

And the Germans couldn't speak French. They couldn't speak it. They couldn't speak the language. Even the fascists couldn't understand each other. And one another thing-- one--

[INAUDIBLE].

--mystery about it is how did the Italians get together with the Germans.

OK. We have to go home today.

Andre, you got to give it--

Wait a second.

Give it a rest.

[LAUGHS] I can't talk.

I can see the family dynamic here, but you take it-- you get the floor and you don't--

The gist.

--and you don't let it go.

Oh, my god. I--

It's a dictatorship here. And just because you're the oldest--

But girls are not involved in politics like he is.

No, no. I just mentioned them because--

[INAUDIBLE]

That's all he talks about.

[INAUDIBLE]

I mean, it's-- OK.

If they all would have spoke the same language, they probably would have won the war.

All right.

OK, then,

Calm down. Down, boy.

[CHUCKLES]

You mentioned that your mother sang.

Yeah, she sang beautifully.

Do you remember any of the songs she sung?

"Papirosen?"

I would stop her from singing, because everything was sad. So I would make a big fuss, and she was not allowed to sing, only happy songs. I'm still like that. I don't like sad songs. Well, certain ones. But I was really-- I was a--

My father sang too, a little bit, like when he prayed or when we was home.

Yeah, but his voice was not good. Hers was.

He was--

She had a beautiful voice, which she did not give to anyone.

No. No, she sang "Papirosen" She knew "Yome, Yome."

What song? The song?

You know, old Jewish songs and a German song that you sing around Christmastime. What's the name of that song, Joyce?

"O Tannenbaum."

"O Tannenbaum."

She-- I remember her sitting down and saying, they were so wonderful. I don't know what happened to them. I don't know when they went mad. Because that's who she knew, was Germany--

I know.

--and German people. And she couldn't understand it.

But as far as antisemitism goes, they have it all over. They have it today. They will always have it.

You know, it's-- I was called dirty Jew all over in France and in Belgium and in America. I see a lot of antisemitism always. They don't know because I don't look Jewish. But so a lot of people say things, but, you know, it's like everything else. It's like with the Black people.

When you went back to Belgium, did you go to a yeshiva?

Yes, I went to [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. It's still there. I went to visit it when I went to Belgium. But now you need to have security. You have to-- they won't let you in just like that. But my friends that I have in Brussels, their grandchildren go to that school. So I went in and everything looks the same, exactly the same.

So half-- and did you learn Hebrew?

Yes. I was very good in Hebrew. But now, I'm not that good anymore.

And she was very good in school because she came before me, of course, and I remember the saying, you are related? How? Same mother and father?

She was a tomboy. I was very prim and proper and did everything right. I had to between him and her! I had to. So they couldn't believe she was my sister, because if I had--

I was the opposite.

Right.

And Andre, you were 13 when you were in France.

Yeah, yeah.

Were you--

At 13 and a half, I come back to Belgium. At 14, I--

Did you ever have your bar mitzvah?

Yeah, in Belgium. We were in Belgium.

Can you tell me about it?

Well-- [CHUCKLES]

I know about it because I used to--

Nothing special.

--learn the--

Haftorah.

I learned the Haftorah with him. So he had bar mitzvah with about 14 boys who had it at the same time. And they all learned it together. And he won the first prize, which I remember because he was so good in it. And then, that's it. Now he's not too much on Hebrew.

Hmm.

Right?

No, but I was in different things up there when I-- because I had the Belgium passport. And I could travel all over, and I got involved with somebody who smuggled cigarettes to France and things like that.

Oh, I didn't know that.

Yeah

Huh.

Yeah.

How old were you?

I was 14 years old.

He was tough. I had to be the good one, because my mother had him--

And me

And her!

Did you graduate from [FRENCH] lycee?

No, I graduated-- in Belgium, I went to Flemish schools. And I had forgotten a little Flemish, so I had to pick up, get back to it in the Flemish. But I had no trouble. Yeah.

I just-- I never went to higher education because I missed too much in school in France. I didn't know algebra. I couldn't understand algebra.

They says e and 6 is equal to m. I didn't understand that. I didn't had the beginning of the algebra.

So I start working early. I helped my father as a plumber. And then I became a jeweler, because they built a shop for a jeweler's. And the guy of the jewelers wanted me to work for him, so I started working for him. I became a jeweler.

What did that consist of? What did you learn from him?

I melted metal, gold, platinum.

He makes beautiful jewelry. He does.

I make rings, bracelets.

He makes beautiful jewels.

I became a jeweler. Then I came here. I worked in the trade, too, until I got drafted in the army, and they sent me to Korea and Germany.

That was the worst for my mother-- Yeah.

--when he was drafted because they sent him back to Germany.

I'd never been to Germany before. I knew I'd seen Germany and France, but I'd never been to--

Yeah, but they sent you--

--to the German territory.

So he was in the army.

How did you feel about that, going back to Germany as an American citizen?

I was a soldier, you know, like I patrolled the border, and I learned maneuvers and everything, slept in the snow in the woods. Yeah, it was-- because Germany's cold in the winter.

And when you have seven army-- and the seventh army-- I was in the seventh army. Seventh army alert all over Germany. So then seventh army goes in the field. And you sleep in the snow for about a month, and you come back. Yeah, and it was tough-- a tough duty.

Yeah.

Lucie, you mentioned the Americans-- Jewish soldiers who looked after your family after the liberation.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Do you remember the names of any of them?

Just the one that helped us find my aunt in the United States, Simon Kohler. And I'd like to find out exactly where his family is, but I could never find out. And--

Do you remember where he was from?

New York.

From New York. Yes.

He was a New Yorker, probably Brooklyn, from what I gather. I've tried, I've-- but whatever I came across-- someone did tell me that-- and I don't know how true it is-- that he went to Israel in the beginning. And he was-- I don't know if he was sort of thrown out of this country--

And I have a letter by him, so--

But I'm not sure.

You have what?

And I have his army number, and I've tried to call armies, the army, and see if I can get information. And I could not get anything.

Did you stay in contact with anybody? Do you remember anybody from Rivesaltes at all?

From Rivesaltes, no.

No.

Not from Rivesaltes.

No. But I know there's a lot of people that live in Canada, like Shmeltz. You know--

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I knew Shmeltz.

Jackie Shmeltz.

He went to Rivesaltes.

He lives in--

He died, didn't he?

No. His sister lives in Canada.

Right.

Probably could find out where she lives. But I don't know if she's still alive or whatever.

There's a lot of things I wish I had asked and been persistent about.

Right.

But I wasn't. I didn't want to know. I was afraid to know. I didn't want to start-- bring back anything to them. So I left it alone. Now, I'm very sorry. I'm sorry I didn't ask more, I didn't try to find out more. But that's past.

Yeah. People should--

And there's no one to ask.

--write things down. Like if their parents tell them things, they should write it down, because as you get older, you forget things.

One of you mentioned that your mother wanted to come to the United States, and your father wanted to go to Israel--

Yes. Oh.

--and that your father had a hard time adapting to the United States. Was he a plumber when he--

No. He couldn't get into the plumbing union because, at that time, it was predominant-- in New York, it was predominantly Italian. And he could not get in. So he took whatever he could. He worked in a factory for a while.

He made lamps for ships.

He did different things.

[? Perko. ?]

Yeah.

And he gave up. He was not a plumber.

No, but he always talked about Israel. He read till all hours in the morning until he couldn't see. He became blind.

But he always wanted to go to Israel. And I went to Israel. And the strangest thing is that, when I arrived in Israel, and we went touring, we-- he always told me about Rachel's tomb and David and all these things.

And when I arrived in Israel and we went sightseeing, we stopped at this big cemetery. And it made me think of my father, you know, with the trees and everything. But--

Did you belong to a synagogue when you came to the United States? Did you--

We went to synagogues, and I belonged to everything, ORT, Hadassah, the Holocaust Museum downtown here, the one in Washington, DC. What else do I belong to, Joyce?

Everything.

[LAUGHS] I belong to everything practically. And I go to temple. And Joyce belongs to the temple in Middletown. And-- you know.

Did you notice that your parents changed their religious practices before and after the war? I remember you-- that, Andre, you mentioned that you kept kosher.

Mm-hmm.

And did they change after--

No.

--the war?

No.

We were kosher after the war too. We were kosher after the war. My father went to temple. He laid tefillin. He did [INAUDIBLE].

Yeah, he believed. He-- I don't.

He believed more than we do.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I'm not a believer, no.

The war did not change his--

Maybe if the war wouldn't have been there, I would probably would be maybe religious, too. But I grew up in the south of France. They're more-- they think different, you know? I think a little bit like they do.

Well, the war robs you from your childhood.

Yeah.

You mentioned a Rabbi Bloch who helped your father.

Right.

He lived on Riverside Drive. We came from-- the HIAS brought us over here, and Rabbi Bloch-- they got us an apartment on Riverside Drive, and that's where we lived. And Rabbi Bloch had the synagogue on Riverside Drive and 100--

Riverside Drive and 138th Street.

--138th Street, and my parents went to worship there. And he always called up. He came to my wedding.

He came to Joyce's wedding. He bought her a present, right? And he always called up and inquired how my parents were doing as old-- he wasn't young anymore, either.

And he always called me on my birthday.

Yeah.

Because he's the one who gave me my Jewish name.

Yeah.

Um--

Chana.

And I went to Hebrew school. He was my Hebrew school teacher. [CHUCKLES] I spent most of the time outside the classroom as well. I-- it was my MO.

He came-- how did he get out of Rivesaltes?

I think that when-- he must have escaped before the trucks came, before they took everybody to Auschwitz. I think he escaped and went to Switzerland. For some reason, I believe that's correct. And then, after the war, he came to the United States. He had two daughters. And I know that his-- I once spoke to somebody who--

And he lived in Rockland County.

And his grandson was trying to find out about him, more about him. And she was trying to give him information because he did run that camp. I mean, he was the religious leader of that camp. He was a very lovely man.

His-- they mentioned him in that movie, [NON-ENGLISH].

And there's also a book about Rivesaltes that he is mentioned in.

What was-- how did you-- how did HIAS get you to the United States?

- Well, it's not just HIAS. It took five years for us to get here, because they kept selling--

Our visa.

--the visas. Finally, my aunt got this man who had some power and had the money and made sure that we would be leaving when they said we would be leaving. And that and the organization got us here.

It took five years?

It took five years to get here.

From 1945 to 1950.

And that's when we came.

It was the Belgian authorities who made it difficult?

I don't know who made it difficult. I think some of the Jewish organizations were not that up and up as well. after the war.

It was hard to get--

It was hard. It was very hard to get out.

To the United States.

And it was very difficult to get to the United States.

There was a quota in the United States.



Very much so.

Well, now you can come in like--

At that time, the quota was very difficult to buck.

Do you remember going through Ellis Island?

No, we didn't.

No, we didn't.

We came in style.

Hoboken.

We came--

We went--

--on a luxury liner.

New Amsterdam.

We came New Amsterdam. It was a cruise ship.

Yeah. We came-- Hoboken, right? Hoboken, we [INAUDIBLE].

We came to Hoboken.

So it was lovely. It was a lovely trip.

Swimming pool and everything. [LAUGHS] Yeah.

It was great. Then we went in the subway.

Mm-hmm.

I thought the doors were going to close on me.

And where did you stay when you first got here?

My aunt's house.

I didn't. I stayed at the HIAS. They had--

Well. We stayed at the HIAS for a little w-- I stayed for maybe a week.

It was like a dormitory.

Mm-hmm.

Yes, it's like a shelter for the Jewish-- for the immigrants.

[INAUDIBLE]

It's a shelter for the immigrants, and we stayed there. She didn't stay there. She stayed by my aunt.

The way I can really describe it is I remember seeing a movie, Bitter Rice. And they had a scene of a big dormitory of a big shelter. And it reminded me of that. Now, I went back to the HIAS, which is now Papp's theater. It became a theater.

It's on Lafayette Street.

Yes. And it's Papp's theater. And my daughter got me in to see. And it's strange, because I remember the staircase. I remember the upstairs. I remembered where the dining room was. But it's a theater.

Anything else you would like to add about your--

No, we just want to say that, actually, we're doing this for my parents, for my cousins, who never made it. And they say the Holocaust never happened. [CRYING] [SNIFFLES]

Thank you.

That's why. And it did.

Thank you.

Yeah.

All right.

All right, then. Thank you.

Before you stand up, I'm just going to take the microphones. The microphones are on.

Oh, I keep forgetting.