Workers' Unions in the country at that time the CIO undertook the organizing of the automobile industry like '35, '36, '37 and this union disbanded because the UAW was being formed. While he was in the leadership of the union the NRA held hearings in Washington. The hearings were to devise industry codes. That was the practice. It would create standards of labor and wages. He went down to testify as the representative of this union. It was probably the only organized Automobile Workers' Union on the East Coast at that time. They found him as a representative of labor. He went down to testify as to the standards. One I remember him telling me that one of the things they fought for was as high a minimum wages as possible because minimums were kept to the maximums in practice. He testified in front of a lot of prominent people of that time, the head of the Teamsters Union¹¹ and major figures in industry, manufacturers. He became known. He was a known person. When they wouldn't hire him back at Darien Body Company he went out to try to find a job somewhere else and nobody would hire him. He was blacklisted. He went as far as Gloversville, New York. He went to someplace in Maryland and he wound up being unable to get a job anywhere.

49:57

¹⁰ Congress of Industrial Organizations, began in 1935 and was successful in organizing the automobile and steel industries of the U.S. In 1955 the CIO joined with the American Federation of Labor to form the AFL-CIO. (www.britannia.com)

¹¹ The International Brotherhood of Teamsters was initially formed in 1903 in an effort to organize transportation workers in the United States. (www.teamsters.org)

MATZ: So becoming known was---

APPELBAUM: -because he was a known figure in the industry. His appearance also- he had kind of strong white gray hair and blue eyes, and he was physically- you remember him. Between that and his reputation the organizer of the union and the guy who testified, he was on the list. He couldn't get a job.

MATZ: Do you remember as a kid any government agents harassing your father as part of the Red Scare?

APPELBAUM: I don't remember, no. I'm not saying it didn't happen but nothing comes to mind. I have no experience of it.

MATZ: It was mostly harassment from shop owners?

APPELBAUM: That kinds of thing, yes, but no official harassment from government. They may have put him on a list but I don't know of any specific attempts to harass him.

MATZ: That was going to be my next question. You have done some research yourself, some historical research, so you never found his name on any official list?

APPELBAUM: Not back then, no.

MATZ: Were you able to find the testimony that he gave?

51:33

APPELBAUM: You know I recently tried to find it. It is there somewhere, I know because I found records of the NRA meetings but I was unable to find it. I'm sure that if you know how to do it, it's there. They have all kinds of stuff. But I haven't been able to find specific things.

MATZ: Going back to your father, he's traveling around, he's looking for work, what is your mother doing at this point? And at this point do you have any siblings or is it just you and your mother?

APPELBAUM: It's just me and my mother. My brother wasn't born until 1937 and the siblings from the other marriage I didn't know very well at that age. I got to know them later. My mother and I, we were evicted from our apartment as a result of not having any money, being on strike, and also not having any job, we couldn't pay rent.

MATZ: And this is 1930?

APPELBAUM: '33 or '34. I don't remember precisely. I think it was '33. [long pause] The reason I hesitate, I have a picture of myself at that time [shuffles for picture]. I was about five and a half in this picture and it was taken at a camp, Camp Unity, that my mother took me took with my cousin and her sister at that time. I was five in the picture, somewhere in here. Anyway, we were without a place to live. We were kicked out and my father was away looking for work. The two of us would live in different places. People we knew would take her in, take.

us in. You would say we were homeless, we didn't have a specific place to live. The only thing is we had friends in the same neighborhood that I had been born in there were people who took us in. I don't know about rent and I don't know where my mother got money for food but I know that it was not good. I remember one place on Girard Avenue. It was a three-story house- a row house. We had a bedroom on the second floor that was empty, a big wide bed. I remember sleeping in that bed with my mother and my mother would talk to me at bedtime just kind of make me feel more comfortable. I didn't feel terribly unhappy or uncomfortable. I didn't have some traumatic feeling about it but I knew that we were not in our usual place. Then I remember going into another place on Parkside Avenue in a snowstorm. I think this was 1935. This was all before my father came back, while he was out of town. My mother was kind of upset, obviously. I'd gotten sick with whooping cough during this period. At that time I was, you know if you have whooping cough, you have no money, you have no place to live, it is not exactly the best place in the world for a five year old. My mother went down to the Rush Hospital which was at 33rd and Lancaster Avenue, below Lancaster. The building is still there. It was a hospital. It was a hospital though. The building is now owned by Drexel University. Drexel University owns it. There's a big sign on the side of the building, "Rush Building." It was a hospital connected with a convalescent home in Paoli that was a state run facility for poor kids, mostly children who had respiratory ailments, especially

TB¹². TB was still a prominent public health issue at that time. Very often whooping cough apparently lead to other respiratory complications. My mother needed a place for me to be that was safer and healthier than what she could offer me. She tried to get me into this convalescent home but before I could do that I had to be tested and evaluated at this Rush Hospital. I spent- it must have been ten days or two weeks- I don't remember. I was there for a little while. It was during Christmas season. I remember Christmas decorations and I remember looking out the window, across the street. I don't know if you know that intersection, there's an armory there across the street. I remember a circus filing in through the back doors, a big wide door that slung open, and Indians and cowboys and so on filing in and watching through the window. Anyway, they finally concede that I could benefit from the convalescent home. I think that the social worker that my mother dealt with was pretty much sympathetic to us. I don't know if I exactly fit the type of patient that they served but I was pretty close to it because whooping cough is called pertussis. That's the technical name of the ailment and it frequently lead to other respiratory ailments so it made sense to send me out there. Especially since I had no home and had no community support so I went out there I remember my mother crying when it was decided that I go. I don't know, of course, when you have a five year old, your mother feels bad about , well any child at that age and under those circumstances I remember her feeling pretty bad.

59:24

¹² tuberculosis, a bacterial disease that attacks the lungs. (www.cdc.gov)

MATZ: How long were you out there?

APPELBAUM: That's not clear I think it was there for about six months. I don't have a lot of recollections about it except form some that are unpleasant. For some reason or another I started to vomit after breakfast when I was out there. I just found the building; I know where that building is. It's on Paoli Road out in Chester County. It's now part of, I think, Bryn Mawr Hospital. But it was a state run facility for a number of years. I had expected to sleep in some kind of very pleasant cottage. Instead we were in a building and it was dormitories. For some reason I started to vomit after breakfast every day. **Every day** like clock work after breakfast I would gag. I remember gagging. And I would throw up and would have to clean up the mess with newspapers. This went on for a number of days one after the other. It was out of control. I couldn't stop it. It would just happen. I remember one time that a counselor started yelling at me for making a mess because this was happening day after day and it was very unpleasant for everybody- for me and everybody else. One day she decided I needed to be punished for this so I was put into a closet. It was dark and all I could see was the white light on the bottom from the other side and all you could hear was muffled noises of people doing whatever they were doing. I don't remember how long that lasted. I know I stood in there for quite a while one day and I don't

1:01:42

remember other days. Interestingly enough, I didn't feel traumatized and I didn't cry and I don't know why. I don't claim any great anything it just happened and I just endured it. Then, years later, sometime ten or fifteen years ago I was talking to a psychologist who, now that I had told her this story she told me that she knows three people who had been children at this institution who also had been treated cruelly. That happened and the other thing that happened there was that I didn't know anything about religion. I knew nothing. My parents were not only not religious and were anti-religious, they were left wing, anti-clerical, anti-religious, (anti-) Jewish, (anti-) any other religions they were anti-militant atheists. So I knew nothing about it, but every Sunday they had a Sunday school and I went with the other children to the Sunday school. I didn't know what you did at a Sunday school, I didn't understand it but I sat there. They had little chairs and I remember sitting there and I remember a man who must have been the Sunday school teacher asking who is the first man in the world. Then he called on me to answer. I didn't understand the question so I said "God." Everybody laughed because the right answer was Adam. I never heard of Adam, I never knew any of that so I just answered the first thing that popped into my head. That's the kind of thing that went on there that I experienced that were contrary to anything that I experienced at home. I don't think I suffered. I wasn't Oliver Twist or that kind of thing. I wasn't brutalized although that type of punishment for a five year old for vomiting is really today I understand how terrible that was. But that's all they could think of doing. They had no idea. Now I don't even know why I vomited. There was smell in the air- the usual breakfast smells. When you go into resort or a camp or someplace in the summer and at breakfast time and you smell all of

these cereals and cocoa and coffee and eggs and cinnamon and all that. That's the smells that I had there but they weren't, to me at that time, they weren't good smells. They all combined to make me gag. I can only assume that I gagged because of some nervous condition which was obvious and apparent. All this transpired of a period of about six months but I'm not even sure of that, how long I was there.

1:05:14

MATZ: Was your mother able to come out to visit you?

APPELBAUM: I don't remember that. It was probably pretty hard for her to come out there because you needed a car, it was not something you reach with public transportation and she didn't have a car. I don't know what happened during that time but I don't remember any visits.

MATZ: Your mother and you are finally reunited? [repeats question]

APPELBAUM: Yeah, my whole family. My father came back. I don't remember the details of that. I remember suddenly being in a new apartment that my parents had rented in the same neighborhood on 41st Street- 41st and Parkside Avenue.

MATZ: In West Philadelphia?

1:06:03

APPELBAUM: In West Philadelphia. They rented an apartment and we had nothing. Somewhere they had beds. I guess somebody had stored them for them. But we had no furniture, literally, no furniture. I remember sitting on orange crates eating. We went on relief. They called it relief. Pennsylvania had just enacted relief. It wasn't easy; it was a struggle to get relief. They didn't want to give any money to poor people. The rent was twenty-two dollars a month. I presume that my parents must have borrowed some money during that period. I remember for sure that they borrowed some money from my uncle and aunt in New York. I don't know how much they borrowed. They must have struggled through with some loans. Then we were in this apartment. We had no glasses or silverware or any of that and very few clothes. It gradually we accumulated- bit by bit we got more things. My father, being handy, rebuilt a couch that he got somewhere and being an upholsterer he was able to. He rebuilt a couch and chair and an ottoman. We had glasses that were at that time sour cream came in these glasses that had decorations painted on them. That was our glasses. Then when we had some glassware from the movies. During the Depression they would give out glassware in the movie house. Little by little we accumulated some stuff. It was a big room with a smaller room behind it. The big room was our living room and my parent's bedroom. They had like a Hollywood bed at one end. My room was the next room which I slept there. We also had our meals in that room. Then there was a little tiny kitchen. Just two people could barely stand next to each other and then there was the bathroom and that was it. We gradually established ourselves in that house, in that apartment. My father

needed a job and he was unable to get a job. I remember he started an automobile business- an automobile upholstery business.

1:09:23

MATZ: He started his own business at this point?

APPELBAUM: Same field but a as a business now- his own. This was either late '35 or 1936. I remember he and my mother talking about what he was going to do. He set up- at the corner of 16th and Callowhill Street was a automobile body and fender shop and the man who owned it was a friend of my fathers. My father rented a piece of his shop, a corner, and put in a table and installed an industrial sewing machine. He got some work from some automobile dealers, some truck dealers, and made a little bit of money. My mother went to work as a sewing machine operator it was still very minimal income for any of that. But the work gradually grew. The business grew a little bit. He rented a building at 1534 Callowhill Street. A few doors from this other place. I remember it was heated with a pot-bellied stove and he put in a big worktable and a sewing machine. Cars would be driven into it. He could work on the cars. At that time they would put seat covers on cars. Car upholstery was mohair and people would want to protect it with seat covers. He would make seat covers and he would do tops, convertible tops. He would repair them or make them from scratch, and truck seats. He got work from some truck dealers. Big trucking companies. I remember one was Scott Brothers- big company at that time. He got work from automobile dealers. They would have cars that needed repairs to the upholstery so they would call him. He would do head linings, the upper, repair seats.

1:12:00

MATZ: Where did he get the funding to buy the sewing machine?

APPELBAUM: I'm not clear about that. I think he may have had the sewing machine but when he made the move to this place he got a loan from Mastbaum Loan Society¹³. I think it was a hundred dollars. Now in 1936 or '37 a hundred dollars was a lot of money. Mastbaum Loan Society- I just saw a book on it. It was formed by a number of wealthy Jews at that time, among them Mastbaum, Jules Mastbaum. He was a prominent Jewish businessman and philanthropist. They named it after him because the Jewish organization in Philadelphia had a similar fund, small loans to poor Jews. They also loaned to other people but mostly to Jews and he got a loan from them for a hundred dollars. It was my job to set two dollars every week. They had like a book, a book where the record was kept, it was about this long [holds hands about ten inches apart] and folded in the middle. It was corrugated paper and printed on there was lines for the dates and the entries. I would put two dollars and close it and put it in an envelope and mail it off every week or month, I forget. That was my job and the loan was finally paid off. That's where he got the funding to make the move to this other place. Where he got the money to do the other things- I don't know. It

1:13:57

could have been borrowed money. The thing is my father had no business experience and had no reserves, He had no savings. Somehow, I remember him

¹³ The Mastbaum Loan System was founded in 1920 in an effort to provide Philadelphia Jews with low interest loans.

talking about- the one thing about my father is he laid out what he was going to do and then he did it. I remember him talking- he's going to do this and he's going to do that and he did. He struggled. The income wasn't too great between 1936 and 1941 or so this was not too good. He almost gave up the business. He went to the Navy Yard to try to get a job as a sail maker. The didn't need sails but he would be working on canvas for canvas covers . He took an aptitude test and came back and was glowing. The test said that he had the internal capacities to be an engineer. Of course, he was very proud of that. He never had anybody test him and he never had an education- opportunity to become an engineer. He was very happy with himself- that they recognized his skills. He did. He had a lot of skills. I remember him measuring tops and doing the measurement for tops and doing the pattern making for seat covers. I don't know how he did it. He did it accurately. He did it well and accurately. He must have had a good head for design and for measurement. He did all of this but it wasn't producing any money. He almost gave up but he didn't. He didn't go to the Navy Yard. I don't know whether he decided not to or they didn't hire him. He was a communist so who knows what they had on him? They could have had a record of him. That went on like that until World War Two broke out. He would say he was underemployed. He was either unemployed or underemployed for about

1:16:34

twelve or thirteen years until World War Two broke out. Then Yellow Cab Company came to him to make seat covers for them for several hundred taxis because their normal suppliers were busy with government work. He got the job- the order and he made patterns and he bought a cutting machine. I don't know if you know what a cutting machine is. It has a blade that goes like this [mimics operation of cutting machine with hands] and there's a motor and the blade goes up and down and it's on a platform. This is material and it would cut it. You would lay out a pattern. He did all of that. Then my mother and black woman who was a communist- they hired her and the two of them sewed them up like crazy. I remember them working like crazy. He got another sewing machine and they finally completed the order. From then on business improved. For the first time, by 1942 or '43 he finally, I would say, was making a living. The first time since the early 1930's- making a living. Of course it was making a living. I don't say that he got rich but for the first time we had money to pay the bills and had a little bit more to spare scraping by. That was around 1941. In 1942 or '43 we moved into a slightly bigger apartment a few doors away on the same block but it had another room. By this time I had a brother. Eugene was born in 1937 so we each had our own room. He was born when we still lived in that small apartment and two of us slept in that little room that was also our dining room. Now we had- did we have our own rooms? [to self] I think we did. Life got a little better. By this time it was not like, so touch and go.

1:19:08

MATZ: Noyma and Eugene that's two interesting names. What are the origins of the names? [repeats question]

APPELBAUM: My name is Noyma. The origin of it is that there's a name in Yiddish- the Hebrew name is Benjamin so people who are called Benjamin as a diminutive they call Nyoma. It's like Ricky from Richard or something like that. It's quite known in Europe. Jewish people and kids in this country, nobody ever heard of it but it's not uncommon in Europe. I've run into some recently in the Jewish genealogy, people referring to their children a Naumcha which is a diminutive based on another Nyumke which comes from Benjamin. That's the origin of my name. She read in the *Freiheit*, she read the story about about some kid named Nyumke and she liked the whole thing and she named me after him but she didn't know how to spell it so it came out N-O-Y-M-A. The nurses were Irish and she didn't know much English and they didn't know Yiddish so they spell it N-O-Y-M-A so I'm Noyma according to phonetic English. My Brother is Eugene Victor Appelbaum after Eugene Victor Debs¹⁴. My father said, he claimed he didn't have any input into naming me but now he was going to make sure that he had input into naming Eugene. [laughter He chose Eugene Victor which of course my mother didn't object. That's the origins of the names.

1:21:09

¹⁴ Founder of the International Workers of the World and Socialist Party candidate for president in many early 20th century elections.

MATZ: I think this would be a good place to pause and then we can pick this up in a week or so.

APPELBAUM: Okay.

MATZ: Thanks so much and I look forward to talking to you more about this.

[end of first part of interview]

Audio file 2:

MATZ: Hello, I'm Dan Matz and I'm for my second part of my interview with Noyma Appelbaum. It is March 17th, 2011 and we are in Noyma's home. May I have your permission to record your voice? [repeats question]

APPELBAUM: Yes.

MATZ: Last week we talked much about your family, your mother, father, and their immigration. We started to get into their affect on your youth. What I would like to talk about is basically, pick up on that conversation. As a youth what sort of ideals were instilled in you by your mother and father?

00:52

APPELBAUM: My parents were militant Marxists. My father was an active communist. My mother was active. I'm not sure if she was actually a member of the Communist Party but she was certainly in support of their ideas. It was a mix of Communist Party politics and Jewish People's Fraternal Order¹⁵, the Schul, and their activities I recall activities beginning in the early thirties. That's where my memories being. That had been active long before I came along. Among the things I first remember was the attempt to evict us, not an attempt, they evicted us from our apartment because of not paying any rent. The attitude of my mother was important. It was derived from her political beliefs and so on. Both my parents were in demonstrations and they included me in many of them. I was on picket lines and parades, communist sponsored parades, during the early thirties and other activities, I can't remember details but I was in many different activities. My mind's- my growth as a person was heavily influenced by these activities. My father having been a union organizer was blacklisted and then he had to go to work in a new small business because he couldn't get a job. All this time he was active in the local community and I accompanied him on his weekly visits to people's homes. These were sympathizers, were friends, people he wanted to bring the message to and I went along with them. As part of my activities I was a member of the Young Pioneers which was an organization that was sponsored by the International Worker's Order which was a fraternal organization sponsored by the communists. Unfortunately, in Philadelphia there were no meetings of the pioneers. I understand in New York and perhaps other places, maybe Chicago or

¹⁵ Jewish organization within the International Workers Order, a communist fraternal organization founded in 1930. (www.rmc.library.cornell.edu)

Los Angeles, there were group meetings. It was left wing communist version of the Boy Scouts with less of an emphasis on nature and more of an emphasis on group activities, some social and many political. My activities in regards to the Young Pioneers was mostly to read literature that came in the mail and to wear pieces of a uniform that the Young Pioneers sent to all their members.

4:11

MATZ: How old were you when you where in the Young Pioneers?

APPELBAUM: About nine or ten. I have a photograph of myself in my uniform. It wasn't much of a uniform, it was not like full regalia. Much of my childhood was involved with the Jewish schools or the Schul. Which was a function of the Jewish People's Fraternal Order which was a subsidiary group of the IWO¹⁶. The Iwo was made up of a lot of different ethnic groups and the Jewish People's Fraternal Order was one of them and they sponsored a Jewish school that I went to starting at the age of maybe eight or nine where we read, wrote, and spoke in Yiddish and learned Jewish history, Jewish language, Jewish literature and political matters. The Schul at that time was supportive of what the

5:34

¹⁶ International Workers Order

Soviet Union was doing in regard to Jews which was creating a Jewish community in Birobidzhan¹⁷, which was a project that Stalin and the Soviet Union sponsored. At that time these things all sounded very positive, very good and were part of the ideological equipment of the Jewish, communist oriented movement. I grew up thinking positively of these developments and it was my understanding, as a child, that the Jews in the Soviet Union were finding a liberation that they had not experienced prior to the revolution. The official position for the Soviet government was against anti-Semitism and the Jews were flourishing for the first time in their history in Russia. That was a major thought that went through my general outlook on the world. It was a positive view of the Soviet Union and according to everything that I had heard or read, the Soviet Union was a breakthrough in a world dominated by capitalism. It was finally a place where workers were free of capitalist exploitation. They were now in charge of their own destiny and the world as a whole, the capitalist world as a whole, was anxious to destroy the Soviet Union and were gunning for them from the minute that they took power in 1918. There was a favorable attitude toward the Soviet Union, not only favorable, but that the answers to most of society's ills were being found in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was a place where

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¹⁷ Created by Stalin in the Eastern Soviet Union in 1934 as a homeland for Jewish people. Jews from around the world moved there in hopes of finding a peaceful and autonomous homeland. Those hopes would be dashed as it became apparent that Stalin created this new Jewish Zion as a way to control Jews in the Soviet Union. Many residents of Birobidzhan would fall victim to Stalin's later purges. (<http://www.swarthmore.edu/Home/News/biro/>)

exploitation of worker's had stopped. Now workers were in control. Now ethnic persecutions had stopped. The Soviet Union had liberated various ethnic groups and they lived harmoniously in a new type of society. One of the major goals of the left- the communist left was defending the Soviet Union. There was constant concern that the Soviet Union would be invaded and there was some history, in the early days after the revolution, that foreign countries has invaded Russia in order to destroy the revolution. The Soviet Union was supposedly the leader of the peace loving people of the world and these are the prevailing ideas of the communist left at that time. That they were seeking to develop a worldwide coalition to stop fascism and that they were in the forefront of this fight. Spain, the Civil War in Spain, was an early aspect of this struggle and I read about these things and knew about them and knew about the communist position because I read the, I was a good reader, I started reading early, and I read publications, the *Daily Worker*¹⁸ in particular, and associated literature which constantly put forward the ideas that the Soviet Union is the leader of the peace forces in the world. I remember clearly the 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact which disturbed a lot of communists and liberal people who were looking for leadership in the Soviet Union but the conclusion that my parents and others like them was the Soviet Union has to do things they don't really want to do because they feel isolated and don't have confidence that the capitalist world will come to their

10:25

¹⁸ A newspaper created in New York City in 1924 by the Communist Party and distributed nationally.

defense. They had to do something to stave off the Nazi conquest that they figured was going to happen in the Soviet Union.

I was a member of the off and on of the Young Communist League¹⁹. I say off and on because the particular group in West Philadelphia where I grew up that constituted the Young Communist League were older than I was and I didn't have too much in the way of a social existence with them but I did participate occasionally in activities including there were some study groups, there were some parties, there were some games, and so on that I participated in but I was not really a full fledged member of the YCL even though I knew all about it and was friends with people in it. My main beginning particularly my own individual participation in organized activity came with the American Youth for Democracy which was an organization that the communists sponsored that replaced the Young Communist League. Earl Browder, had written a book called *Tehran and After*,²⁰ thought that the class struggle was going to diminish after World War Two and a new type of relationship between the left and the capitalist system would have to develop. Of course Stalin had ended the Communist International, the Third International, and Communist Party was no longer a member of that. It didn't exist any longer. Many of the features of the communist movement of the

12:39

¹⁹ Communist Party youth group with a history dating back to 1920. The YCL frequently had periods of underground membership and name changing to avoid political persecution but is still in existence today.

²⁰ Earl Browder was a prolific American communist writer and controversial leader. Upon further research no book entitled *Tehran and After* could be found but he does have a 1944 work titled *Tehran: Our Path to Peace* (www.library.syr.edu)

twenties and thirties. The AYD, or American Youth for Democracy, was one of them. It was not intended to fight for socialism or to pursue the class struggle as such in the way the YCL had but it was intended to develop a coalition among youth for democracy, to enhance democracy, to fight racism and to generally further progressive ideas in the country. There was a movement that I was active in and I participated in the formation of the AYD and I was active in my local community trying to develop some of the ideas of the AYD one of them was in high school we tried to form a club which became known as the All-American Club which was intended to foster ethnic cooperation in high school. There had been considerable fighting among certain ethnic groups, Blacks and Italians in particular. We formed this club but it didn't last very long because it didn't gain much traction or support among the students. There was a small group of us that supported it but it didn't go very far. The AYD had a lot of activities in the city and nationally. I'm not sure how many members it had but it probably had several thousand nationally. In the community was one of the things we did was we formed a basketball team with an effort to influence and attract youth around sports. We did play some games and we had a team and we won some and lost some but it also didn't last long. This AYD existed from about 1943 or '44 into the late forties.

When I graduated from high school. I got a half scholarship to Temple University and I went to Temple. For the first year I was just an ordinary student. I

had a part time job at the Philadelphia Inquirer as a copy boy. I needed to work to make ends meet and to pay for the half of my tuition that the scholarship didn't cover. For the first year at Temple I was just kind of an ordinary student with no particular political activities but I got involved with the AYD at Temple and came in touch with many of the young people who had been in the AYD on the city basis and gradually my friendships and my activities more and more centered on the American Youth for Democracy and I became active at Temple, at the Temple club for the American Youth for Democracy. We issued literature. We took stands on public issues. Mostly we fought on racism and at that time we took a stand against universal military training which was a hot political item in those days it was diminished in importance over the years. At that time it seemed to be an effort an effort to create a permanent military group among young people. It seemed to have reactionary purposes. It never went very far but that was one of the items on our agenda. Some time late in the first year of college or early in the second year I was approached by a member of the Communist Party at Temple. There was a Temple club of the Communist Party. There were communist clubs at several other universities and colleges in the Philadelphia area. I was approached and asked if would join. I said yes. I seemed like the natural thing to do having been all my life connected with the Communist Party- as a child and as a high school student, my father having been very active in involving me and including me in many things. Many things connected with the

17:55

communist movement. Joining didn't seem to be a very dramatic or special event in my life.

I became very active in the party and continued to be active in the AYD. This was the period in which McCarthyism started to increase in its intensity around the country and the Attorney General, I think in 1947²¹, issued a long list of organizations that were either communist inspired or communist oriented and they were- The AYD was one of those organizations. We had been active for several years. Then we were banned from campus because we were one of those organizations on the Attorney general's list, Attorney General Tom Clark at that time. We had a meeting with the President of the University, Robert Johnson. He said that we were banned from campus. He didn't even make an effort to hear us out. We just voiced our disagreement and our complaints. He said we were banned and that's all there is into it. There was no real discussion, no argument that was it. We were banned. We were still active in other organizations around campus. We tried to have meetings that would arouse the students about the fact that we were being banned, that it was a serious violation of free speech. There was bubbles of interest in the campus but it didn't go very far.

²¹ Attorney General Tom Clark issued a list of communist organizations in 1948 (www.trumanlibrary.org)

I continued to be active in the party. Some of our activity involved the Young Progressives and students for Wallace²². We formed a club at Temple, an organization that supported the candidacy of Henry Wallace in 1948. Much of our activity was involved with that and trying to fight the growing McCarthy type atmosphere that was developing in the country

20:25

MATZ: Now do you remember any other time in your youth? When you were younger or in college? Was there any other time you were being challenged for your beliefs? Your political or social beliefs?

APPELBAUM: Yes. I was challenged at various times as a kid. For example, because of my parent's left-wing beliefs I went to school on Jewish holidays. I was accosted at times on the street and punched by some Jewish kids who didn't like the fact that I went to school. That was part of it. Very often as a kid there were not many discussions about those things. But at Temple I ran into that. I had a class in public speaking and I gave a talk in defense of in support for Henry Wallace. That was one of my classroom activities. A veteran, who was a very angry young man, bitterly denounced me and Henry Wallace and the whole movement as being communist, as being anti-American and so on. There were also challenges, there was one episode I remember when the AYD met and Trotskyists came to the meeting and broke it up. I don't mean literally physically,

²² The Young Progressives, formed in 1948, were affiliated with the United States Progressive Party. The main focus of both groups was to support former Vice President Henry Wallace in the 1948 presidential election. Wallace received wide support from the Communist Party as well. (www.lib.uiowa.edu)

but broke it up by standing up and denouncing the Soviet Union and communist. In fact, they got me so mad at the meeting that afterward I got into a physical fist fight with one of them. It didn't last very long. But it was the only physical fight I had since I was like nine years old. [smiling and laughter]

22:42

I know that there were challenges but I can't remember all the details. I remember there was one. Individuals who would challenge us. Mostly it had to do with the Soviet Union and whatever the communists advocated, good, bad, or indifferent. It was heavily influenced by our attitude towards the Soviet Union and that seemed to color everything we said or did about many other issues. So there were challenges along the way. They didn't deter me. I would say that, this is an important point. I viewed the communist movement through the lenses of the people I knew. My parents, my friends, the broader group of people and I never knew anybody who was a hateful person, who advocated anything other than human liberation, human progress, that people should get along with each other. They fought anti-Semitism. They fought racial bigotry. Of course they fought for equality of working people and improving their lives. Everything that I saw was colored by that experience. There was a general attitude that my parents instilled in me. It was an attitude of sympathy for people who were downtrodden, people who were oppressed. When the Soviet Union became an issue it was hard for me and others like me to see that the Soviet Union was not exactly what

24:52

we thought it was. Our ideas was shaped by what we thought was the communist attitude. The communist attitude was supposedly one of human liberation and advocacy for the betterment of the human race and that was what influenced us. It was the central theme or idea that kept me within the movement. No matter what good and bad things happened that seemed to be, from my perspective, what the communist were for. Toward the end of my college years I had been working through the *Inquirer* part time for about two and half years and then in Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia area, the Communist Party developed a local edition of the *Daily Worker*. A weekend edition, which was nothing more than a wrapper, a four page wrapper around the national edition, but devoted to Pennsylvania affairs. They started this, and this was not only in Pennsylvania, it was in many areas of the country, they developed local editions to supplement the national edition of the paper. I had been at the *Inquirer* two and a half years. I was getting more skilled in journalism and I proposed to Walter Lowenfels²³, who was the *Daily Worker's* correspondent in Philadelphia that I join him on a paid basis and would become his assistant in putting out the paper. He proposed it to the Party. Of course, I said the only thing I need is the income I get from my part time job so if they could keep paying me the same thing I was getting at the *Inquirer*, which was in the summer full time, 18 dollars a week. I

²³ Poet and editor of the *Daily Worker*. Lowenfels was arrested in July of 1953 for conspiracy to overthrow the government for his writings. A conviction was overturned in 1954. (library.wustl.edu)

27:20

needed that money to save for tuition for the following year. Also, during the school year I worked part time for nine dollars a week and I had needed that money to pay my daily expenses. It's interesting how far nine dollars went in those days. I was able to pay car fare, buy lunch, and even have a date [smiling, laughter] on Saturday night on nine dollars a week. I might have had some other money but I can't remember where or how I might have gotten it. Anyway, for the last year and a half of my college life I worked on the Pennsylvania edition of *The Worker* and for all intents and purposes I became an employee of the *Daily Worker* and I suppose by extension I became an employee of the Communist Party because that's where the money came from to pay my nine dollars and eighteen dollars a week. During my last year of college, toward the end, no, in 1948 I met my wife, the woman that became my wife, Ellen Kotsky. We had a romance that lasted for a number of months and we decided to get married. By the end of college life, at the end, I graduated from college, I got married, all within a week. I also had my twenty-first birthday party, which was the first birthday party of my life. My parents were not too big on bourgeois things like birthday parties. Not that I had missed them or anything but it seemed appropriate at twenty-one to have a birthday party.

Then I worked for a year on the Pennsylvania edition of *The Worker*- full time. I participated in many activities of *The Worker*. I learned a lot about

29:28

newspaper work. I learned to work under pressure. I wrote a lot of articles²⁴, I did research. I assisted Walter, there was layout, editing, and so on. We would mail off the four-page wrapper to the *Daily Worker* late Sunday night at the main Post Office on 30th and Market. It would see the results the following week. We conducted a number of campaigns during that time. One of the most important was the one we conducted on police brutality. We thought to publicize police brutality in a very big way. We constantly were exposing Frank Rizzo²⁵. At that time Frank Rizzo was a police captain at I think the 11th and Pine Street police station. The report every weekend was large numbers of black people who were brought in by the police to his station as a result of his brutal style he was a very brutal police officer. His station became notorious as a place where there was a lot of arrests; a lot of people were hit in the head with clubs, people sitting in the jail bleeding. We exposed this. We publicized it. Every opportunity we could we publicize police brutality which was historically great in Philadelphia. It was not something that we invented or discovered, it was well known in the black community

MATZ: Your degree at Temple, was that in journalism?

²⁴ In a later conversation, Mr. Appelbaum discussed the secrecy of the writers at the *Daily Worker*. Writers would use pseudonyms. Norman Anderson was the name Mr. Appelbaum used in these publications.

²⁵ Frank Rizzo was a colorful and controversial Police Commissioner in the 1960s and led Philadelphia as Mayor through much of the 1970s.

31:27

APPELBAUM: Journalism, at that time, was in the school of business so it was a bachelor of science in business with a major in journalism

MATZ: And that was something you had planned to pursue? You had a job lined up?

APPELBAUM: It was my ambition my ambition was to be a newspaper reporter but I was hoping it would be a left-wing type of reporter. A person on the order of, I don't know if you know the name, Wilfred Burchett, who was an Australian left wing reporter. Or one of the *Daily Worker's* reporters, Joseph North, who I admired his work and I didn't know Burchett at that time but he is the kind of guy I would have wanted to become. During the year that I worked full time, the Korean War broke out. The intensity of the McCarthy attacks on communists was great. They had the twelve national committee members of the party had been arrested and on trial. They had been arrested in '48 and their trial went through a several year period and they were convicted. Other arrests were taking place and toward the end of the year, that year the party, sometime in that period, decided that a fascist takeover seemed to be in place. That attacks and arrest on communists and the firing of many people who were not necessarily communist and liberals seemed to be getting greater and greater. The Party decided it would form an underground organization. I know that they went to France and asked them how the French party conducted itself during the Nazi period. They fully expected that's what would happen here. People started to

disappear. There were a lot of transfers to different places. New people came in. We never knew their real names.

33:53

MATZ: This was at that *Daily Worker*?

APPELBAUM: This was the party in general. It included Walter, I'm not sure of all the conversation that went on but I do know that they didn't know exactly what to expect. I know that sometime- in the summer or later of 1950, Walter disappeared for a while. I didn't know. He just went. He never told me he was going. He just went. He disappeared and I was smart enough to know that something was going on. I didn't know where he went. I did the paper myself for a number of weeks. By myself and some help. I don't want to say that it was no help but I was the mainstay at the paper. Then he came back and he had been in Mexico. He never told me the details of why he went. I understood more or less what was going on but I didn't know the details. The Party as a whole was beginning to disperse. Fewer and fewer people were in an open national position as the open spokesmen of the Communist Party. After about a year the money to pay me ran out and I had to get a job. Yet, part time I continued working on the paper. We had people in the city who helped with the artwork. We would gather every Sunday, sometimes at our apartment. We lived at South 5th street. Around 5th and Spruce, in a third floor apartment. We gathered there on Sundays. Also, new people showed up sometimes with their real names, sometimes with assumed names. I worked part time on the paper but I also, to make a living, I

36:11

got a job at a clothing factory where I did work on keeping track of yard goods, _____ (??) an inventory type of job. Then I got a job, the Party tried to help me get a job. Then they got me a job. I worked for less than half a day, a shoe store in center city. I pretended I had experience and the guy said- he could see that didn't know what I was doing. And then I got another job at a shoe factory at west Philadelphia. The Brooks Shoe factory. In the riveting room where they attach spikes and cleats to the soles of shoes- athletic shoes. I worked there a number of months, six months, I'm not sure five months? This was an underpaid department it was all piecework. We didn't make much money so we staged a little ruckus at a union meeting and they sent me into be the spokesmen for the riveting room people. I was more well-spoken than they were. I negotiated for some increases in piece rates but I didn't really know what I was doing. I didn't know anything about negotiating and the union didn't help me any. I made some gains but I'm not sure if couldn't of made better gains if they had sent an experienced negotiator in with me but they left me on my own.

It wasn't long after that that I got the opportunity to work at the Baldwin Locomotive Works. I went there and I got a job working on army tanks it was a fabrication, steel fabrication. It was in Delaware County. Baldwin's plant was in Lima, not Lima, Eddystone. They had, by now, Baldwin had become part of a bigger corporation called the Baldwin Lima Hamilton Corporation. They continued to make locomotives at the Delaware County plant but they also at that time

made army tanks. Which was a manner of welding sections of armored plated together with special titanium welds. So I got a job-

38:55

MATZ: In that job was there any conflict of interest for you?

APPELBAUM: Yes, it was not- you mean because it was a war?

MATZ: Yeah.

APPELBAUM: Yeah, but if you're going to work you have to accept that because wherever you went there was some aspect of it that had something to do with the military so I just had to accept that. I didn't like it. I had nothing more to do with it than steel fabrication work. There were no armament; there was no controls, that was done somewhere else. They shipped these hulls elsewhere for that. Then I think at Chrysler for the motors and all that. There are M47 tanks. The plant employed, that particular plant employed about 1500 people. I started out as a grinder which was to grind the welds free of slag. It was that thick [holds out hand and show about four inches of space with fingers] and the welds would be in a v-shape and they would lift from one side and you had to clean the slag out of the other side. I then learned to become a chipper. Chippers chip the slag out and then the grinders come along and smooth the hull over. This is they can weld it from the other side and so that the welds are free of any slag or anything that would weaken the weld. I became a chipper and the chippers are- I learned a lot about physical hard work as a chipper.

40:52

MATZ: After college you had this journalism degree and then you went into industrial labor. Was that based on your political beliefs or were there no journalism jobs? Or was it based on people knew your political history and saw conflict there?

APPELBAUM: The Communist Party had a policy of attempting industrial concentration. The idea was more and more young communists should go into industry because that's primarily where the Communist Party need to be built. The industrial workers were the presumably the backbone of the working class and should be part of the backbone of the Communist Party. The Party had limited numbers of workers in its ranks. The early founders of the Communist Party were heavily workers- manual workers, but later, as time went on, that generation died out. The people who replaced them- some were workers but many were not and the Communist Party, they believed in, even in industrial areas where they had a lot of influence they very often had influence in the leadership of the union because they were involved in organizing the union. Massive workers didn't belong to the Communist Party and in fact werer non or even anti-communist. The Communist Party needed to influence, if it was going to be more than a top heavy organization, have members with influence family life and policies in the unions and industries. Some places they were very strong, they had a lot members, rank and file members. Bethlehem Pennsylvania they did. These were guys who had twenty or thirty years of experience in the industry

43:06

and many of them were foreign born. Those were guys who, you know, were militant from way back. Younger people, post-1935 or so, there were not too many coming into the Communist Party. Some, but not too many. I went into industry as one of the many people who went into industry, communists, went into industry. I got the first job and after that. I don't know, maybe a dozen or more communists got jobs there. We had so many people in one part of the plant, it was called Section D, where they made locomotives, we had so many people that one of our people had a lathe that clamped that held the material onto the lathe flew off and hit another one of our people on the head. He was out of work for a long time. It was quite a serious injury.

MATZ: It was a secret that you were all in the Party?

APPELBAUM: It was a secret yet the FBI knew all about it. That's another thing. Simultaneously to all this, the FBI was following us, knew all about who we were, where we were, why we were. First of all, they knew communist members from various ways. They had the communist headquarters up at 250 South Broad street at that time, they would break in at night and steal records, photographs, and so on. My membership, for example, within a short time after I formally joined, they already had me down as a communist. It either was somebody told them or they got the records. I think that they called them black bag jobs. They would come into the party headquarters at night, steal information, and so on. They knew all about who was who, mostly, not 100 percent.

45:33

MATZ: How do you know that? Have you seen proof?

APPELBAUM: Oh sure. We were all at one time or another approached on the street by FBI²⁶ people. I was when I was working at Baldwin I lived in south Philadelphia around 5th and Snyder. They would park their car in front of my house I knew who they were and I knew why they were there. One day I went out to see what did they want exactly because they were just sitting there. I went out to test what they would do. I walked to the corner and some of them got out of the car and walked towards me and then down from the other side, another groups of about two or three and they met me at the corner and they were trying to get me to talk to them with the idea of converting, or quitting, or turning me, and so on. I realized finally what they were up to I stamped my foot and I said "leave me alone I don't want to talk to you!" and I went back into the house. I knew they knew things about me because- I don't know whether I tapped my phone. Of course tapping the phone and listening to what was going on in your house, we took it for granted that our phones were tapped. My FBI filed which I showed that they knew something about the fact that my wife had been talking to someone about needing money so they thought I was ripe for quitting or something because I needed money. The fact that they knew about her

²⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigations

47:44

conversation means that they either I were listening through the walls of the house or over the phone, one or the other. We assumed that that was going on. I didn't know all the details except that I knew that when they stopped me I knew who they were when they were parked outside my house. That's my personal experience had similar experience. My brother had that experience, close friends of mine, they stopped on the street. Partly it was to intimidate, partly it was to win someone as a spy. That was a big thing, to win people over to be informers. Also, I began to realize that they were FBI cars and they had certain license plates which we began to recognize. They were all numerals. Pennsylvania state license plates and they use to start with a 6-1. I would drive home from work in a car with several other people, it was a car shared ride, I would drive by the house where I knew some communists lived- there was a car, there was an FBI car outside that house with the 6-1 plate. I knew exactly. One time, I played a trick on them. I just wanted to agitate them so went out, I knew there was a guy in front of my house, same house on 5th and Snyder and I went out went down a one way street so he couldn't follow me because I went the opposite way on a one way street. He had to go to the next block and come down, meanwhile I had gone over to Sixth Street and I ducked into a doorway. I wasn't going anywhere, I had no intention of going anywhere, I wasn't going to a meeting, I wasn't meeting anybody. I just wanted to see what they would do. I walked down the street and then ducked into a doorway for a minute or two. [excitedly] This guy comes roaring past me, he didn't even know where I was. He was looking for me and

50:54

then I went home. I just wanted to see what they would do. There were many experiences like that that people had. Some of them we knew about, some of them we didn't know about. The communists tried to keep from being known. With their meetings- very often the FBI knew exactly where they, you know communists would drive around for an hour, two hours to make sure no one was following them. They would drive to a meeting place and sure enough the FBI was already there. Many times they knew exactly what we were doing. The only purpose for all of this to keep our movement alive without interference from the FBI if possible. Turns out that the only way can really be secure is if you disappear completely and then you're ineffective. If you disappear completely you're not doing anything, you're just hiding. The purpose of hiding was to emerge someday because everything else was going and you were the only leader, that was one thing, but you weren't effecting anything, you weren't conducting any type of activity you were just hiding and staying safe. There were some people who stayed safe during that whole people and there are a lot of different stories I heard about- some funny stories about people who were sent out to hide in Minnesota and no one never told them to come back in, for years he was still out there. [smiling] One thing you have to understand is that a lot of communist were very dedicated and very honorable about fulfilling their tasks and so on so when someone says the ideas is to go hide, they hid, and stayed hid. There were other stories. I have a story about someone who met a beautiful woman at an art museum in New York and it turned out that this woman was

Marilyn Monroe- she was wearing ordinary clothes, didn't look like much, and this guy, not begin very up on current movie stars, didn't know who she was. He just got to talk to her and later found out that it was Marilyn Monroe. I don't know if it's a true story or not but it sounded likely. Those are amusing things. There was some serious stuff going on. They were trying to suppress a movement,

52:50

MATZ: On that dedication. You seemed dedicated to the ideas but the way you talk about the ideals of the Communist Party, it seems like maybe there was some shift in your life.

APPELBAUM: That didn't happen until- it was in 1956 when the Stalin revelations came out at the Twentieth Party Congress.²⁷ I was influenced by those events like everybody else in the party. It was like a slow moving situation, revelations came and discussion and then revelations and more discussion. If someone has had these ideas in there had for a lifetime this is shocking but you don't just let go suddenly unless you're, some people did, but I was like waiting to see what we would find out, how we would deal with this. It was very shocking, very upsetting. Very Upsetting!

MATZ: How long of a period was that? Everything came out at once?

54:06

²⁷ In February of 1956 Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev held a "Secret Speech" in which he publicly denounced Josef Stalin's brutal policies.

APPELBAUM: Well the first thing was the actual revelations themselves then there was a long period of several months of articles in the *Daily Worker*. There was a discussion of communists would write in with their opinions of what to do, how it happened. Some were disgusted. There were many different kinds of things. I kept reading these and trying to figure out, what are we going to do? and waiting for some leadership. One of the things I noticed was that the top leadership was too quick- to not wipe it out but to minimize the meaning of this one of the things that were interested in was that they felt that given the political tenor of the times the Soviet Union needed support and we shouldn't let this revelation help undermine the Soviet Union. The Korean War was on, no the Korean War was over by then, this was '56. The McCarthy period was still hot. The Un-American Activities Committee was still persecuting people all over the place. There was a convention in 1957 of the Party where a lot of this came to a head and there was a big conflict. I didn't go to the convention. All I knew about it was what I read in the *Daily Worker* and that wasn't informative enough. It was at that time also that I was laid off at US Steel. I had worked there for two years. This was an economic layoff. It wasn't a political thing. Then I had to make a decision; how am I going to make a living? I need a job. Do I go back into journalism? I did briefly go back, I got a job at the *Doylestown Intelligencer* for about six weeks. Then I quit to take a different job which was not in journalism, that didn't last, that lasted about six months. I had to make decision; what am I going to do? The only thing that I was able to find for a person like me with a

56:32

family, by this time I had two children, a wife and two children, he had a wife and several children. We went to the Temple University intern-teaching program for college graduates which got you a job teaching while you learn whatever it is that they teach you in a college of education. In order to take a teaching job at that time I had to take a non-communist oath, I had to sign a non-communist affidavit which was the law at that time in Pennsylvania. To be a teacher you had to sign that you are not a communist. What they didn't require was have you ever been? There was a law about that, the "Peckin Act²⁸" of Pennsylvania at that time, "are you now or have you ever been?" This particular law, they didn't require us to sign that, but they did require us "are you now a member of the Communist Party." In order to sign it truthfully I had to quit. I quit by just not participating anymore. I didn't make an announcement; we both did the same thing. We just didn't participate anymore. I know longer participated in any Communist Party activity and I signed the oath and I was able to be teacher.

MATZ: It was important for you not to be deceitful about this?

APPELBAUM: It was not only important I could go to jail. People were put on trial for perjury. There were two things happening at the same time. One was the need for a job. I had to support my family. The salary was low enough. It was four thousand dollars to start. Even in 1955 that was a low salary. No, '58, it was

58:42

²⁸ There were a number of Federal and State laws requiring anti-communist oaths but mention of the Peckin Act in Pennsylvania could not be found.

'58. I was also becoming troubled by the attitude of the Communist leadership about the Stalin period. I was sure that they were taking it seriously. There were few revelations beyond that one Khrushchev speech there was very little that indicated anybody was alarmed by this. I mean in the party. I was alarmed. It bothered me a lot and I knew it bothered a lot of other people. Lacking any real leadership, they were beginning to bother me in that- why am I am member of this thing? If they don't do more than they're doing what's the propose of me being a member and take risks both personal and political risk if they're not dealing with it in a way that I thought should be dealt with? They weren't asking serious questions and Foster, William Z. Foster²⁹ even said he knew something about it but he never indicated that he knew this to the public about the party. The only time he said it was once in the course of the discussion. Also one of the leaders of the party a national leader, William Weinstone, said that Stalin's behavior was a violation of socialist norms. Without knowing any more than that, than what I knew by reading, that I knew more serious than that. A violation of serious socialist norms means a guy doing a lot of wrong things. But what I read was a lot of people murdered. A lot of people being killed by Stalin and whoever else and that there was something seriously wrong when that is what went on but they don't want to discuss it. So when they palm things off like that and kind of brush it aside, they're not taking it seriously. I know what's behind that. One, first

1:01:36

²⁹ Communist Party leader who ran for the US presidency in the 1924, 1928, and 1932 elections.

of all, these guys have been party leaders for twenty, thirty years and they had a mindset that didn't allow anybody to think differently. That's one thing. Also, the implications were that the Communist Party would dissolve- collapse. These guys, a lot of the full timers, the didn't have a way of making a living and if they lost there jobs in the party they had nothing because they had like twenty, thirty years they had- how are they going to make a living? The party paid them and paid their medical bills and all that. They had a personal interest plus a mindset that didn't allow for real thinking and real self-criticism. There were people who were trying to do that but they were resisting it. Between that and the need to get a job [cough] that required me to sign an oath. I just stopped being a communist. Gradually, over the years, I didn't stop being a socialist, a Marxist in my head but I stopped participating in the party or any activity like that. I continued to believe in [cough] various aspects of the same activity that I had participated when I was in the Party, like [cough] for integration. So we moved here from Bucks County to this house and we participated over the years in many different things.

MATZ: This house is in what neighborhood?

APPELBAUM: This neighborhood. This house here in East Oak Lane. [cough] We participated in school integration activities. We participated in the struggle to end the war in Vietnam. We formed the committee a neighborhood committee in this house. We held meetings. We staged a parade through the neighborhood to end the war. We hosted meetings of the miners. There was a

1:03:29

miner strike in the '70s and we gathered a number of people together to help support the miners including people who we wouldn't talk to before like Trotskyites. We don't call them Trotskyites anymore we call them Trotskyists. We were much less hard line than we ever had been. More open to other people than we had ever been. We were involved with the McCarthy, Eugene McCarthy campaign. We had students who had campaigned for him, sleeping over here. Over the years I also kept in contact with other organizations which I would not have ever dealt with, like the socialist organization, [cough] the one that was formed by Michael Harrington and Irving Howe³⁰. It was not the Socialist Party it was another socialist organization that was attempting to replace the party. I'm not sure that's exactly right. Attempting that a lot of people who were former communists who were trying to find a new political home where they could pursue the same ideals that they always had believe in but free in some of the dogmas and some of the negative aspects of the Communist Party. I never really became an anti-communist. I did not like the official policy of the Communist Party under Gus Hall. I felt that he was for personal or political reasons was just- it was wrong. What really made a big impact on me was the book by Medvedev, Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*³¹, which was the first detailed discussion of the Stalin period by somebody who was not an anticommunist by a socialist, Marxist,

1:05:58

³⁰ In the early 1970s, with Michael Harrington, Irvine Howe formed the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. (www.upenn.edu)

³¹ Originally released in 1971 and furthered the criticism of Josef Stalin's policies.

who went into the details of how Stalin had gotten to where he was and what and the details of what went on when he was the leader of the Soviet Union. What bothered me there too was that the Communist Party didn't sponsor that. It was sponsored by other people. It was the first time that I read something that helped explain this because frankly there was a _____ (??) of information. There was just very little. Nothing was coming out from the Soviet Union. Not to my knowledge. I didn't have any great connections to find out. For a number of years it was just lack of information and then this book came out and that kind of began to fill the all the holes in what we knew. Then it became more understandable, not acceptable, but we began to understand what really had happened. What bothered me mainly, not mainly, also, was the Communist Party didn't have a hand in this. It had to be done by other people and that bothered me. Even if it became less difficult politically to be a communist I didn't feel like going back and to this day I wouldn't join, although they are changing. Over the years I continued my ideals. When I say my wife and I, I'm talking about the two of us. We continued our ideals are the same, our beliefs are the same but we don't believe in the Communist Party the way we once had.

MATZ: Let's talk about your wife for a bit, Ellen?

APPELBAUM: Ellen.

MATZ: What year did you marry?

1:08:09

APPELBAUM: We married in '49. We met in '48.

MATZ: She was aware of your political beliefs at that time? Was she socialist at the time as well? Or communist at the time as well?

APPELBAUM: She came out of a liberal family, not a communist family like I did. She had always been friends, in the neighborhood here, with young people who were left liberal and some were communists. She had joined around the time that we met. In fact, I met her at a dinner given in this neighborhood with people who invited her with the intention to get her to join the party.

MATZ: She's from this neighborhood?

APPELBAUM: She's from this neighborhood. It was a combination of things. We met and we got involved with each other at the time that she became a member so she became active. She had always been active in the Young Progressives and Progressive Party activity. This was one step further. She and I we stuck together through all of these difficult times.

MATZ: You have two children?

APPELBAUM: Three.

MATZ: How old are they now?

APPELBAUM: Politically?

MATZ: How old are they now?

1:09:47

APPELBAUM: One's going to be sixty in August. One is the guy downstairs with the music is 56 and my daughter is 51. She was born in '59 so, I don't know, what does that make her?

MATZ: 51 [repeats]

MATZ: And their political beliefs, do they follow in your footsteps?

APPELBAUM: They're liberal; they're not anything like I was. They're not active in organizations. Something's different in the air these days. They were involved in the '60s, well my daughter was too young to be involved in the '60s, but they were involved for a while in things, for a short time, in the political aspect of it. Culturally, they were involved as they became Beatles fans and picked up a lot of the social aspects of life at that time. They were active in the Weathermen³² [pauses] briefly. For a short time, never got really involved in any really heavy stuff.

MATZ: Just your two sons?

APPELBAUM: My older son in particular, my younger son was around but didn't get involved. He was more into music and the Beatles and all that stuff. My daughter, like I said, was too young to be involved. They're all liberal, politically

1:11:22

³² Leftist political movement formed in 1969 with the belief that political change would be affected more readily by violent action. Early 1970s attacks include the Capitol Building and the Pentagon. It is not assumed that Mr. Appelbaum's children were involved in any way in these attacks or the violent aspects the Weatherman.

liberal. They're all very ____ (??) on the matter of Gay Rights, and Civil Rights, and integration. But they are not organizational type people. They don't have that kind of mental set. Even though they know about my activities. I told them about it but it's somehow not for them. So they didn't follow my footsteps. After all, for a long period of time I wasn't active like I had been either. Most of life, after I began teaching, was about taking courses and I finally got my doctorate and all that so my life was busy with doing things that people do very often in their early twenties so I was already a father in my thirties and forties at that time so they didn't see me at the peak of my activity. They grew up with me when I was a teacher and so on. They knew about my beliefs but they didn't see me. I didn't role model for them by begin active in organizations where I have been at one time.

MATZ: It seems like they had adopted many of your progressive ideas.

APPELBAUM: We don't have any real problems .

MATZ: In your career as teacher, did you see teaching itself as a political act?

APPELBAUM: No. [pause] Teaching, first of all, was just a way to get a paycheck. Then I had to learn how to teach. I forgot what you do in school. [smiling, laughter] Literally, I used to worry about what do I do tomorrow. I didn't

1:13:21

know what to do. I did get involved with the unionization in the early sixties. The AFT³³ started to origination in Philadelphia. We started to agitate for a union out in Buck's County. There were some difficult periods. Some teachers were bitterly opposed to a union. Bitterly. Interestingly enough, Middletown Township in Bucks County- the AFT won. In Bucks and Bristol Township and others, they went for the NEA³⁴. The Bristol Township became the de facto union. Other than that, teaching as a political act [pause] I didn't see it as a political act. In fact, to this day, most of what constitutes teaching in schools is to prepare you to be members of the military or the business world and not to do anything to unhinge the social order. Teaching is a matter of helping to impart knowledge. Helping them if you can to think critically. Very often that's not the point of much of what you do in a school anyway. You might like to do that but what you do is help them to pass test and get them into a higher level of education and get them into a job. And that's not even working anymore. At the time that I started getting a high school diploma, getting a college diploma, finishing in high school and going off to college and then maybe graduate school was a big way for social advancement. Most of what went on in schools was to accomplish that. Although there was a lot of talk about democracy, teaching democracy, and all that, as far as I'm concerned, most Americans don't know what democracy is all about. The schools have done a terrible job. In fact, the schools can't do more than what the

1:15:53

³³ American Federation of Teachers, a union for educational staff.

³⁴ National Education Association, a union for educational staff.

society will let them do. If they started to really teach democracy they'd get fired. So teachers are careful. In fact, teachers themselves don't know much more than that. Some people tried to make teaching into a political act, especially in the '60s. I said there were some teachers that trying to help the student make a revolution. I mean this literally. I became a supervisor to teachers in the intern-teaching program and I used to say to them, "teach them to read, let them make their own revolution." If they read and can understand what they're reading they will come to the ideas that make for revolution on their own. It's not your job to help them make a revolution. Your job, is, if it's a political act at all, is to make them literate. More literate than just reading the comics and the news headlines and sports pages. I never thought of myself as some kind of revolutionary or some political activity as a teacher.

MATZ: How long were you in the classroom as a teacher?

APPELBAUM: Six years. Six years at a public school classroom. Then I went to Hahnemann Hospital had a psychiatry department had a contract to teach reading to juvenile delinquents. I went there for a year and then the same program that I got into for intern teaching hired me to be a supervisor to teachers because I did pretty well as teacher and they liked my work. I worked four years at Temple as a supervisor of teachers. Meanwhile, I worked for my doctorate on foundations of education, philosophy of education. Then I worked for a year in the New Jersey Department of Education. At that time it was model cities, it had

1:18:12

an educational schools component and we were a part of that. I was assigned to Atlantic City to help improve their schools. Then I became the principal of the Miquon School- private, so-called free school. I didn't make it so free [smiling, laughter]. Then I became an educational director of the Greentree School which is a school of handicapped children and social, emotional problems. Then I got a job at Jewish Employment Vocational Services which was the last job I had which was not an educational job but more of an administration job. All these jobs were related to education, related to teaching. Seven years of actual classroom teaching, four years at Temple teaching at the University level.

MATZ: That's a lot of educating. [REPEATS]

APPELBAUM: Various aspects of education.

MATZ: You've been involved with a lot of kid's lives. As an educator, as a father, what is the big message that you hope that you have gotten across to these kids?

APPELBAUM: That's a hard one because I've never thought of myself as big messages. You know what's interesting is that I used to have big messages when I was very young. I knew the way things should be. My messages, whatever message that I have become small messages.

MATZ: Maybe just the key lesson that you hope they have learned.

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APPELBAUM: Key lesson [long pause]. After we leave I'll probably think of better answers [laughter]. You made me think. But for the movement, the best answer I can think of at this moment is things that I've learned and most things are not the way they seem. Most big events and most situations in the world are not the way they seem and upon further investigation you'll find that there is more to it than you know about or that they're letting you know about. The big thing to do is to understand that and ask penetrating questions so that you don't get suckered into the official line on anything. Like just this minute about Japan and nuclear energy³⁵ and the whole energy question. You question why is that we need so much energy and what sort of outlook on life that we have. So, if you want to call that a message, the message is ask hard questions and don't accept the answers that the officials give you because very often they are hiding something. This has been proven over and over again. The War in Iraq and so on that it has all been based on lies. There are many minor things that have been based on lies or simple lack of examination. So if that's a message, then that's my message.

MATZ: Following that question which I believe this to be my final question, what are your thoughts on history's handling of American radical movements of the twentieth century and how they are handled historically today?

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³⁵ At the time of this interview Japan was recovering from a massive earthquake and tsunami. A nuclear power plant saw three reactors catch fire which lead to massive evacuations and a renewed worldwide concern for nuclear energy.

APPELBAUM: It depends on who you are talking about. Who's handling it? The press? The university? The teachers? I think one of the things is the lack of continuity. There's a long history of radical movements that a lot of people today don't even know that they have this history. Look at the business in Wisconsin³⁶. People are suddenly reminded that there had been a trade union movement; there had been a LaFollette³⁷. The continuity of all that has been broken. The fact is that socialists were very active in this country and were not considered foreigners and aliens and traitors. There's a history of socialism but the average American lives in a stupefied environment which his connections with these things are not understood or known well. The '60s was a effort to break out of some of that and they did a lot of good work but I'm afraid that if there had not been the Vietnamese War that would not have happened the way it did. I think the war and the people being subject to the draft made it much more militant and much more activist than it might have been otherwise. I think that the powers that be have learned that so they don't have a draft. Otherwise, millions of kids would be in turmoil just as they were back in the '60s. It's just that they don't want that. I think that mostly people have forgotten the radical heritage that there is in this country. They seem to be coming awake and aware of it but it's sad. The final

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³⁶ At the time of this interview national political discussion was rife with talks regarding Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's push to limit union collective bargaining rights in that state.

³⁷ Robert LaFollette, Progressive Wisconsin governor and Congressional representative in the early twentieth century.

thing I'll say, not the final, I think it was a tragedy that happened with the destruction of the communist movement. I think the communists were behind more progressive things in this country than anybody's aware of. And I mean good things. One of the things that some one pointed out to me recently was that Hawaii became a democratic community because the communists, through the International Longshoremen's Union, organized the pineapple workers in the fields and others in the fields and built a integrated society with all these racial and ethnic groups. Hawaii became, instead of being a colonial playground, became an integrated, progressive society, more or less. Who was behind that? The communists. The communists, with all their faults, have been behind more progressive activity and ideas that this country that anybody gives them credit for. This is not to deny the socialists of the earlier period like Debs and other socialist people who made great contributions, but since 1920 the communists have been behind more things than anybody realizes. Example I could give you is, 1957 there was an effort to integrate Levittown; there was communists behind that. It brought great deal of resistance and so on but the Communist Party of Lower Bucks County was behind organizing that. There are many, many more things like that that communist initiated not in their own name very often but their policies were for democracy, for racial integration, for equality of the benefits of our society. If it weren't for the tragedy of the Soviet Union and the communist attachment, the connection with the Soviet Union, there would be much more- today for example I think the fact there is not a strong communist movement- it's a to say why the Republicans are able to get away with a lot of this stuff. If you think that at one time there were eleven unions influenced by communists- major

unions influenced by communist, what impact they had on the life of this country. Not in the name of the Communist Party but in the policies that they advocated. I could name many more situations and events. It's tragic that that's happened. Maybe things will turn around.

MATZ: I'd like to thank you for your time and the interview. Thanks you so much.