



# Handout 1: Oral History Transcript

For use with the lesson plan *The Holocaust and US Immigration: An Oral History Analysis*

---

## Alice Dreifuss Goldstein Interview Excerpt Transcript

Alice Dreifuss Goldstein is interviewed by her daughter Beth Goldstein (B. Goldstein) in April 2019 about her family's escape from Nazi Germany in 1939 and their experiences adjusting to life in America. *The following transcript is from timestamp 13:04 to the end of the interview (27:29). For the full transcript and the recording visit <https://www.kentuckyoralhistory.org/ark:/16417/xt7c1snxcc09k>.*

---

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** Yeah, thank you. Let's go back a little bit to, uh, Bennington and Groton, when your parents were domestic household servants.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Um-hm.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** Um, as you've related these two living situations to me, that's the period of time when you made a transition to speaking English, as did your parents, your mother, and American lifestyles--understanding American lifestyle.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Yes.

German-Jewish refugees. So you--can you speak to both sides of that a little? Americanized, and my father, uh, his name was quickly changed from Siegfried to Bennington or Groton? families in Bennington, Vermont, and, uh, my family became friends with them. Groton to New London. So those of you who don't know uh, New England geography

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** But at the same time, you were acutely aware of your status as German-Jewish refugees. So you--can you speak to both sides of that a little?

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Yeah, I mean, it was--it was a great opportunity to become Americanized, and my father, uh, his name was quickly changed from Siegfried to Fred, uh, which he remained for the rest of his life, and he completely identified with that. Um, and, uh, he learned to like, uh, orange juice and Rice Krispies for breakfast. --(laughter)-- So it--he became, in, in that sense, Americanized quite rapidly. He also was--since he was a chauffeur, he was very happy to have cars. He had a love affair with cars from early on, and that was a very positive piece of his experience. Um, my mother, uh, had to learn how to cook American-style, with cuts of meat that were totally different from the ones she had been used to in Europe, and so she lived with, uh, the, uh, German-English dictionary on one side of the shelf and the, uh, Sullivan Cookbook on the other, and she would go back and forth to learn how to cook American. Um, which they did, and they s--they gradually learned a little bit of English. I went to school in Bennington--it was a much better situation. The teachers were more understanding. I was again put in first grade, but quickly was able to master that, and I learned English rather quickly. And so by, uh, Christmastime, when there was the winter break, I was transferred into third grade. Uh, and this, this was great, but it, it meant, again, that I had no stability and no chance to really make friends at all. And so, and, in that period in Bennington, I, I remember not any friends, not--never making any friends. And that kind of transferred itself to our situation in Groton, Connecticut, where I al--I--by that time I was in, uh, in fourth grade, and, um, uh, went to a school

where my father served as, uh--he brought me to school along with the two boys that lived in the house while he was their chauffeur--got us back and forth to school, but never had an opportunity to make friends. Always felt like--a little bit like an outsider. And um, I suspect, uh, at that stage I still had something of an accent, so that kids knew right away that I, I wasn't like them. And, um, they didn't have a whole lot to do with me.

**GOLDSTEIN:** What about any connection with Jewish families in either Bennington or Groton?

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** We did identify--there were two other German-Jewish refugee families in Bennington, Vermont, and, uh, my family became friends with them. Uh, they had, um, children who were both old--much older and, and much younger than I was. So uh, there was, there was no chance of, of, uh, socializing, but it did give me a kind of a haven. One of the families lived just across the street from the school. And when I got finished with a day's school and was in tears because of all the stress, I would go across the street to their house and get some consolation. Um, in Groton, Connecticut, there was no opportunity to uh, make friends at all, so it wasn't until we moved to New London that I gradually began to find, uh, a few, uh, children who could be my friends. But I had been taught--oh--I had learned in Germany that friends were not to be trusted. All of the friends, non-Jewish friends I had in my home village, uh, left me. They deserted--they did not play with me. I was not allowed to play outside. They were afraid to be seen with Jews, and so I learned very early that it--friends weren't a good thing to have because they were not, they're not dependable. And so that carried over. It took me until after college, almost, to get to the point where I could really make friends.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** You spoke a few minutes ago, uh, about the transition from uh, Groton to New London. So those of you who don't know uh, New England geography at all, they're, uh, across from each other, um, across--

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** --just across the river--

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** --across a river, right. So in 1941, when the US military mobilized, your Groton employer had, was called up, uh, for the--for war service.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** He was a major in the U.S. Army.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Right. And that's when you moved from Groton to New London. And New London became your parents' U.S. home. I grew up as a child traveling back and forth from Rhode Island to New London, visiting them. Uh, and it was your home until you graduated from college and married.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Right.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** Um, so you rented an apartment there, uh, and through his previous employer, Opa, my grandfather, found work as a night watchman in Groton and still had to commute back and forth between New London and Groton.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Right.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** And your mother went to work in New London Garment Factory.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Right.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** She supplemented the family income by having other refugees, single males, as boarders, right? And in fact, you'd come home from school every day in time to serve them lunch while your mother worked in the factory.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** And that was a problem when we had snow days and had to stay for an extra hour so that they wouldn't lose the day of school. Uh, that, you know, we would go in the morning and it would start snowing, and they'd say, "OK, we'll leave at one o'clock." But I was granted an hour-early, uh, dismissal so that I could go and, and feed the boarders.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** Right. So this was another school change for you.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Yup. I went to seven schools within four years. This is not good stability.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** Right. What else changed with the move to New London for you? You want to talk a little bit more about school, maybe, and then we can turn to Jewish life?

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Okay. Um, going to school in New London, uh, was, uh, a--provided a lot more stability for me, and I identified another girl who was in my class as, as a friend. We both loved classical music, we lived only a couple of blocks away from each other, and so we walked back and forth to school. Um, on the other hand, I, I was still a target for, um, for kind of pranks in the, um, in the school. Uh, kids would rifle my desk and take things out of it. Um, I, um, I, I never talked about my experience, nobody ever asked me about what my background was. The only exception was in fifth grade, when, uh, there was an essay contest, um, provided by Scholastic Magazine. Did you e--do you--any of you know Scholastic Magazine? Still? Okay, so it's still there. Uh, and I wrote a story about my experience coming to the United States. Um, just a little essay. And it was--it was my, my way of saying, you know, "here I am and this is what happened to me," but nobody ever asked me about it, not the teachers and not the students. So, um, I, I learned not to say anything at all about my background.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** Uh-huh. What about, ah, your Jewish life in New London?

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** My parents were very determined that I would get a Jewish education. So even in Bennington, Vermont, when we first got there, I was enrolled in the local Hebrew school. It was a very small congregation, and I don't have any memories of it. When we moved to Groton, Connecticut, they immediately also followed up and put me in Hebrew school in New London, but I could only go on Thursdays, which was their day off, and they would be--we would be able to take the bus into New London and I would go to Hebrew school while they did their shopping or they went to a movie or something like that. And I remember that because we had a very intensive Hebrew education, and even going just one day a week instead of three days a week, I did uh, learn quite a bit. And then once we moved to New London, of course, I went full-time, and, uh, my, my friend whom I had developed through school was also, uh, a Jewish, uh, student. I--we, we were still in a very ambivalent position in, in the Jewish community. Uh, we joined the Conservative congregation because in Europe we had belonged to what was considered, uh, a modern Orthodox congregation, where it was all Hebrew except the sermon was in German. And so, uh, and it was a very decorous kind of a service. And uh, this seemed to be--the Conservative service seemed to be as similar as we could get. And so we joined that. It was, um, founded by, uh, the most well-to-do segment of the New London Jewish population. And, um, there--so there was a class difference there. Um, we, we were poor. We had almost no money at all, because whatever salary we had earned as, uh, as domestic servants, my parents, they were mostly sending it back to Europe to help sustain my grandparents, who were still there. Uh, so, um, we were in a, a very different social class. But we also had another strike against us as far as the uh, New London Jewish community was concerned. This was across denominations. Uh, we were German Jews, and German Jews were considered extremely foreign. We were called "not real Jews." So we were, we were outsiders even within that community.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** With all apologies to our current location.--(laughs)--

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Absolutely.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** And, and the wonders of this community.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** And the times have changed.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** And the times have changed, exactly. One last question, because we're, uh--the time is short. Uh, you mentioned just a moment ago about sending funds to Europe, for your family in Europe. Can you speak a little bit to the kinds of news that you got from Europe? That is very critical to the life of refugees, is thinking about people who have been left on the other side of the borders. And, and so thinking about the family there and also what that meant for how your parents thought about you.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Yeah. Um, it--communication was very difficult. The only thing we could do was write letters and occasionally telegrams, but that was only in, in extremes. And so, uh, our communication was through letters. My mother immediately wrote her mother for recipes when she learned she was going to be a cook uh, to earn her livelihood. So there was an exchange. It was sea mail, so there was at least a six-week lag between getting--sending a letter and getting a response. Um, in No--in October of 1940, my grand--both my grandparents and several of my, um, great--other relatives uh, were deported to, uh, France as part of the German effort to clear Germany of Jews. And, uh, then, m--uh, communication became even more difficult, but we did continue to get mail from them, um, on a maybe monthly or every-other-month basis, and we were able to correspond a little bit. Um, it was incredibly difficult, and my parents, uh, tried everything they could to get authorization for a visa from the United States so that they, they could emigrate to the United States. Um, that never happened, uh, for a whole complex s--series of reasons. Um, so by the end of--by the middle of 1942, all communications stopped. The only, uh, news we had from what--about what was happening in Germany were the sermons that the rabbi would give, uh, every so often, but especially on the high holidays. And it was always horrible. And my mother would sit there with the tears running down her face--I can remember that very distinctly. Um, not knowing was, was hor--was terrible. Because we had no idea what happened to my father's brothers, we had no idea what happened to their parents, um, and other relatives. And we tried telegrams and various things and never, never really had, uh, a clear communication. It wasn't until after the war that we began to search and learned through the Red Cross that my grandparents had been killed, um, in the camps, my mother's parents in Auschwitz. Um, and eventually we also learned through a maga--a newspaper, the "Aufbau," which was really designed for this purpose of connecting survivors, uh, in Europe with those who had been able to emigrate, uh, that my uncles had survived the war, and we were able to reestablish contact. But it was a period of, of great uncertainty and constant worry, because we never knew what was happening. And, uh, and, and that kind of limbo is incredibly difficult, and, and, and very hard to manage.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** And if I may close, then, it had consequences for how your parents treated you as their only child and the only child of that generation.

**DREIFUSS GOLDSTEIN:** Yeah, it, it, it meant that I was, I was the survivor, that I--all of the family hope was on my shoulders, and that I had better live up to that. So expectations were incredibly high. Fortunately, I was doing very well in school, but I didn't dare not do well. I didn't dare give the wrong answer, because it was going to disappoint my parents. And their sense of discipline was, you know, put on a little guilt and disappointment, and so it, it made me, um, very, um, very careful. I had curfews when I was a teenagers, and I'd better not break them. And, uh, I was sheltered from anything negative as long as I could be--I couldn't go to see movies that had

scary scenes in them. Um, it, it, it made me very reticent to stand out and, and to do the wrong thing. And, um—but it really had me burdened on, on my development.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** I believe that you have--I believe that you have, uh, discussion questions at the table. I don't know if there's any questions to Mom directly, or if you want to go to the table discussions.

**M:** Um, I, I think we can go to the tables.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** Okay, let's do that, and--

**M:** And thank you so much.

**B. GOLDSTEIN:** Yeah. Thank you, Mom. --(applause)--

[End of Interview.]

---

### About the Source

Citation: Goldstein, Alice Dreifuss, interview by Beth Goldstein. April 27, 2019, Jewish Kentucky Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries.

*The recording and transcript are housed in the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History in the University of Kentucky Libraries.*