

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Marlies Plotnik, née Wolf, on August 19, 2010, in Hartsdale, New York. The interview was conducted by Peggy Frankston.

I'm Marlies Plotnik, née Wolf. I was born in Darmstadt in the South of Germany on September 18, 1927, which means that I was 11 years old-- 10 for Kristallnacht and 11 when we left Darmstadt and came to the United States, which meant that I was just old enough to remember everything very clearly, but not old enough to understand any of it, really. But then, maybe nobody else understood, either.

At any rate, I was born into a very nice family. I had a very pleasant childhood. I was the youngest of three children my parents were happily ensconced in Darmstadt. My father was a prominent lawyer, and I say this without exaggeration. He was also-- and this becomes very important-- he was an officer in World War I and a Frontkämpfer-- means he was at the front, which gave us privileges for a long, long time, because the militaristic Germans made a-- that was so important to them. At any rate, there was pride in the family, not only because of the position in the social circle of Darmstadt, but because of the family history. We trace ourselves back to 1560 in Germany, which was rather important, because everybody felt that they were really Germans and had lived in Germany so long, all these families. This is on my father's side.

And on my mother's side, there was pride because of another reason. The family had a factory called Adler & Oppenheimer, which had many branches all over the world, really. It was a leather factory which served the army in World War I. And that was this big, big deal, right? And that was important, also, because they-- this was a rather large concern. And there was nepotism in the family. A lot of people worked for it, et cetera. So on both sides, there was a false pride, maybe, but there was a lot of pride.

On my father's side, it also was because of real education. He was a lawyer, his brother was a lawyer, and his sister was a doctor, so that meant that they were well educated. And that also was so important to us. At any--

What was your father's name?

Hermann David Wolf. And my mother's name was Irene Oppenheimer. And the firm name was Adler & Oppenheimer. At any rate, I-- as said, my-- the childhood was really very, very nice, and so it was a shock when things occurred in 1933. I was six years old, but at that-- when things start to happen, you're quite mature at a very young age.

Tell me a little-- did your parents have servants or--

Yes.

--maids or--

Yes.

--nannies?

Yes. We had a cook and we had a nanny. And the nanny was more than just a nanny. She was a [GERMAN], which meant that she had French lessons, piano lessons. She sat at the table with us. She actually had been hired for a trip my parents were going to take to Paris, and they wanted somebody along for my-- I wasn't born yet. My sister and brother were very little. And so she had worked in a bank, and she was actually the daughter of my father's-- well, his-- not a valet. There's a word for it. Orderly in World War I.

And she didn't-- she was just going to go on this trip, but she stayed for 12 years and became quite educated in the household. And she was wonderful. And this was-- when she was forced out of our household because she was an Aryan and in-- I can't tell you whether it was '35 or '37. I think-- oh, yes, definitely, it was '35. She had to leave because she was under the age of 35, and she would-- because there might be rassenschande, which was "race scandal" in case-- because my father and-- was a male, and she was a female Aryan, and she had to leave. And she made an attempt-- she

got to see Himmler, who pat-- she was a very pretty blonde. He patted her on the knee and said he couldn't make any exception, even for a pretty blonde. When she was forced out, this was a tragedy in my-- not only for me, but also for the rest of the family.

But just to say what happened in 1933, three days after Hitler came to power, my grandfather who was the head of the firm, or the representative head of the firm in Berlin, was in the office. And a man in SA uniform came up and said he wanted the head of the firm, and he wanted him to come down with him-- [CLEARS THROAT] pardon me-- to the front door of the firm. And there was a sign that said, he who deals with Jews is a traitor. And then he said, you have to pay for the sign. And my grandfather went home, obviously, had a heart attack and died. And everybody said it was because of this. I'm not that sure, but yes, it's believable, because he was horrified.

My sister's birthday was on the 23rd, and he had-- he died on-- I think died on the 22nd.

[PHONE RINGING]

That's my phone.

Oh.

This is a continuation of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Plotnik.

The reason that this was especially meaningful for me is that my sister's birthday was on-- is-- was on April 23, and that was the day of his funeral, so there was no party. And we were alone with our governess in Darmstadt with my parents in Berlin where this-- where the funeral, of course, was.

So early on, I didn't know about things happening like this sign and other signs that then appeared very shortly. In front of every store front it would say [GERMAN], "Jews not wanted." And it was the brown sign with a swastika-- the brown of the-- the same colors as the SA uniforms, and things like that.

But to get back to our family, we were members of a Jewish congregation, which was a liberal one. There was an Orthodox synagogue and congregation in Darmstadt, but the liberal one was a very beautiful synagogue, incidentally. We were members even though my father was an agnostic, at best, possibly even an atheist. But we attended because he felt very strongly that one had to support a Jewish community for those who wanted it.

My mother had been raised in a semi-kosher home in Berlin, but we certainly were not kosher. We somehow were the opposite, a little bit. Our cook-- for instance, there was a pattern, and Friday was-- Friday, of all things-- no, I think this Thursday-- was [GERMAN]. That involved ham. I, as a child already, thought the kosher business had been outmoded and all that.

At any rate, we did-- we were members and we all went to Hebrew school. My father had been bar mitzvahed, as had his brother, but already that family was not kosher or anything like it. And my brother was bar mitzvahed-- again, because my father-- because the family thought that that was what one does.

And I want to-- I don't know if this should be mentioned at this point, but for instance, in Germany, one was tithed in a synagogue according to your income. My father thought that was a very wrong kind of thing. And even though he was hard of hearing, sat in the last row. He went to the synagogue, of course, only three days a year, but he said in the last row. And I remember distinctly a Yom Kippur where instead of a prayer book, he had Rousseau with him, which I thought was terrific, because I just thought he was very wise, and I-- and he did not fast. Of course, my mother did. But when we came to the United States and we found out that the congregation we joined here didn't tithe you according to income, but you just paid for your ticket, we sat in the first row so that he could hear. And I-- this is the kind of thing that I respected tremendously.

Well, at any rate, to get back to Germany, one of the things that-- what happened in '33-- to us, not very much happened, but we knew of people who immediately lost their jobs. We knew of a cousin of my father's who was a doctor who was

attached to a hospital. She was fired within two months of Hitler's coming in to power. We knew of many people like that. I don't think I was aware. I mean, I found that out later. But I did become aware of things as things-- as time progressed.

For instance, very much aware-- my brother attended a very good private school in Darmstadt, and he was so tortured by the kids in his class that he played hooky because he-- the teachers didn't defend him. And so he would go off to school, they thought, and he went into the woods, and then returned-- or into a park or something, and returned in time. When my parents by chance ran into a teacher of his who said, oh, is Paul any better?

My parents found out that he played hooky, and they immediately removed him when they found out what the circumstance was. They removed him at the age of 14 and sent him to a school that was especially set up in Italy called [? Yeshula ?] [? Al'mita mer. ?] It was in Recco on the Riviera. It was in a delightful old palace. It was run by a Jewish-- a German-Jewish couple, and it was really set up for kids that had to get out of whatever school they were in, in Germany. So he was in this delightful setting. He didn't learn much Italian, but he became the best dancer and best swimmer-- this was on the Riviera, so it was very nice, indeed.

How old was your brother?

14.

But when was he born?

Oh. I want to get this perfectly right. He was born in May, May 17 in 1922 in Darmstadt. The kind of thing, then, that-- so he was taken away from the family setting at 14, and that's a little tough--

And what was his name?

Paul-- Paul Theodore Wolf. Theodore was-- he's named for his-- for my paternal grandfather, middle name. By the way, I did digress. When we came here, he was 17. He was drafted. He spent four years in the army. He was in the second wave of the invasion in June at Normandy. He was in the Engineer Corps. He came back, luckily, without any injuries, but he went to Darmstadt. He saw our governess and-- but spent all four years in the army.

My sister, whose name was Ellen-- and that was not a legal name. So it was Ellen, Elfriede. And she was forced out of school at the age of 14 because they-- she went to the best girl's private school. And she and her best friend were-- we got a letter saying that she had fulfilled her legal years to the age of 14, and they were therefore requesting that she leave the school. And so she was sent to Berlin where there was a very good Jewish school, and she lived with my grandmother for the years that she was in Berlin. She spent Kristallnacht in Berlin, for instance.

My father, who was determined and stuck on certain rights-- since they had chosen as an excuse that she had reached the age of 14 and therefore legally they didn't have to keep her anymore, I was now of the age to enter this school, so my father insisted that they accept me, and they had to accept me. Incidentally, I remember very clearly the letter that came that asked that she be taken out of the school was signed [PERSONAL NAME], Heil Hitler, [PERSONAL NAME], I remember, was the name of the principal. At any rate, they had to accept me, and then my father said, and now you go to the-- you don't go. You go to the Jewish school in Darmstadt. And I was much relieved. At any rate, that was the kind of thing-- my father had a sense of justice and made certain demands of other people of this.

You were attending the school beforehand?

No. I was in the-- no, this was in the--

In the--

--school that started at-- when you were 10. She had also attended the school that I was in, which was the public school, until the age of 10. But I was then poised, and then I went to the Jewish school from the age of 10 on. When Lisbeth but

was forced out, that was sort of the whole signal for me that many things were going to go-- be very difficult. My parents came to the United States in 1936. There was a special trip called-- I'm sure you've heard this before, the [GERMAN].

They came to the United States in '36, and they relatives here-- we were lucky we had relatives here. They couldn't understand that my parents would return to Germany. What they couldn't understand is, the children would-- I would have been a hostage. I was-- and Ellen, who was in Berlin-- I was in Darmstadt. My brother was in Italy. They just couldn't imagine that this kind of thing could happen.

Well, so my parents came back, and then we were on the list to be to be able to come, and it took from '36 to '39 until we were able to. And there was a lot of living that had to be done. For instance, Kristallnacht. I went, as I said, to this Jewish school, and I was on my way to the school when-- which was very near, rather-- really, on the same-- right next to the very nice synagogue. It was a not very important building, but the synagogue was it was a very stately, lovely thing. And the synagogue was in flames. And there were lots of people standing around, and I wanted to get through. And there was a policeman standing there. Oh, and I heard things like, the Jews set fire to it themselves, and talk like that.

And the policeman stopped me from going further. And I said, I want to get to the school. He said, you're not going to school today. There won't be any Jewish school today.

This was the morning?

This was the morning of the 10th. I--

And happened on the 9th?

Nothing. In the 9th-- everybody says the 9th. Well, maybe a lot happened on the 9th that I was not aware of, but to us, whatever happened was on the 10th. And we had not been aware of anything. I think in-- the reason the 9th is mentioned-- for instance, that they seem to have asked the people-- and they-- we knew about that later. Certain people were bussed-- or no, not bussed, but taken by-- in buses, I guess, to Frankfurt, which was pretty near. And Frankfurt people were brought to Darmstadt. This was because the people were afraid that they might be too lenient and couldn't destroy what they were going to destroy of their neighbors, Jewish neighbors. So total strangers destroyed what they were going to destroy.

I ran home, and my way of going was passed the other synagogue, and it was also burning. Incidentally, I-- it was a long way. I normally went by trolley, but I ran home all the way. And when I got home, my-- well, my mother was totally surprised by what was going on. And we had-- by this time, the cook had also been forced out, but we had-- because you were not allowed to have people-- even though she was over 35, you were no longer allowed to employ anybody who slept in. So we had a very courageous woman working for us. She came and she made the big meal at lunch and she prepared supper for us. And she became important, that she was so courageous, in my eyes, at least.

Well, we then-- yes, it was decided-- no, excuse me. I'll have to backtrack. My father had been at court that morning, and he had a letter in his briefcase from relatives who became our sponsor from New York. He didn't know-- he hadn't read it yet. He didn't know if it was an English or in German. But the relative here frequently wrote about politics. So he was terrified what might be in the letter in case there was trouble. Well, he didn't know there was any trouble yet.

He went to his office, and there were two men standing in front of his office and said, are you Dr. Wolf? And he said yes. And he said-- they said, you have come with us. You're under arrest. And he said, can I put my briefcase upstairs? And they said no. And he didn't know yet that the office was totally destroyed. But--

They had come in and ransacked--

Yes, totally--

--the archives, everything.

Yes. And the law books were all in-- well, they were-- all the-- what does one call it? I'm sorry. The words are really failing me. The bookcases were all tilted into-- in those days it wasn't computers yet, of course. It was typewriters. And all the typewriters had been put in one corner and hacked to pieces. The briefs were all over the place. They even slashed the furniture. In the waiting room, there was a couch and stuff like that and chairs. And the doors to my father's partner, between their two offices, was a leather padding so that there wouldn't be-- that one wouldn't hear the other. They slashed that. But everything was in utter, utter destruction, which my father did not know.

So he was taken by these two men, and I don't-- on the way, he saw somebody he knew, and he said he wanted to give this man his briefcase, and they wouldn't allow that. And father told this man, please tell my wife that I'm being-- call my wife, and-- that I'm arrested. But that wasn't necessary, because he came back to us.

He was taken-- and I don't know whether it was Gestapo or police headquarters. And as he-- when he came in, there was a man behind a desk whom he recognized. He didn't know who it was. And this man said, Dr. Wolf, you're here? Just a minute. Went into an inside office, came out, and said, you can go home. Don't leave the city, but you can go home. My father noticed that there were other people obviously being held, and typically said, why can I go when they can't? And this man said, look, don't ask questions. Just go. And he went home.

So he came home very shortly after I had come home. It was decided that I should have a normal day-- a more normal day, so they called my piano teacher and decided that I should have a lesson. And he was home because he'd had some kind of an attack that day-- not a heart attack. He had asthma. And so he was-- he said, I'll be in my robe, but I'll give you a lesson.

So I went there, and as I went there, he was taken down the staircase in his robe and obviously was being arrested by some man who, as I recall, was totally in black, leather coat, black boots, black hat. I'm not sure it was SS. I don't know. But I just remember this total black, and the car into which they dragged him. And I ran home.

And the car was standing in front of our house. And the man was talking to this very-- this-- I mentioned before, this brave woman. And she said, Dr. Wolf isn't home. He went to his partner's house, but he is not leaving the city. And she-- in her tone was so-- that the man turned around and left. I mean, she was really-- I mean, he wasn't going to do anything anyhow, because my father wasn't there, but you know that-- everybody knows that that day, they arrested and sent to concentration camps everybody from the age of 19 to 90. My father was not arrested, was never-- was not sent.

We never knew who this man was who said, you can go, the man behind the desk. We thought maybe he might have been a relative of a client of my father's. My father was a do-gooder and took on-- helped a lot of people, so it's conceivable. I decided that there is a God, and he was watching, and he was rewarding my father for being such a decent person. At any rate, it was wonderful.

But the partner was arrested and they-- I was-- I went with my mother also, and it was-- there was hysteria. They were very wealthy and they were very ostentatious. They had two, let's see it as cars and a chauffeur and on their estate, a very beautiful, modern house, there was a small house in which the chauffeur lived. And they was putting the silver into the chauffeur's house and stuff like that. What-- why they imagined it would be safer there, I don't know. But all I can tell you is the-- I was in the kitchen because madame was very-- it was-- as the maid who came down to get tea said, madame is hysterical. And my mother was trying to calm her down. My father was trying to calm her down. I could understand why she was hysterical, because this-- obviously, terrible things were going on.

Both my piano teacher and the partner were sent to Buchenwald, which was the nearest concentration camp. They both came back approximately two weeks later with shaved heads. And the partner talked and told my father a great deal about-- my-- the piano teacher, whom we knew and who emigrated into England-- according to his daughter, never said a word about it, because they had impressed these people that if you say anything of what you saw here or what happened here, we will get you, no matter where you are. And he believed that. The partner did not. The partner, incidentally, also ended up in London.

So on my way home from the partner's house, later on, when we were walking home, my father said, you're going to be a very interesting grandmother. Unfortunately-- well, I don't think-- well, now, we do talk about it. But for years and years, nobody was really interested in the Holocaust here. You didn't talk about it. And we tried to assimilate here as quickly as we possibly could. My mother had been in boarding school in England, so she spoke English. My father only knew French, Greek, and Latin. But we took German-- and we took English lessons, which didn't take very well, before we left.

But I remember, for instance, when-- between '36 and '39, when the plan was definitely established that we would come to the United States, my mother had books that she had brought before World War I from the boarding school, Dickens and-- so we went-- if we were-- for a picnic in the woods, he-- we read Dickens, translating each sentence, word for word. Dickens is frightening enough, but if you take it apart that way, I was terrified that life would be as it was for David Copperfield. And the descriptions of the poverty and the crime and all this impressed me tremendously. I was hoping that the United States was not like the Dickens. And very little English was really learned this way, but, well, it was a start. But--

Could we backtrack a little--

Yes.

--and go back to how things gradually changed for your family and how they plan to go to the United States was developed?

All right. Well--

First of all, when you first went in to the Jewish school, what was that like?

It was not the best school. That's why my sister was sent to Berlin, because-- but I was only 10, so it wasn't so important. But there were-- the school was small. The classes were small. It wasn't so bad because there was so much individual attention, because there were so few of us. For some--

Did any of the students who were in the public school with you go to that school when you entered?

Yes. As a matter of fact, my first little boyfriend and I-- I have a terribly pathetic letter from him to the United States, hoping when we got out-- hoping that he would get out, and he never did. And we lost other friends, two girls who were half Jewish who were actually used as prostitutes for the army. And we heard that later. And then they finally died. Terrible stories. We were saved from all of that.

Incidentally, there was-- in 1937, we were supposed to meet the American family in-- not Hungary. Well, at any rate, we were visiting my brother in Italy, and it was wonderful. It was my first trip into Italy, and I thought it was just lovely, and we went to Switzerland. So they were good times. We had no money in-- because you had to-- shortly after that, you had to account for every single mark spent.

And I have-- yes, I should talk about that much more. My parents were not only prescient enough to realize that they had to get out, but they also were prescient enough to ferret away some money, which became very important. There was cash in-- on our balcony, in the flower boxes. This became terribly important, because people had to be bribed and because by-- I guess it's '37, one had to announce-- declare every dime spent.

Not only that-- also, they were terribly-- taxes put on Germans-- the German Jews in order to be allowed to leave. I'm sure this is wide spread. It's no news. But I have the papers where everything is listed. When we came, we were still allowed to bring furniture, we were still allowed to bring paintings and even silver, but no money and no jewelry. And they took my father-- I have my father's lists of investments. My father owned an apartment house and another house-- oh, yes, his family house. They had to be sold at 17% of their worth. I'm sure you know all about this also. And this never came back.

The jewelry had to be appraised, because the bureaucracy was that they had to document every single thing before they took it away. There was some jewelry, but it was-- had been out of the country with a relative in Holland since 1922. So that's why I have this, which was an earring, originally, because I-- well, I'm-- I have to say, I was pointing to my engagement diamond, which my husband was allowed to pay for the setting and for the wedding ring, but we didn't-- certainly, I would not have permitted him to spend anything like this so--

On a large diamond.

Yes. But that was because it was in Holland, not-- my mother's engagement ring was a problem, people knew that she wore a fairly decent size, and that-- so had you had to buy a ring, a stone, to have a German stone for them to take away, because the real thing was in Holland.

Oh, yes. By the way, we-- the plan to come to the United States had been formed, as said, when they came in '36. We had relatives here, which was very important, because if you did not have a relative here, you couldn't come here. You had to have a sponsor who was willing to say that he or she would take care of the family. This was a cousin of my father's, and they were wonderful. They came to Germany very often. It was somehow much easier to come from Germany-- from America to visit Germany than for Germans to visit the United States. It wasn't--

I'm backtracking. There was a law that if you had any money outside of Germany, if you were Jewish, there was a death penalty. So a lot of people pulled their money back. We did not know-- we children did not know that we had a dime besides the 10 marks that you were able to take out of Germany when you left until my parents were halfway-- until we were on the Queen Mary, halfway across the ocean. Then my father said, there really isn't that much to worry about. We have some money.

We had money here because my-- the relative who had written the letter that my father was worried about had my father's portfolio here. My father had the cousin's portfolio in Germany. I don't know what happened to that, whether he-- whether that was able to be pulled out. I don't know. But so we had some money here. But the idea that there was a death penalty was hair raising. But it was, and that-- my father and mother had the courage to not pull their money in, because we knew people-- he was planning to go into business with somebody who pulled his money in, and stuff like that.

And my father had cases-- we know of somebody where-- since there was, again, a law that no Jew was allowed to have any weapon of any kind, that the Nazis planted weapons in people's houses, and my father had such a case where they planted a revolver in somebody's home, and that man committed suicide, because he knew he was not going to [INAUDIBLE]. He didn't wait for the case to come up, really.

Your father was allowed to practice law until what date?

We have that letter that takes-- took away his rights. Darmstadt is the-- was is the capital of Hessen, so all the big courts were there. My father had access to the top court. And in 1938, right after Kristallnacht, they sent him a letter that they had removed his right. To us, that didn't mean very much, because we were leaving for the United the states anyhow. My father was the last one-- the last lawyer permitted, and strictly because he had been an officer and had been at the front. And this-- his partner had not been in the army. And many other lawyers had not been and hadn't been officers, hadn't been at the front, so he was the last one. But as I said, that didn't mean so much to us.

Would you like to know how we-- the trip out and what it meant?

I want to hear-- if you remember some other incidents when you were living in the Darmstadt--

Yes.

--between 1933 and the moment you left?

Yes.

When you in public school and before you were taken out, did you experience any antisemitism?

No. I can't really say this. Well, no, no, no, no, I'm sorry. Of course, there were things like this. There were places on the street where they had posted the-- I forget the names, suddenly, of the German newspaper that was very, very antisemitic. The whole point was antisemitism. And I remember reading some of it. And a man came up and said-- called me a dirty Jew, and said, you shouldn't be reading this stuff, and chased me off.

There were things like this. I would pick, in the trolley car that I would go to school-- I would go into the-- we had trolley cars where there was where there were two cars. The second one was a smoker, and I loved to be with my father before all this happened in the smoker, because that was open, whereas the other one was sort of for ladies, for-- But I traveled only in the first car, because my theory was that there would be women-- more women than men in that car, and I wouldn't have to be afraid of being beaten up.

Things, for instance, that were hurtful, but that I didn't fully understand-- that happened early on, that I had a friend, a little girl with whom I played all the time. And her father came to talk to my father and asked that I not play with his child anymore, because he was afraid of going to-- that he was going to lose his job. My father immediately understood and, of course, I didn't play with this little girl anymore. I didn't understand that, because I guess at that point, I was something like seven, and I thought she'd been a real friend. And it was that kind of thing that--

We were also-- we were restricted-- you couldn't go into any restaurant except the restaurant at the railway station, which was OK with me, because that happened to be a very good restaurant. But we couldn't go to the movies. We couldn't go to the opera anymore. My parents had been very-- Darmstadt had a very good opera company. Rudolf Bing, who became the head of the Met here for years, was at-- in Darmstadt. We had very good visiting singers. We had very good theater. And my parents had been very much involved, and that was not-- that was painful, I'm sure, for them, very.

And there were so many, many things that were-- just playing with your self-esteem and things like that. One of the things that was most annoying, not just for feelings, but physically, is that they would call in the passports very often. The first call that I-- and I have my parents passports. There was in order to put a big red J into the passport. And they made you pay for that. Next, it was called in, in order to add the name Israel to every male and Zara to every female and underlined.

And when my father wrote letters that had to do with the legal stuff, the list of all his holdings or the lists that had to be handed in all the time for-- what money was spent for that month, he would have to sign it-- it was signed doctor Hermann Israel Wolf. I mean, it was this idiotic thing. For the calling in to add the name Israel, and then it was underlined, and Marlies-- and my legal name was Marie-Louise, because Marlies wasn't legal, either. My name was Marlies Marie-Louise Johanna Zara, underlined. These were the things.

My father once in awhile would do something-- we went to a movie, and I was terrified. But he said, we are going to go to the movies. And we saw an American film called Ramona in technicolor. It was my first. And I was-- I hated the idea of going to the movies. I scared out of my wits. And also, there's a scene in Ramona where rednecks-- it happens to be that she is half Indian or something, and they come and-- the rednecks come and force them off their farm. And I thought, oh, America's going to be the same way as Germany, if this is-- luckily, it was not that way at all. And what-- did you want me to stay in the German thing, or do you want me now to get--

I think little more about Germany. When your brother was 14, when he went off to Italy, how long did he stay there?

He stayed in Italy approximately a year and a half. I may be slightly off with that, because the next thing was that my parents moved him to a school in England, number one so that he would learn English, and number two, because Italy was beginning not to be such a healthy place to be.

And there is a story there. He went to Hove college in Brighton Hove. And his-- the application to come to the United States was to the London consulate. And guess who was the ambassador? The ambassador was Kennedy. And oddly



enough, when my brother went there, they asked-- he was brought in to the ambassador, which was a little bit unusual. And Kennedy said to him-- and Paul talked about this. He said to him, your parents must be sending you quite an allowance at your school. And Paul said, no. They are very much restricted. They can't.

And it was obvious that he was asking Paul to fork over, which was-- he made it very obvious. And when you think about this, this was a multi-millionaire, and he was going to make this-- Paul was then 16 or 17. He may have been 17 already. Yes, yes. But the sequence is right. He was 17, because when we came here, he was 17. My sister was 15, and I said I was 11.

My sister experienced Kristallnacht in Berlin, which was quite different from a smaller city, even though I think it's named Kristallnacht because of all the storefronts in Berlin where the glass was broken. But she had her first little boyfriend, and he escaped being arrested by sleeping in other people's apartments every night for those next two weeks. You couldn't have done that in Darmstadt. You couldn't have done that in Frankfurt. It was possible in Berlin because it was so large.

My sister did not know that my father hadn't been arrested until the evening when we had-- when we were able to talk to her on the phone, which must have been very difficult for her. The separations were quite awful. And we-- I was-- we felt so very lucky that we came to the United States as well as a family unit, because we knew so many people where somebody went to China, somebody landed in Australia, and then they were never going to see each other again. And I think that has overshadowed my entire life.

And I-- because that's the important thing that-- this feeling of abandonment, feeling of-- that we could be torn apart again. I have no first cousins, but I have many second cousins, because on my maternal side, the Adler & Oppenheimer thing that I mentioned, they were 10 children. That's why there were so many in all the branches in South America and in England and in Holland and in-- there were always family members there. But they were all torn apart, many of them. And that was very, very sad.

Incidentally, my grandmother in-- stayed in Berlin because she was convinced that she would visit us, and then her other daughter was in what was then Palestine. And she didn't. So she was there in 1941, and my father managed somehow to get her out via Cuba. He got her and her sister, one of those sisters, out via Cuba. And then she lived with us here.

So your parents were telling you about this plan to go to the United States?

Oh, yes.

How did you feel about that?

Oh, I wanted to get out like crazy, yes. And also, there was this element that I felt somehow that my father would solve it all, because he'd always solved so much. I will tell you that they made an attempt-- because I showed that I was afraid to be alone. By this time, we had no servants anymore at all at night. My sister was in Berlin. My brother was either in Italy or in England by that time. And my parents were making plans with this person I mentioned who pulled all money out who was in Frankfurt. They went to Frankfurt to discuss the business that they were going to open in Texas, of all the places. Never got there, because this man made-- well, it didn't happen.

But they were there very often to talk about business. And they also wanted me to feel that I could be alone. So they made it their business once in a while just to visit other people so that I would be alone. And I was terrified because people disappeared and were never heard from again. And I thought this could happen to my parents.

By the way, I have to tell you, earlier, in my-- if you wanted to know what our life was like, it really was very nice. My parents-- as I said, the [GERMAN] had piano lessons. My parents had musicals at home, a great deal. My father played the violin, my mother, the piano, and the governess also played. And we were exposed to a great deal of music. And luckily, my husband had exactly the same feeling about it. We were-- became tremendous opera buffs. And it was planted very early on.

My parents also saw to it that when we traveled, we were taken to museums like crazy. I found that, when I was little, very boring. But I had art lessons. I was very lucky in school here. I went to a very special school. I went to the High School of Music and Art. And I learned there that there were people much more talented than I, but I began to make my way into writing, which was helpful. I then went-- I went to Barnard College, which was then very hard to get into. And it was a pleasure to be there. So I was very lucky in my own education.

And that was important, because my father felt the worst part of being-- of having to leave Germany under the circumstances was that we were not going to become cultured people, because we would not have time and we would not have the means, the money. Well, it wasn't so, because we were very lucky-- the war years in New York here were fabulous. It was the-- everybody of meaning was-- had come to the United States for safety, so we had top opera. We had top theater. We had top concerts. We had top artists. The galleries were doing fantastic business because the painters were here.

[? ManÃ©-Katz ?]-- I don't know if that means anything to you, but I was traveling in circles. I'd met a fabulous French family, the Rosenthal family. He was known as the Pearl King of France. He came here, and because of my connection to them, I went to the ballet like crazy with them, met Hurok through them, who was who was the impresario who staged a great deal of opera and a great deal of music. But it was a fabulous time here. So we--

Could we backtrack a little?

Yes, I'm sorry. I'm--

You said that--

Yes, you want more of--

About what it was like being in Germany between 1933 and the exact time when you left in 1939.

Well--

The Jewish school you went to, what were some of the subjects you studied?

The normal subjects. I had history, which was German history. I don't remember why we had no-- I guess maybe didn't have an English teacher, but I had no English. We had some French. And we had math. I guess I was in what was called [GERMAN], the first-- I was not very much impressed, even though there were some very smart kids, and we were also-- there weren't enough in the same age group, so that it wasn't-- it was a little bit like a-- not that it was a one-room school. I mean, it wasn't like that. There were-- math, you had only math, and you moved in to the other class that was-- I think we did have French. I am at a loss, because there wasn't that much that happened to me in particular that I--

Did you wear a yellow star?

No, that was not yet. I think that came in quite a bit after-- yes, that was later.

When you mentioned that a man saw you reading an antisemitic newspaper on the street, how did he identify you as Jewish?

I could not figure that out, because frankly, I-- at that age, I was quite blond. I had a short nose still. I don't know. Oh, it could have been that he simply knew me, because that's what my sister talked about, that we were fairly well known, that people identified me as a child of Dr. Wolf. So it could have been that. Also, that was very frightening. And I was-- are we getting it? I was frightened a great deal.

But you bring up an interesting point, because I think it was that we were known. It's not a tiny city, but it may very well have been that. I'm trying to remember now some of the-- there were so many embarrassments.

Was there a difficulty in obtaining food?

Yes, yes.

Did you have to only purchase at certain times of the day?

Yes, and I know that we were entitled to two eggs a month and 1/4 pound of butter. We were never hungry because, as I said, my father was a do-gooder, and people brought us food. I'm sure this was very dangerous for them. And by the way-- all right, I remember some things quite vividly. My father's orderly, this father of what became our nanny--

What was her name?

What, the nanny? Lisbeth Hake.

Hake.

Hake, H-A-K-E. I'm trying to remember that Hake's first name. I'll show you pictures of him and certainly her. He insisted that my father give him the military sword and that the dagger, the dolch, because it had the colors-- well, whatever, the [? labeled ?] stuff, of the regiment. And I was the one who was designated to get it to him. Very interesting that my father allowed this. I took my bike and I put the dolch into my pocket of my favorite raincoat.

But I didn't-- and I don't know how they got that to him. My father had a very modern-looking revolver, a-- well, wait a minute. A revolver has a [? wheel. ?] This didn't happen-- yes, I guess it had-- but it was very modern looking. And it landed with the orderly. And his stepson got it to our family who brought it here, years later.

Now, this was-- we had to get it out of the house in the first place, because there was a death penalty for having weapons. But that my father permitted me to do this-- I found it was weird. But it got there.

What else can I tell you? There are memories-- well, also very good memories. For instance, we were-- yes, we were Jewish, but we had a Christmas tree, and the excuse was for the maids. And the orderly was a very good carpenter and he made us very special Christmas toys that only came out for Christmas. And I had a living room. My sister had a kitchen with running water. My brother had a Ferris wheel, which was fabulous, and a store. And we made-- in the kitchen, we actually were able to cook a little frankfurters and stuff like that. And the excuse was the maids.

We had the best of all worlds, because we celebrated Hanukkah. We celebrated-- we always had a Seder. My mother fasted. We had-- we lit candles on Friday night. And until my husband died, I lit candles on Friday night, here, because I wanted my children to feel Jewish, even though they were not really raised-- my husband was a very definite atheist but had come out of a very Jewish household also, and was extraordinarily tolerant of-- and we did try to join a congregation here. We just didn't--

Let's go back to--

Yes, Germany.

--to Germany.

The congregation there was-- my parents' social life was, I think-- no, it wasn't all Jewish, but most of the people were professionals, doctors, lawyers. My mother would give teas in the afternoon. And by the way, there was resentment that the governess was part of the party, very. They were people who really thought-- of a class consciousness, which was idiotic, but they minded. Some people minded that she was at the table, too, and that she was part of the musicals. But as I said, that's-- all of that ended in '35.

I also remember that Lisbeth, we-- came to visit once. And she combed my hair in the garden. And somebody came down from someplace and said, you are working. You have no right to do this for a Jew. She was just combing my hair.

It was that kind of thing that was-- it put a pall over everything. It was a-- life was-- you had a constant thing hanging over you. That's why, when you asked me, did I want to go? Boy, did I want to go. And I guess that kind of feeling was even there before Kristallnacht, but after that, I mean, it was very, very definite. And we didn't know anything about ovens yet. We didn't know how bad it was going to be at all. [COUGHS] Pardon me.

Do you remember the day you left Darmstadt?

Absolutely. We went-- we had 17 pieces of-- oh, yes, I have say. We had to make a list of everything we took, and I mean everything. And I've got the list. My father took 12 handkerchiefs. Me, I don't remember exactly, but the number of panties, the number of my mother's underwear, my mother's-- my pajamas, everything, including the paintings, every single thing. And when it was packed, there was a man sent to supervise this and compare it to the list. And he had to be bribed.

And the only-- and the people packing it were-- there was a couple helping, they-- and they were Jewish. And they turned out to be slightly crooked. My father had a wonderful, roll-type desk, which we, as children, used-- we used to pull out the drawers, climb up, and then slide down. It had a secret compartment into which my father had put his grandfather's shofar and money. And when we arrived here, the shofar and the money were not there. We do have-- we did have of other things that were handed-- that came down from the rabbi that became very important to us. And I will show you photographs.

The packing was-- I don't know-- I'm sure that people have described this, that they were put into a lift. And the lift was approximately half the size of this room. We had two lifts. How they did this, how they packed this, I-- it was amazing. Books-- they put three books, and then put [INAUDIBLE] around them. Our piano did not survive very well. But the furniture survived and was unpacked here on the street, everybody watching as these wooden crates were taken apart.

There was-- by the way, the 17 pieces of luggage became a hazard. We traveled to Holland. to pick-- we were going to pick up the Queen Mary, and I should mention that was a very frightening thing. We were scheduled to be on the Queen Mary two weeks prior to when we finally made it. Then, when they suddenly decided, like the pulling back of the passports, that my mother's jewel-- my mother's pearls had to be appraised in Hamburg, as though there were no jewelry store-- all the rest of the jewelry had been appraised in Darmstadt. This actually delayed our passage, and we were-- we didn't know whether they would let us go at all.

We traveled to Holland, it was on a train that one up the Rhine, a very wonderful train called Rheingold. And it was a luxury train where my father, because he had some money left, said for lunch, have whatever you want, because we have to spend the money anyway. So we did, and he had a glass of wine. We get to the border, and you know that the Germans have to OK you going and the Dutch have to allow you in. When the German, whoever he was, heard that we had 17 pieces of luggage, he said, you cannot-- you have to leave the train. And my father was sorry that we'd spend money needlessly on the food, but he seemed to have had enough left to bribe him. And all of a sudden, we were allowed. But the 17 pieces of luggage-- to this day, I think people-- and I-- it's better to travel light. The feeling of freedom as we were in Holland was incredible.

What it was the exact date that you left Germany?

You know what? I can't tell-- yes, yes, I-- I have to look it up, because it was definitely in February of '39. I can't give you the exact date. We arrived here on the 27th. We stayed in London for a week, I think. It may not have been a whole week, so I'm not-- I don't know exactly, but I have the papers, because we know you had to sign out, you know? Again, the-- in Germany, not just for Jews, were-- if you were in a city after three days, you had to register with the police. So we have-- when we had to leave.

And by the way, I have all kinds of things that I have forgotten to tell that did not just happen to me, happened to my father. He had to have an identity card with a big J on it where he was fingerprinted, because fingerprinting in Germany meant you were a criminal. You just weren't-- so, again, just to embarrass. His driver's license had-- and, well, I have all that. I will show you. I have the papers when we were signed out. And there's something about that that was also embarrassing, that it wasn't--

When you got to the border between Germany?

No, no, this was leaving Darmstadt. And I remember also that the taxi that took us to-- we took two taxis because of all the luggage-- to the train station, I turned around and looked at the most important monument in Darmstadt. It was a huge column, the Langer Ludwig, the Tall Ludewig, which the place had been called Luisenplatz-- it was Adolf Hitler Platz, of course, by that time. And I turned around to look at it and said, I will never see this again. But I also-- at the wise age of 11, said, and you've got to remember it.

And I have to say, they invited me to come back, and I never went back. I had the hope to show my husband where I came from, because Darmstadt was a very pretty city. But it was bombed extensively, so-- one of my sons, the correspondent, was sent by either ABC or CBS to Germany at one point, and he went through Darmstadt, and he had the crew with him, so they took pictures for me of where we lived. And of course the-- it's not-- it's rebuilt differently. But I had no urge at all and no desire ever to go back.

We were very much involved with [GERMAN], but that didn't solve anything. What have I left out?

I think we're going to do a pause here.

OK.