

[MUSIC PLAYING] Good afternoon. My name is Anne Kaplan I'm a member of a Kean College Holocaust Oral Histories project. We are affiliated with the Yale Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. I will be sharing this interview with Nancy Kislin. Today, we are privileged to welcome Suzanne Winarsky, a survivor presently living in Elizabeth, New Jersey. She will be telling us about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Mrs. Winarsky, welcome.

Thank you.

Would you please tell us, Mrs. Winarsky, about the town or the city in Europe where you grew up.

I was born and I grew up in the city of Mannheim, which at that time was a very large city. I believe it is still a very large city. It was a very industrial city. It was on the confluence of two rivers, of the River Rhine and Neckar. So therefore there was a lot of industry, and industry generated a great many other things.

We had museums, we had the colleges, we had the theaters, we had concert halls. We were all privileged to participate in these activities. The city had about 500,000 people at the time. There was a large Jewish congregation, there was an Orthodox congregation, and a conservative congregation. I grew up with the conservative group.

Tell me about your family, about what your father did. And I'm sure you had a warm family life. We'd like to hear about it.

Well, I'd like to think that I had a warm family life. We had lots of relatives who either lived in town, or in the city, or we visited them. My mother came from a small country town, and we very often went there to visit, because her mother and her sister still lived there. And it was always a pleasure for us to go there, because we were admired when we came, we were spoiled when we came. So it was very nice. We came from the big city.

My father was what you would call a customs representative. He had to travel a great deal. He traveled all over Germany. And whenever he traveled, he would bring us something very interesting back. So we didn't mind when he had to leave and be gone for several weeks.

You had two brothers.

Yes, I had a brother who was two years old, and I had a younger brother who was eight years younger than I was. I had my mother, and we he had a good life. Yes.

And what was your schooling like?

My schooling was very pleasant. I went to a private school. I went to school three days a week, on Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays, with five other children so I wouldn't be overburdened. But, of course, we met in the teacher's home. But the teacher was, of course, a licensed teacher. It was-- the Germans are very fussy about these things.

But it was a very, very pleasant. It was very nice to go to school. And--

Did you attend a religious school?

Yes. We had a religious school. I don't remember when I started religious school, but we did go to religious school twice a week. That was after school. The German school system was so set up that religious teachers would come to school twice a week to give instructions for I believe it was an hour. But my brother and I went to in the afternoon to another religious school where the training was more intense.

Mostly for the Boys.

No, for girls also.

The girls too?

Yes, absolutely.

Did you notice any changes in the general atmosphere, any change of laws? Since you went to private school, perhaps they didn't touch you. But were there any laws that pertained to the Jewish people in public schools that you were aware of.

No, not at that time. When I started high school, I was 10. Which is the set up in Germany. You go four years to school and then in the fifth grade you start going to either high school for which you have to pay, or you continue in the public school until the eighth grade, and then you can go to work. But in high school, of course, then you have a different program. You have either a six-year program or an eight-year program. When. You finish the eight-year program, you could go on to college.

The six-- I don't remember but the six-year program entitled you to, because it was always assumed that we children would go to the eight-year program.

And when you finished or graduated the level that you did, what happened after that?

Yeah. Well, I didn't graduate from high school. I left high school when I was 15 because we were invited to leave. The Jewish students were invited to leave. But there were not that many Jewish students, so we all left, and we all went to a private school to learn languages. I learned French, and English, and of course we had some German courses too. This was the school where we were taught commercial subjects in three different languages.

Did you think it was strange that the Jewish students were asked to leave?

No. No. All my girlfriends left, so we went from one school to the next. So it didn't really matter. Life went on pretty much the same as it had.

No one gave a second thought that this might be the forerunner of exclusionary laws? They didn't consider it antisemitic even though in essence it was.

Yes, but the Germans were always antisemitic. We always lived with a certain degree of antisemitism.

So [INTERPOSING VOICES]

So it wasn't all that different. Or if it was very different, it was never made aware to me.

What was your earliest memory of antisemitism in Germany?

I don't remember any antisemitism. I really don't. The only thing I remember that the household help, under 45 could not work in a Jewish household. They felt that Jewish men might do something that might offend anyone who's under 45. So one lady left, and another one came who was over 45. That was about it.

But a non-Jewish lady was permitted to work in your home.

Yeah. They were permitted to work as long as they were old enough to do so.

When you left school, then what was your goal after that? You didn't go out to work.

No, I was supposed to go to school for a time, and then, well, I had an aunt in the United States, and my father wrote to her and asked whether I could come and stay with her. And she wrote back, and she said, yes.

And that more or less was customary from--

Yes.

--to go to one country or another--

Yes.

--to further the education. In your case, it was the United States. And how did you find life then in the United States with your aunt?

Well, that was quite different. I had three cousins who were my age. There was a daughter who was in college at the time, a son who was in high school, and a younger daughter who was also-- no, she was still in grammar school. And we got along. They-- I was a novelty to them, and took me around and showed me off-- Here's my cousin from Germany-- which was quite something.

And then my aunt did send me to high school here, because she felt I should improve my English. But she would not let me go to New York to get a job.

And you were qualified.

Yeah, I could have worked in an expert firm or in some kind of on an international basis.

Because of your study of languages.

Because of my language background.

And European children learn many languages. And you had-- what were your languages-- well, it was--

Besides German of course.

French, and English, and then of course I had a good Hebrew background also.

So that instead you were kept in Newark to do what?

Yeah. Well, I became a hairdresser.

That's a far cry. And you--

But yeah, I didn't have to travel. And I think hairdressing at the time was not quite an acceptable profession. It was something not really what nice people did. I don't know why. But as I said, I wasn't aware of it at the time. I only realized it later.

Yeah. But that was the important thing.

What was your older brother doing at the time when you came to America?

My older brother was still in Germany, but he made preparations to come to the United States. He went to England for several months as a stopgap. But I think I was in this country already even when he made this move.

Was that part of his departure into a foreign country, or were things beginning to erupt so that it was important for him to make this move?

Yeah, he had a chance to leave, and he left. And it was important at that point to leave for anybody.

You were in touch with your family by mail of course.

Yes.

And you had no indication, or they gave you no indication, that things were changing.

Well, the indications I had were strictly through the United States press. Mail from Germany was always censored. Or the possibility of being censored was always present. So they were very cautious in what they wrote.

How are you feeling at this time, being here in America, and your parents and your family in Germany, still in your town?

Yeah. I began to miss the very much. Yes. I had hoped that they would come here very speedily.

The things that we're beginning to come to a head in Germany prompted people to apply for visas. Why don't you tell us about your parents' experiences with that.

You had to apply to unite United States consulate for a number, which gave you a turn for a visa to emigrate. And, of course, my parents had a number where the whole family could have left-- my remaining family, my parents and my brother. But they gave this opportunity to my mother's sister who had to-- who needed to leave very quickly.

You want to elaborate on that?

Yes. My aunt's husband, my Uncle, was interned in a concentration camp for a time. And the condition to his release was that he would leave very quickly, otherwise he would be re-interned. And therefore that was the only way they could leave. My parents giving their turn, their visa number to my aunt and Uncle.

And then they reapplied?

My parents reapplied, yes.

And they had to get at the end of the line again.

Yes.

In the meantime, what was happening within the family? Your younger brother, what was happening with him?

He was 12 years old at the time. He was asked-- invited-- to stay with my father's sister in Belgium. She felt food was more plentiful, there would be less restrictions, he could go to school freely, and my parents sent him to stay with her. And the proviso was that he would return when my parents were ready to leave for the United States.

And then the signal came from your father to your aunt in Belgium that they were ready to leave. Yeah, they wrote to each other. There was mail. The mail connection was open.

So your brother left to meet your father at the border?

Yes, my father couldn't cross the German border at this point, and he was supposed to meet my brother in Cologne, which was the closest railroad stop to the Belgium border. But the day he was supposed to go to Cologne, all the Jews from the city of Mannheim and the home state of Baden, B-A-D-E-N, were deported. They were rounded up and deported. And even though my parents knew my younger brother would arrive presently, they were not permitted to wait for him.

There was nothing they could do about it?

No. And then when your brother came to Cologne and your father wasn't there, what happened to him?

Well, I don't know how he made his way to Mannheim, but he did make his way. And maybe his railroad ticket read Mannheim-- as I said, I don't know. But he did come, and there was no one there. And someone, from what I heard later, told him to go to the city of Frankfurt, where there were still Jews. The Jews in Frankfurt, which was a different German state, were not deported at that point. So he did go to Frankfurt and someone directed him to the Jewish orphanage, where he was taken in.

Do you know where your parents were taken to?

Yes, my parents were taken to a camp in southern France by the Gurs, G-U-R-S. And we were in contact with them at that point. Afterwards, they were sent to different camps. Again, my mother was in Marseilles. I don't remember whether my father was in Marseilles or whether they were in another camp called Tarbes, T-A-R-B-E-S. This, I don't remember.

But they both were-- at one point, they both were in Marseilles. Not together-- they couldn't live together. And they were waiting to leave France, to come to the United States.

When you corresponded with your family at Marseilles, you wrote separate letters to your parents, to each one? You knew that they were separated, or you didn't know that.

No, they did see each other. They might have seen each other maybe once or twice a week. But they just didn't live together. They lived in different hotels.

So your correspondence was fairly frequent.

Well, war had already started with England, and it wasn't very often, but we did hear from each other.

And until-- when did you finally realize that things were not going well?

When the mail was returned from France.

You were getting your mail back from Marseilles.

Yes.

In the meantime, was your brother back here from London?

My brother was in the United States, yes.

Why don't you tell us about his experience in England and how it was that some of the Jews were able to find a haven there.

The firm of Marks and Spencer realized what was going on in Germany, and they offered any Jewish person who was waiting to enter the United States an interim haven. And it literally was a haven. And my brother fell within this category. And he lived in a very small country town in England, but nevertheless he lived there, and he was safe.

He lived with an English lady. I guess she was paid by Marks and Spencer. And Marks and Spencer got him a job. He was a printer. He printed corset labels for their various stores.

Very necessary.

Yes. And their philanthropy saved countless lives.

Yes. Oh, there's no question about it. There's no question about it.

How much time did he spend in England before he finally got to the United States? I imagine it was about nine months or a year. It was not very, very long. It was less than a year.

What year did he come to the United States?

It was maybe 1940. War had already broken out. England was at war, so it must have been 1940-1941.

So you were separated for about three years before--

Yes, three-four years.

While he was in England, did he have better contact with your parents?

No.

No.

No, no. Then war had started, and there was no contact.

So he couldn't bring you any more information of the family at all.

No. No, he couldn't.

When did you find out or how did you find out what subsequently happened to your family?

I received a letter from some relief organization in Paris who had a roster of people who were taken to Auschwitz. And that's when I heard.

And they were on the list.

Yeah. I never had any official notification that my younger brother had gone to Auschwitz. It's merely a surmising on everyone's part.

An assumption. Or from any of the other kids who might have been in that same orphanage. It was prophetic that he went to an orphanage while your parents were still alive. He was separated from them. In effect--

Yeah.

--that's what he became.

Definitely.

What were your feelings living in America hearing about this? Did you do anything?

Yes. I-- when I knew that my parents were in France in the unoccupied-- so-called unoccupied-- part of France, I did try to contact the French consulate in New York. I went several times to go to Washington to speak to our senators and representatives to see what I possibly could do.

What was their reaction?

Oh, they were most solicitous, but nothing was ever done.

The experience that you had with the consulate-- the French consulate in New York-- he gave you any hope--

Nothing.

--in the kind of reception he gave--

Nothing.

Give you at all.

He merely stated that he had no idea what was happening at this point.

Did they give you any reasons for refusing when you went to the senators, and the mayor of Newark, and all the other avenues that you tried? What were their reasons?

The reasons were, the State Department said that anyone who has relatives, close relatives, in the occupied territories, might possibly be used as hostages, so to say, to work against the German government--

Against the American government.

No, against the German government if they were to come to this country.

Yes, I see.

Yeah. No, during that time-- well, it was wartime. I know someone came to my aunt's house to check out the radio to make sure there was no shortwave connection with Europe.

In other words, they were not as much concerned then with being subversive towards the United States as being working against the German government with whom we were not yet at war.

Oh, I'm sorry. I-- they were afraid to work against-- that the Germans would put pressure on my parents to work against the United States government. Oh, yes. Definitely. I'm sorry.

Yes, that was-- so waiting for the visa became your project to see what you could do. And you covered all the avenues and to no avail.

As a matter of fact, one time I took a vacation, and I went literally-- 10 miles away from work there was a hotel. It was [? Gottman's ?] Hotel, which is very close to work. Because I could take a bus from there to New York. If my parents were to come during that time, there would be no problem for me to get there.

So you hoped all the while. And when exactly, or was there any such exact time, that you finally did learn that there was no point in longing and hoping-- that the finality--

Well, after the war.

Oh, after the war.

When this mail was sent to me from Paris.

Where was your older brother living at this time?

Well, my brother lived in New York. He lived with my mother's sister. He worked in New York, but he also was in the United States Army. He was not a citizen yet, but he became a citizen in the army. And he served in Africa and in

southern France-- Italy and southern France.

The United States Army never permitted him to go to Germany while he was in southern France. Never got any leave due to investigate anyone.

Take any chances. But that automatically made him an American citizen.

No, he was sworn in as an American citizen in the army.

In the army, yes. Where is the family to whom your parents literally gave the gift of life? Where do they live now?

Well, my aunt and her husband died, but they lived in New York. They lived in Glendale. How are your feelings when they came? Of course, you didn't know what the circumstances would be.

No.

Then what were your feelings?

Oh, I was very happy to see them. Oh, yes. I was very happy to see them. I wanted to live with them, because I had grown up with them. This was a second mother to me, a second father.

You felt closer with them.

I felt very close to them. But my aunt in Newark discouraged me, because she felt they were a family with three little children who had to make their way, and that I might be a burden to them. So I remained.

When you finally learned about what happened to your parents, did you have any kind of recriminations or maybe feelings that your parents might have been here if they hadn't given up their visa?

At the time, I didn't know it.

Oh.

I didn't know it. I only found that out a few years ago. No. What bothered me for a very long time was the man who was employed by the French consulate. I had the feeling that he might have done me a favor if I had done him a favor. But I'm not sure. This is merely surmising.

He asked you to come back or stay a little later.

Yeah. Because he had asked me one time to come after office hours. But, as I said, I don't know.

No, you don't know. And, of course, you would not have had any guarantees that--

Yes.

Did your feelings changed about America when you learned that-- found out that nobody was going to help you?

No, not really. No. In later years, when I understood the political process, then, of course, I became very resentful. But at that point, it-- I just didn't understand it. I couldn't understand this. Even after the war, my brother helped some people whom he had known in Mannheim-- matter of fact, he was our dentist-- who had miraculously survived the war in France.

And he was a soldier in uniform. He took these people to the American consulate. And the American consulate very generously said, why don't you tell your friends to go back to Germany?

And this was where? In?

That was in Marseilles.

In Marseilles.

That was in 1945.

Regardless of people's lives. What is still vivid and alive now, and how do you think about it now, and how did it change you?

How it changed me.

What effect might it have had on you?

On my life?

How-- your feelings, your emotions. When you think of it, how incomprehensible a thing like that could be, how did it change how you viewed the world and different governments?

Well, I'm essentially an optimistic person. So how it changed me. I don't know. I don't know how I would have been otherwise.

That's true. Both an incomprehensible thing about having your family wiped out while you were supposed to be having a vacation.

It was nothing that happened from one day to the next. It was not like turning off a light, and then all of a sudden it's dark. It happened gradually. I mean, things did penetrate somehow. We did hear of the concentration camps. But nobody knew really what it was like. The Jewish agencies didn't know.

There were many conferences going on during the war. There was a conference in Å%ovian in Switzerland. And a trade-off of Jews leaving-- we do this if you do that. But nothing ever came of it. But there was always something that you felt, well, maybe, miraculously, whatever trade-off there will be, your family will be included.

So when you realize that you and your brother were what was left of your family, it was something you had to accept. And when you grew up and then life went on for you, tell us, bring us up to date.

Yeah. Well, while this was a great tragedy for us, of course, we were not the only ones. You don't feel really singled out. You don't say, well, it's just happening to me. It happened to many other people too. So that, I think, made things a little easier.

You're certainly optimistic. When did you meet your husband?

My husband's brother was married to one of my girlfriends. So I met him before he went in the army. I met him in Newark. And after he was discharged from the army, we were married.

Is your husband also from Germany?

No, my husband was born in Newark. He came of Russian background.

And let's get back to your brother for a moment, the one who lives in New York. What did he go on to do afterwards, and did he get married, and what was his life like?

My brother went back to his job that he had in New York before he left for the army. He married, and he has two sons. Today, he has two grown-up-- now, of course, they're grown-up.

And to get you back to your marriage, you had children.

Yes, I had three children.

Tell us about them.

I have a son. Then five years later I had a daughter. And then-- no, three years later I had a daughter, and five years later I had another daughter. There's five years difference between my daughters. And eight years difference altogether.

And what are they doing today?

My son is a lawyer in Washington. My second child, she is married. She has two children. She is a banker. Her husband is a doctor. And my younger daughter is living in New York. She works as a private secretary to an investment banker.

And there are no grandchildren?

Yes, I have two little grandsons.

And I'm sure--

One is 7 and one is 5.

--you see the family quite often.

Sometimes more than others. In this month I saw them quite a bit.

And WASHINGTON is not that far from Elizabeth.

No, fortunately.

Summing up the whole experience, to us it's important, because fortunately you survived. And not having experienced some of the horrors that others have. But when your heart is left on one side of the ocean and you are here, you have to cope with feelings like that. How do your children feel about this experience? You've shared it with them I'm sure.

Yes, to some extent. I never wanted to make them bitter. But my son did go to Auschwitz. But he never talked about it. He never told me anything about it afterwards. I think my children are very much aware of what happened. They don't always talk about it either. This comes up in casual conversation.

And your brother, for having left a few years after you did, what did he bring back with him? And he was closer to the European picture, Kristallnacht for instance. Did he have more pertinent information, more eyewitness accounts so to speak?

My brother needs to pluck out his past. Never talks about it-- never talks about anything. Doesn't remember.

Did he bring back any pictures?

Yes, he had taken pictures of our-- we lived in an apartment-- apartment, what had happened. And just the horror of people knocking on your-- breaking in your door, I imagine, and just going through your house, and breaking things, and then leave again as if-- you know, this is really difficult to understand that an orderly house can be left in shambles for no reason.

The invasion of the dignity and the privacy.

Has your brother-- has he ever talked about his experiences with his children, do you know?

You know something, I doubt it. I doubt it. My brother has blanketed out his whole former life. Even sometimes when I talk to him about the weather, he doesn't even remember that.

He just pulled down the curtain on that part of his life.

Yes.

And he wants to forget it.

Have you-- it seems that you are able to talk about it somewhat. Are there certain things that before you came to America, Jewishly that you remember?

Oh, yes.

And it was special to you?

No, it was just a Jewish household. You know? Saturday morning you went to services, and then you came home, and You had a nice dinner. And in the afternoon I would visit relatives.

I remember one time my mother was terribly upset with me because one of my girlfriends and I went to the movies on Rosh Hashanah, the second day of Rosh Hashanah. And the second day of Rosh Hashanah was observed as much as the first day. And I remember that was one of the times where I got a balling out, because my parents felt very strongly about that.

And other family celebrations, families gathered together and visited one another.

It seems to me we were always together with family. Yeah. I had a cousin who was my age. Seems to me we were all together, this girl and I.

Is she alive now and in this country?

No. She died when she was 16. She had a very minor ailment, but no doctor would come to the house. And she died. She was 16.

Was that because she was Jewish?

Yes.

But this was during a time when--

That was just before. But I didn't know the reason of her dying. Only afterwards I was told that the doctor didn't come to the house at that time.

You were already in the United States.

No, as a matter of fact, I was ready to leave. But I did not say goodbye to her mother in person, because it was too-- I was told it would be too painful for her if I were to come. But no one ever said to me that it was lack of medical care that she died. That I only found out later.

It seems that they shelter the children from anything that might have disturbed them along those lines.

Yeah, I think so.

Because the things from what you told me with the laws about the school and the cousin not getting medical attention, that it was there, but they shielded the children from the pain of it. You want to tell us something about the people in that lovely picture?

These are my parents. I imagine, on this picture, my mother must have been in her late 30s. And my father, being 11 years older, must have from the late 40s. It's enlarged from a very, very small photo. And it was colored, because the colors were added afterwards.

It's a lovely picture. It's a nice memory.

Yeah. I never remember my mother without eyeglasses. And my father, I never remember him with hair.

And they were a little older when you left. This picture was taken much before.

I imagine this picture was taken maybe 1939.

Oh, after you left.

After I had left. My brother brought it with him.

And it was pretty much the way you had left them?

Yes. Yes. German people are not-- or at that time were not as appearance conscious.

Your mother is very beautiful.

Oh, thank you.

She's lovely.

She was very quiet--

I see the resemblance to your father too.

Yeah. My father was very lively and very-- my mother was very quiet. I often say, if they both had of been very lively, that would have been awful.

They complement each other well. Have you ever had the curiosity or the desire to go back to Germany to see how things were or to see what the family home was like?

Yes. I went back twice.

You did.

I wanted my children to see where I had come from and my husband, and we went.

You want to tell us about it? How you felt-- your emotions.

Yeah. Well, I thought I handled it very well. My family didn't think I handled it so well. But since we come from a big city, we went to the cemetery just to-- because there were so many relatives buried in the cemetery. So we went to the cemetery.

My mother, coming from a smaller town, I was particularly anxious to go to the cemetery there. But once I was there, I could not make myself go to city hall to ask for the key to the cemetery. Because at that time, and I imagine it's this way now too, the cemeteries are under the supervision of the city. And I could not face anyone saying to me, oh, I knew your grandmother, and I knew your mother, and I knew your aunt.

That was more than I could, at that point, handle. So I didn't go to the cemetery. Which I have regretted, because I felt I should have displayed a little bit more courage. But I didn't.

Did you go back to your apartment where you had grown up? Was it still there?

No, that had been bombed. That wasn't existing anymore.

So you were spared that trauma. But they keep the cemeteries under lock and key--

Well, at least in a smaller town you have to ask for the key. But in the bigger cities, I think you can just walk into it. I don't remember it. But I remember having gone to the cemetery.

You say you went-- you made two trips. That was the first trip. What about the second one? How far apart were the two trips?

They were just a year apart.

A year part.

The first trip, I wanted to see my aunt in Belgium very badly. And that was our first stop then to see her. And then we went on-- we went to Germany. And the second trip, I again went to see my aunt first before we went on.

Were you able to see any old friends or neighbors or--

No. My friends one Jewish girls who had gone to various countries. My two best girlfriends came to New York, not directly. And there was only one girl who had remembered me from when I went to high school. And before I left Germany in 1937, she walked with me through town. And that I appreciated.

I even remember her name. Her name was Agnes, which was not a very popular name. But I guess she liked me. And she walked with me, which was unusual for a Christian girl to do.

Of course that was post-war--

No, no, no that was before I left in 1937.

Oh, before you left.

No, when I went back again there was no one there I knew.

Did you visit the camps?

No. I-- I couldn't do it. We were very close to Dachau, but I couldn't do it.

Your son, you said, did make a trip--

He went to Auschwitz.

That took a lot of strength and courage.

Yeah, I think so.

But to see with your eyes-- and yet there are some people who do go back again and again as though nothing happened.

That is such an individual reaction. There is no right or wrong about these situations. You do what you need to do--

Where your heart leads.

--what you have to do.

Would you want to go back to Germany again? Would you want to make another trip?

Not really. I had a chance to go back to Germany a few months ago. A new home for the aged was built and dedicated. And the German government was very anxious for many of the former inhabitants of Mannheim to return. And some people I know have gone back. I couldn't.

I couldn't get myself to do that. Because people who return on an official basis are exceedingly well treated. But I knew this would be such a shame and such a falsehood, that I couldn't do it.

No compensation for what had been robbed from you.

I beg your pardon.

No compensation-- that was no compensation, their extended invitation.

No. This was-- no. No, not at all.

Your aunt in Belgium, when you saw her, I'm sure you reminisced about the time that your brother was with her. Did she shed any light on-- how long was he with her?

I don't remember. We didn't talk about that much at all. Because she had a nervous breakdown after my brother left when she realized what had happened. So we didn't talk about it. We cried when we saw each other, but we really didn't talk about it.

She had a sense of guilt for having let him go.

Yes, and she shouldn't have had.

No. It was not something that anyone could foresee. And the plans seemed to go along very well.

Yes. No, it's--

How is the family for whom your parents gave up their visa? The children must be grown certainly by now.

yes My aunt and uncle died, but their children are fine.

They live in New York?

Yes. One daughter lives in New York and two sons live outside of New York. They became exceedingly orthodox. The sons became very, very Orthodox, and live a very Orthodox life, and a very good life. And I-- we see each other, and we are good to each other.

It's remarkable-- your spirit and your optimism is admirable beyond expression.

Oh, not really.

What has been in my mind was to ask you about your musical exposure. Because I know that you're a great music lover. What was your background in Mannheim? We go back to happier days, and what was your musical background?

Well, there was a great deal of music around. So it just seems to be part of our lives. It was nothing special. All the boys learned the violin and all the girls had piano lessons. And my brother didn't practice, and he gave up the violin lessons. And I didn't practice, and I gave up piano lessons.

But still the love for it has remained--

The interest has always been--

--where you go to concerts.

Oh, yes.

This is the legacy.

Yes.

So a lesson that you would give to people who have suffered is the bitterness doesn't help. However, you have to be particularly strong to have that kind of a make up, having left--

It's nothing. Really. I mean, that's your personality. Either you handle it or you don't handle it, no matter what comes.

Well, you're fortunate you're able to handle it.

I think so.

Because it's a--

It's a lesson.

Yes, to lose parents and a younger brother before he even had a chance to have a bar mitzvah--

That was sad.

--at 12.

Yeah, that was very sad.

What was the bar mitzvah like of your older brother?

I remember we had dinner in the house.

And they make-- they don't make the fuss that they make here.

Oh, i remember all my relatives came. But in Germany the catered affairs-- I wasn't aware. I mean, people, I don't think, did it. I wasn't aware of it.

People, I don't think, did it as much here either in the '30s. This kind of mushroomed with the prosperity, where the actual event got lost in the shuffle so to speak. Suzanne, did you ever believe in your wildest dreams that you wouldn't

see your parents and your brother again?

No. No. That never-- never even occurred to me. And even to this day, it's so unreal. When you have a cemetery to go to, it's a final confrontation. But I never had that. If somebody would call me up today-- I mean, my father today would be over 100 years old, so it would be exceedingly remote. My mother would be in her 90s. My brother would be in his late 50s. But if someone would call me up today, I wouldn't be one bit surprised.

The finality of a burial just wasn't there for you.

That's what it is. As a matter of fact, a number of years ago, my brother read in the paper that a group of students came from Frankfurt. This is where my younger brother had lived in his last city. And one of the students had my brother's name. And my brother called the New York Times, and the young man was kind enough to spend an afternoon-- come from New York City to spend an afternoon-- with my brother, and, of course, I went to see him.

He was a student. It was an exchange student program. But it wasn't my brother. I remember my brother's eyes very much. His face, of course, would have changed. But he had a particular shade of brown eyes. And when I saw this young man, I knew it wasn't my brother.

With the same name?

The same name, same age, the same city. It was an uncanny coincidence.

That must have been quite a shock--

Yes.

--to even have become that close and have your hopes raised so high.

Well, you really-- that would have been a present-- like a present that you don't expect.

A miracle.

So neither he nor I expected this present that day.

Do you find that you still think about your parents and your brother a lot?

Oh, sure. Oh, yes.

Still part of your days?

I think so. I think so. Yeah, I sometimes wonder what my parents would think about me today or my children. And hopefully they would approve. I think they would. They always approved whatever I did.

There's no reason to think otherwise.

Well, listen, I was a youngster, I'm sure I had my moments.

You had a good and happy home life and a very strong family feeling. And you remember your parents as being young and vibrant.

Oh, yes. And that is how you have to cope with it. And you're doing a beautiful job.

Thank you.

Are there any other comments you would make on the entire-- what was your reaction when the war was over and there were liberation broadcasts about the people being liberated? What was your reaction at the end of the war?

Well, there was always hope. I tell you a coincidence that happened to me. I became engaged after the war. And there is a German-Jewish newspaper in New York called the Aufbau. My aunt in New York put my engagement announcement in the paper with my address, because she had hoped that if my parents had lost my address that this would give them a contact. However, the contact was a cousin of my mother's who had gone to the Philippines to live who had lost all her papers.

And the Jewish Welfare Board sent Jewish people into the detention camps in the Philippines, and they handed them this paper where my engagement announcements happened to be in. So this couple, who now lives in New York, they came to New York.

They contacted you as a result of that announcement.

Yes, because of this announcement. But we left our forwarding address for years with the post office in Newark where I left and my aunt in New York, just in case a letter would come in by some miracle. But it never did.

How long did it take for the Philippine cousin to come to New York?

It didn't take very long. Maybe-- I don't remember the time. But maybe a year. Maybe even less. I don't remember, but it wasn't too long.

So life was full of surprises.

Yes.

And good things. But in the final analysis, what you had hoped for didn't come to pass.

And, as I said, I was not the only one. I grew up with another relative whose family had moved to Holland because they had business connections in Holland, and the daughter, who was my age, was sent to England. When England was invaded, they asked the daughter to come back to Holland, because Holland was neutral during the First World War. And unfortunately the family was deported and never heard of again.

And the mother, she survived the war. She came to live in New York. And I often felt very guilty. I said here she looks at me, and her daughter would have been exactly as old as I. How sad it must have been for her to see me.

But then, again, you were thinking in terms of her feelings. What about your feelings, that your mother wasn't here, even though you were? So that in effect you were across the crossroads, each one looking in.

Well, I felt--

You were sensitive to her.

--that there was nothing I could do except accept the situation as it was.

And yet you had a sense of guilt--

Yes, I felt very badly for her.

--that you survived and the daughter didn't. Have you been to any of the European countries where some of these things like the Anne Frank House for instance?

Yes, I was in Amsterdam. I could not go into the Anne Frank House. I stayed outside. My family went, and my husband

and the children went. No, I--

Do you feel that your husband understands as much as he possibly can?

Oh, yes. Yes. My husband has died. But he understood. With all these German relatives around, he had to.

Well, he would have had the same sensitivity that you did, because like attracts like in that respect and the important aspect of things. So that on the whole you seem to be very, very grateful for having survived and for having a nice, warm family now. And it was a big nightmare that left you and your brother a partial family. But nevertheless with the spirit that you have, it is something that is very admirable and unbelievable.

Well, my children regret it very much-- and I do too, of course-- a certain part of the family just never existed. They had no cousins. They had no grandparents. They felt it when they were little.

Other people had grandparents and other people had cousins. That's very true.

I hope they overcame it.

It's really remarkable and almost unbelievable that it's left you totally unscathed. I mean, to be able to accept such horrors. But then again you lived in a kind of-- well, it was a secure home life with your aunt and her family, even though you couldn't pursue what your training was, where you're training would have taken you to. But that also is part of the times, and you were by this time part of the family.

Yeah. No-- she did not exactly throw me to the wolves. That she didn't do. She had her, own problems which I realize now, and she handled it the best she could.

That's very true. Are you close with those cousins today?

Well, the two daughters died, and my aunt died, and her husband died. But there's a surviving son, and yes, we're very close.

Because no matter what happened, you did live as a family.

Yes.

And although you may have had other alternatives, their home was open to you.

Yeah. No, definitely.

What happened to all the trousseau that you brought from Germany?

I'm using it.

To this day?

I sure am.

That's remarkable. So you have some good feelings about what transpired. I think that we are most grateful for your wonderful story, and it gives us an insight to people who were spared perhaps the physical agony of having gone through the throes of the Holocaust but still the mental anguish and the emotional anguish of having been left so unceremoniously without proper goodbyes. Because when you left it was a lark, and all the faces were happy.

So it's remarkable that you have shared this experience with us. Because while we do know and can share with people the horrors that they've gone through, yours is from the vantage point of the comfort of the United States, but

nevertheless has molded you into a remarkably wonderful human being who takes things in her stride, and doesn't feel singled out and doesn't ask, why me. So we want to Thank you very much on behalf of Kean College and the Yale project, and we hope that your life will always be a happy one.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.

And thank you for giving me the opportunity.

[MUSIC PLAYING]