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This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Marlies Plotnik.

One of the things that I remember, which I mentioned before now, this fear that people-- that my parents would not return, which was so pervasive. And I remember one-- well, in our dining room, we had a clock that had a pendulum and it tick tock, tick tocked. And I remember being there and it was maybe 8 o'clock or something, and I had a visitor. And the visitor was the sister of Lisbet of the nanny.

This is long after Lisbet was forced out. And she came and she wanted to bring my parents something. And when she found me there alone, she said, I fully under-- and I looked frightened. And she said, how do you feel? What's going on here? And I said, well, I'm waiting for my parents-- and that evidently blurted out-- and who knows whether they'll come? To which she said, you know, I fully understand and she was a woman maybe in her late 20s, maybe early 30s.

She said, I would be frightened, too. And sitting here with this clock, waiting, waiting, and tick tocking, and I was so grateful that somebody else was willing to admit that I had the right to be frightened. I also have to admit that I frequently, in this situation, left the house and went to the corner where the trolley cab would come. Because my parents would come from the train and take the trolley to come home because there was also-- you didn't take taxis lightly after a certain time because you were turned down. I don't know how they knew that one was Jewish.

Again, maybe because we were known. I don't know. So that's one thing that I remember very, very vividly, this fear that because people literally did get lost and were never seen again. I also remember, with tremendous horror, what I left out. Because my father was not arrested at the time of Kristallnacht, somehow people found out that he was there. So we were visited constantly by women whose husbands had been taken to concentration camps who were hoping that father, as a lawyer, could somehow help and do something.

And so my mother and I were-- somehow we had coff-- no, we didn't have real coffee anymore. But at any rate, we were trying to feed these people. And some of them came with black eyes and had been beaten up. And it was very, very upsetting to see these people. And especially since my father was helpless-- which was something else that was very meaningful to me to see my father reduced to some as somebody who couldn't help, and my mother who was really a very wonderfully stalwart woman. But she was 4 foot 9 and she was very naive which was wonderful.

But she believed-- first of all, her belief in God I think was helpful. And her theory was que sera, sera. And even though she was totally dependent on my father, my father picked her clothes for her. I remember going to-- she had a lot of stuff made for her because she was so tiny. And he would go along and suggest the fabric of something. Later on, he and my sister and I shopped for my mother.

But when you needed her, she was the Rock of Gibraltar, even though we had to take care of all her investments and do everything because she just she just-- she had never written a check and also didn't know how to cook. But that's-- do you want to hear about that kind of thing? All right. But that's what happened when we came here. That's-- all right.

In Germany, we had always a cook. And as a matter of fact, until the very last day, as I told you, that we had this woman who came in who prepared all the meals. When we came here-- and I think it may have already been on the ship still-- my father took us aside, the three children, and said, your mother doesn't know how to cook. You are going to accept whatever she puts in front of us. You're going to like it, you're going to praise it, you're not going to criticize it.

And indeed, my mother did not believe in reading cookbooks. And tongue had been a great, great delicacy in Germany. Here, they were throwing it out. Now you no longer eat it because it's so unhealthy. But they sold it here with its outer casing. My mother took that casing that was brined and thought it would make soup.

My mother froze-- we had refrigerators with a tiny thing that had two trays for ice, but not a freezer yet. But these two little ice trays, she put jello into that. Frozen jello is dreadful. But she was wonderful because she knew more about oratorios than anybody else. And I respected that. And she was she was marvelously helpful in many ways.

Do you remember reuniting with your sister--

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Yes.

--before you left?

Yes.

Did she come to back to Darmstadt?

Yes, she had to come back to Darmstadt. We had to-- the American consulate it was in Stuttgart and she had to join us. That was also difficult because my father who was never sick in his life-- except I remember he had a sty on an eye. That was the only thing I ever saw-- had 102 fever. And the day we were in Stuttgart there was a physical exam. And we were terrified that they would do something. No, it was fine.

But again, there was a man who had to be bribed. Everybody knew about it. And thank God, my parents had some money in the various caches. So everything like that was tense. I don't remember anything that had to do with an authoritarian bureaucracy that wasn't.

So you got your exit visas--

Yes.

--or your visas for the United States in Stuttgart.

Yes, and my sister came back. And she had a short haircut and also she didn't know that my father had to account for every dime-- of every penny, not dime. And she was buying clothes. And she came in-- I thought it was wonderful. She had a suit that had zippers all over the place. And here, the opposite. I had big two braids.

And I will say this. Since I had no idea that we had any money in the United States, I remember that we bought some shoes for me. And since the only thing I knew to do was what a maid did, I said to myself, those are the shoes that I am going to be wearing for an interview when I become a maid. I thought since we were not going to have any money, I was going to have to do something like that. Of course, that didn't happen at all.

Did you reunite with your brother in London?

Yes.

After Holland you went to London?

Right, yes.

And then you took the boat--

From Southampton.

What was it like? Were there other German Jews on the boat?

Yes, yes. Incidentally, after we were in Holland, we then boarded a small boat to cross the channel. And my sister and I shared a cabin and my parents were in a cabin. And they had a little box with a paper thing in it because everybody certainly threw out-- the paper was fresh, but the box itself was not.

That we survived that night-- it was very stormy. It was February and the Atlantic was also very, very-- even the Mary was not big enough. I was seasick for two days. But then it was very enjoyable. We swam in the pool with my father and my brother and my sister, and was very luxurious. Very nice. Even though we were second class, there wasn't

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enough money to travel first class.

But the sense of freedom was such that I thought I'd never be frightened again. But if you wanted to go back to German feelings-- I knew then that I was never going to want to come back. We'd heard of real atrocities with-- I told you, my father had several cases where he was still defending Jews and still could. And even one of the things that was the most horrifying, when people were arrested on Kristallnacht for the two weeks, some people did not come back. And instead, the wives were sent little boxes with their ashes in them. And we heard about this. And that kind of thing, when you were 11 years old, makes a very deep impression because, well, we didn't know that they wouldn't repeat this and that my father would not, the next time, be involved.

And so many people really were very, very frightened. Everybody was frightened. And this pervasive fear--

Did your father practice law after Kristallnacht? Because his office was destroyed.

Yes, he wasn't-- no. Well, Kristallnacht was November 10. And he was disbarred-- I'll give you the exact date-- very shortly thereafter. So there was no question that he couldn't have practiced anyhow. But I do remember that when we went into the office, one of the things was in order to keep the briefs, they had to make three holes. Somehow there was confetti all over the place for these because they'd found the boxes that somehow-- we, as children, were sometimes privileged to be given some of this confetti when we visited my father.

And there was one funny thing. My father smoked and my mother had bought him something that was supposed to take away the smoke. It was a figure and they planted that on top of something. On top of a whole pile they put this thing that was-- I have to say, I loved the fact that he smoked. Somehow, it was the male business. My sister smoked. My mother never smoked. That made her somehow not courageous. Idiotic things when you're that little.

But I remember when one entered my father's office, there would be layers of blue smoke sitting there. Well, by and large, maybe I don't remember many things. Freud claimed, after all, that we remember the good things. The really shocking things, of course one remembers. But there is something to it if it was just not so terribly important that maybe one doesn't remember.

For instance, I can't remember when the cook had to leave us. But that wasn't a tragedy because she wasn't the same thing. The life before had been very, very pleasant. And I have to say, the closeness of the family, I think that that's happened to a lot of people, that they became a very closely knit family here because of it. And my sister was absolutely my best friend and for years and years.

We even lived together. We had the two families live together because when there was such a shortage of apartments in New York, we had a commune without knowing that it was a commune.

Do you remember arriving in New York City?

Absolutely.

Did you go to Ellis Island? No, no. That's the other thing. Luxury liners did not. If you came on-- that's one thing. I start my memoir with the idea. The Queen Mary was important because you didn't talk about, with other people or kids, whether you were well off in Germany or anything about that. But you talked about how you came here and was allowed to brag about that.

And I had lots of friends who came on ships that took three weeks to get here, certain ones two weeks. The Mary took 4 and 1/2 days. And pity because it was so, so pleasant. But I very vividly remember as we came in the harbor. And my parents, who had been here before, said, there is the Statue of Liberty. And to this day, I get a little bit of goose bumps when I-- and we used to take the Staten Island Ferry constantly, so I saw it very often. And of course now we have visited and names are in the water line there.

The Mary pulled up-- in the time, there were peers all over because all the liners were there. The Mary laid next to the

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Normandy. The Normandy was the ship that was sunk there. But the Mary pulled in and the gangplanks were-- by the way, the colors were not-- the Mary became a troop ship. And we saw her very gray, but in those days she was black and red, and she had the British flag which was very nice.

And by the way, the reason we knew so much about her, they gave a tour of the ship, so we heard all the minor things and the major things about her. When we pulled in it was very cold. And the Hudson looked very dirty. And I was very disappointed because I thought all the sky scrapers would be lined up on Riverside Drive. Instead, they were all over the place. And it took a long time for us to get off.

But the sponsor's wife was waiting for us for hours in their Lincoln car. And we came off. And they took us to a hotel that had been booked for us on 74th Street. And it's no longer a hotel. It is now a co-op. But the bank that it faced is still exactly-- it's no longer the same bank. It's changed hands many times.

But I can tell you exactly what this felt like because I looked out of the window and I saw the huge sidewalk. And I said, oh, if I only had my roller skates which were in the lift. So they weren't with me there. It was a very special thing because of the food that was on display. And I can tell you exactly what it cost at the time, too.

A rye bread cost $0.09. And one of these most striking things was that before they packaged butter in quarters, they had it in barrels and they cut out butter. We hadn't seen 1/4 quarter pound of butter a month. And here was this butter. You know, these were striking things.

But that was fairly unimportant. Just the feeling of being here was very special. And we didn't know yet that a lot more could have been done. But that there was such a quota system, that so few people, really-- and in my memoir I have statistics of how many-- the United States took many more people than any other nation. But when you see how few people were taken-- and as you pointed out, nobody wanted any of the Jews-- was a not very good feeling.

But I didn't know yet how restricted it was. And so I felt-- we were coming to Roosevelt, who was a marvelous thing to think of, that this was not a dictator. But I also have to tell you that I had not heard the word dictator applied for Hitler. He was called the Fuhrer. And in my little head, that wasn't like Mussolini that I knew. He was a fascist and he was a dictator. But Hitler was a fuhrer in my head.

By the way, I saw him once. And under the circumstances, he was coming through Darmstadt in one of those typical open cars with the hand raised and this idea that he did not do the salute the same way as the general populous did. And I was standing there, and a man picked me up with my legs up and said, so you can see him better. That person did not know I was Jewish. By the way, dreadful. I mean, I knew that this was a man to be hated with every bone in your body, even though we didn't know yet how bad it was going to be.

What happened to your parents' parents?

My grandfather on my father's side had died during World War I already. And there was a story about that, that my father was able to come back for the funeral which I knew all about because we made my father tell stories about the war. And what was so wonderful is they never changed. He did not exaggerate. He told the truth.

My father's mother had died in Germany in '37, I think. On the other side, my grandfather had died in '33 with that story about his really-- with a sign. My grandmother stayed in Germany. And she was in her late 70s. And when the war broke out and there were early air raids, they made her go down, when everybody else went into the settlers together, in this luxury apartment house. She lived a 12 room apartment. It was that luxurious because there were representatives of the firm.

They made her sit in a cold cellar by herself. But my father got out via Cuba and she died here at the age of 83. My mother's sister was in Palestine and eventually came here, too.

And your father's mother?

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My father's mother died in Germany in '37.

And he had a brother, I think?

He had a brother who had died of leukemia in 1922. He had a sister who was a doctor. I don't know why I haven't mentioned it. She stayed in Germany and she was gassed. She had the Iron Cross and a grateful nation gassed her. In my memoir, I have two people who were very special people in the family.

One was also a doctor, Johanna Geissmar. And she is known. She's written up in many places because she was in Gurs first. And even though she was not supposed to go to Auschwitz, she decided a doctor was needed. And she went to Auschwitz and she was gassed there. And she's written up because-- two people wrote whole books about her. And I will show you the books.

She was really very special. And then there was somebody else who was rather well known. Because she was Furtwangler's, the conductor's, right hand, she became-- I'm trying to say what her title was then. Well, she did all the booking for-- she was the manager of the Berlin Philharmonic. And the Nazis wanted to use Furtwangler because he was a great Wagnerite and Goebbels wanted to get rid of her immediately.

Goering protected her for a while with a famous-- she was not raised as a Jew, so she was very surprised that she got into any trouble. Goering supposedly said, I'll decide who is a Jew, which he may have said for several other people. At any rate, they finally forced her out. She left with her father's Strat under her arm and went to England and became Sir Thomas Beecham's right hand the same way that she had been Furtwangler's.

And there are many stories because she wrote a book that describes the musical world between the wars. And she died in London. But we met Sir Thomas Beecham here when he was here during the war. Well, talk to him about her and stuff like that.

When you arrived, did you know any English?

That is a story. I knew a little. But I can tell you I am convinced that if you were a child, and I think anybody who tries, the first three months you learn everything. After that, it's only fill in. And we made every attempt, anytime we were outside of the house, to speak only English because we wanted to certainly not offend anybody here and also to become part of it.

For my father, this was much more difficult because he was 59 years old and he didn't know English. And he thought he had to speak English the way he spoke Hochdeutsch. By the way, he spoke two languages, as I did, in Germany. In Darmstadt, [GERMAN] was the word for the local speech and Hochdeutsch. And of course, father came from Rheinhessen, where they-- I think the same kind of speech. He certainly used very high language. And he thought he had to do this in English.

For my mother, it was wonderful. What was funny was when she came here she had a very decided British accent because she was in boarding school for over a year in London. We lived in a part of New York that had many German Jews. It was referred to as the Fourth Reich because so many German Jews lived there together. I think my mother developed a sort of German accent. German.

For the first time there, it wasn't British anymore. She still said things like often and instead of often. But she was wonderful because she was able to see us through. She was quite talented in languages. When we were in Italy, or anywhere, she used a Baedeker and she talked to people very easily. So that was very helpful.

So you first stayed in a hotel, and then how did things work out?

Yes, my father was horrified because the hotel-- we were in one room and it cost $95 which was a lot of money then. And he somehow knew somebody else and we moved to a different hotel where, for $95, we had two rooms, and a kitchen, and a separate-- no, we had three rooms for the same $95. It was on Columbus Avenue, right opposite the

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Museum of Natural History. And there was a train still, elevator that went through there, which then was taken away.

But we were in the museum constantly. We lived there for about three months and then moved to an apartment in the Fourth Reich on Riverside Drive. Very nice. Seven rooms. It cost $72. I have the first lease.

A month?

No. No, no, no. Yes. Pardon me. A month, yes. But it was seven rooms. And it had a long corridor, so all the paintings were lined up.

And family paintings, when I think about it, we destroyed because we didn't-- nobody wanted them after we moved my mother out and after we were married. We had paintings of the great, great grandfather, rabbi, twice. We didn't want them to fall into different hands. When I think it, it's terrible. We burnt them. And we had paintings of-- this is me.

Of course there was one of Paul and there was one of Ellen. We still have the one of-- yes, those exist. But we had paintings of my father's brother, of my grandmother, and unfortunately, we behaved very badly about this as young marrieds who had modern apartments. And-- terrible. But we have photographs of most of them.

So you arrived in February, and did you go to a public school right away?

Yes. Yes, and my parents, after we were here three days, decided we should go to school. So we asked where the nearest school was. And I was enrolled in one and my sister was enrolled in another. And luckily, a relative took over and just said, this won't do. And how she did it, she got my sister into Julia Richman. My sister spent her four years in Julia Richman. After we lived on 160th and Riverside Drive, she was certainly not entitled to go there, but she was able to stay there.

And she got me into P.S. 9 which was a very good school. And I was immediately assigned a girl, who had been here for a few months, as my guide. This was very helpful because she told me the rudimentary things, that we had to wear a midi blouse on Wednesdays, and say the Pledge of Allegiance and things like that, which did not have the words "under God" yet, which came in under Eisenhower.

And then when we moved to I was put in to the public school near where we lived. And they put me into the right age group for me instead of what I-- of course I had been much more advanced because somehow, in Germany, you are advanced. So what happened, I became the best in the class within three months that I knew English. The first time around, the first term that I passed things, was incredible because I cheated like cra-- because the kids helped me.

Civics and American History, which I knew nothing about. And the school wasn't so dumb. They put me into 6B which was the slow class, and that's where I became absolutely the best. It was the easiest thing in the world except in sewing. And there goes-- do you want to hear a story like this? Well, it was very funny.

They prepared us. By the way, I then began to skip classes like crazy because they advanced me when it became plain that I had been advanced. At any rate, they were trying to get us ready for a home echo class that we were going to have. And we had to have an apron and a thing for our heads. And they gave us the cut out apron and we had to put an edging, a bias on.

So I took it home and I did what I thought was right. And the teacher looked at it and said, this is terrible. Take out all the stitches and tell your mother to help you. So I realized that my mother had no idea what could be done about this. She could crochet but she couldn't sew. So I did very small stitches and everything was fine, and the teacher accepted it. And then we had to go home and starch the thing.

So my mother and I looked at-- by the way, we brought starch. Whatever we could, we brought. So we had detergent which wasn't detergent yet. I guess it was soap. And we had starch. She and I read the thing and we tried to starch it, and it came out in waves.

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So I brought it in and the teacher said, this is terrible. You go tell your mother to help you do it. So I took her to a Chinese laundry and when I brought it back, the teacher very wisely said, well, I knew your mother would help you. And I must tell you I was proud that my mother didn't know how to do it. Because as I said before, she knew more about oratorios. She was a lovely mother, so she didn't know how to do these things that she was never privy to learn.

So you did well in school. And how did you get-- how did you decide or how was it decided that you go to a high school of music and art?

Well, I could draw. My father could draw, my mother could draw a little, too. I was not a super talent. And incidentally, I was given art lessons, I think partially because my father wanted to give some money to the woman who taught me. And music and art was a goal because it was-- as said, by that time I was 13. I was going to the galleries like crazy.

It was wonderful here. And so I took the test and I succeeded. I got in. And it was a very wonderful thing to be in because the teachers took us very seriously as little artists, little musicians. The music students were exposed to a lot of art. We were exposed to a lot of music. And Stokowski came to conduct, Bernstein came, Laguardia, who built the school, came and conducted. But it was very, very special.

And we hung out-- I had a clique-- and it was called the clique because this French girl called it that-- and we went to the modern art all the time. We had artists pass us. We saw all the movies. In those days one could get in all the time. And as said, we went to galleries and I began to go to the Met. And then I supered at the Met.

And then was the goal to get into a decent college. And Barnard was by far the choice. Were you-- no, I'll ask you later. Yeah. At any rate--

Was there a tuition to pay to go to Barnard?

Yes, yes.

Because you could have gone to a trade school.

Yes, my sister went to Hunter. But frankly, while I was the better student-- and there was also this-- my father had a cousin who was a librarian in Washington who said, let her go to Barnard if she can get in and let her make contacts. It's important to make contacts. My sister, by the way, had gotten married to a young man who is exactly from the same background. And she left Hunter in the second year.

Well, at any rate, Barnard cost $242 for one semester in the beginning. By the time I left it had doubled. But I had a scholarship by that time anyway. But $242 sounds like absolutely nothing and it wasn't. But a top secretary made 1,250 a week. And as I said, rye bread cost $0.09. So I have to say, I worked every summer to buy my own wardrobe and books.

Were you living at home or in dormitory?

Yes. No, I lived-- that was absolutely understood, that I would not put my parents in a-- I never for one minute thought that I would go to an out of town school because of the cost. But there was also something else I have to admit. I think the family was so tightly knit that the idea of putting myself out of the nest would have been very difficult. I remember saying to myself, my father is now advanced in years.

My mother was much younger. She was 17 years younger than my father, which was because of World War I. And besides, in Europe, the husband is established before he marries. But 17 years is a vast difference. That's why there was this business. She was sort of one of the children and was even thought of-- that was so funny. When we bought tickets once in a while at a railway station, the man would say, one adult and three children because my mother was so little and looked so young. I'm sorry, I forgot my train of thought.

We were talking about Barnard, but I wanted to ask you a little-- I wanted to backtrack a little and ask you how your

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father made a living because he had a plan to do something in Texas--

Yes, yes.

--and apparently that fell through?

Yes.

So what did he do?

Well, he couldn't be a lawyer because you had to go through law school completely and he felt he was much too old for that. But he had some money. And a friend of his who had come from outside, which was the town that my father was born in, this man had come here much, much earlier. And he was in the jewelry business.

They became partners. My father was the money bags. And that's how he made money. And the other thing is, as said, the relative had had him invested here, so my father was in the market which was very different from the German market. And I remember he got a phone call from his broker every morning around 11 o'clock. And we used to joke about this because my father would say, how is the market? And the answer was, "veak."

But he parlayed this money to support a family of five until-- my brother was drafted, so a family of four. But a family of five again when my grandmother was brought in. And he sent money to this Doctor Geissmar, Johanna Geissmar, for instance. And we were sending care packages to Germany all the time, including to my nanny.

He supported my sister's husband who also was drafted immediately. His father came to the United States. My father supported him. My aunt who came from Palestine, until she got settled and was able to work. He was supporting people right and left and it was incredible that he was able to do this because we didn't have a huge amount of money.

Was your apartment a kind of meeting place for other German refugees on the Upper West Side?

Absolutely. And as a matter of fact-- boy, you hit on something. Every Friday night-- and this is how my sister met her husband. We belonged to this congregation I mentioned. And there was a very, very exciting rabbi. He was an Israeli and he formed a youth group there. And the youth group met. And that youth group, several kids-- kids they were. They were 19 years old. My sister was 17, no, 19.

Well, at any rate, they would come to our house. My parents always had coffee at 11:00 o'clock at night anyhow. But they came after a meeting. They'd be at our house by 9 o'clock every Friday night. And a musical record playing took place. And I remember we had a Zenith that dropped the records.

And they would establish a very well chosen concert. It was carefully picked. And of course, coffee was served to all of these young people. The result was that my sister had three offers of marriage in one week. She picked the wrong guy because they were divorced by the time-- look, I think she was 17. No, she was 19. He was 21. They were separated for four years and they were growing up differently.

Her second marriage was much more successful. But I was lucky because I met Gene after the war. And in my sister's age group, there were many, many divorces. In my age group, it was far, far better.

When did you become an American citizen?

With my father.

When was that?

In 1944. We came in '39. It took five years. And that's interesting also. I found my ID card and it said country, none. And we were not allowed-- we were enemy aliens, even though we were Jewish. We were not allowed to travel out of

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New York further than 75 miles. Japanese were, after all, put into camps. That did not happen to German Jews.

But there were these restrictions. But life here during the war was really not challenging. Well, you're too young to know, but we never-- we were restricted. We didn't have so much sugar and we were restricted in how many pairs of shoes you were able to buy. And if you had a car, which we didn't, your gas was restricted, and stuff like that. But nobody ever went hungry. And nobody-- and luckily, of course, nothing happened here.

Do you remember when Germany declared war on Poland? Do you remember--

Yes, I remember the--

--September, '39?

And it was very frightening. Because we really-- and my father was a pessimist and my mother was silent about this-- were saying, there, there. Well, in the beginning, it looked as though Hitler-- that the Nazis and the Japanese were going to take over the world, that they were going to win. And it was so remarkable. And my father then talked about this with such respect that we sort of overnight became a nation that was able to switch from building cars to building airplanes.

And he also respected the law here very, very much. Harvard asked him to send his reminiscences about the law in Germany which was put under lock and key because we still had relatives in Germany, so he didn't want Harvard to publish anything. But he did contribute to the legal changes that were made.

Incidentally, his brother had written a text that was still used after. There are only three law texts that was a fairly definitive text. I don't know when they stopped using it, but it made its way past the Jewish problem. What else? You are asking good, good questions. You should prod me on.

Well, these gatherings in the--

Yes.

--Upper West Side, did you speak German or English?

I think only English. Though, look, I speak German still, but it's the German of an 11-year-old. My sister could write much better than I could. And she did the Wiedergutmachung after my father died. And she was able to still write much better and know where to put commas. I didn't know where to put commas. And to this day when I write German I have to think very, very hard.

But I can guess German now has changed also. And to read ads, they make no sense to me very often because there are words in there that I have never heard that I think were created the way Kant created words. By the way, I have to say in Barnard, you had to take a language exit before you got your degree.

And they were idiotic. They decided that English was my second language. So I was allowed to take it in English which was a riot because I had decided not to take any language in Barnard. I didn't want to waste my points on languages. I had taken four years of French at Music and Art with my mother helping with the homework not only for me but all my friends.

And what did you major in, in Barnard?

Philosophy.

And what was your goal? Did you want to teach afterwards?

No. The relative who decided that I should go to Barnard, said, whatever you do, don't major in English. Everybody majors in English. So we had a very wonderful department in those days. 25 majors in my class were philosophy. Now

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if they get three it's very good.

I minored in psychology and music, of course. But because I doubled up, I took a lot of stuff. And I met my husband, and he went to Columbia, and we saw each other a great deal. We didn't meet because of the school. That's a whole other story.

But New York was quite, quite wonderful. But in the midst of my being at Barnard came the Iron Curtain and the fear that it was all going to start again, and the fear that World War III was a tremendous threat. I remember we had nine newspapers in those days in New York. And I remember the Journal American had a front page where they said if the bomb hits on 34th Street, and they had circles, these people are going to die immediately. These people are going to die in two days. These people are going to die in three months.

It was totally taken for granted. And I remember-- by the way, I made my living as a writer. I spent my four years at Barnard reviewing movies, and opera, and theater, so I thought I was going to do this for the New York Times but they weren't waiting for me. So the job I could get was in writing. Frankly, I'd won a lot of prizes and this was because I realized that at Music and Art, all these kids who could draw far better than I could, I majored there in sculpture. I wasn't bad, but I wasn't like these real talents.

But I learned early on that I could write. And I won scholastic awards and all kinds of nonsense like that. So I knew that I wasn't going to use philosophy for becoming a librarian which he thought I should become. And I knew I was going to go into writing. And I went into advertising. But later on, I had a syndicated column and had a business that Gene thought up.

When we had children, with his help I formed a thing called the copy pool, a freelance copy group. I still wrote what I wanted to and I had people whom I sent out. And it didn't become a huge business, but it was able to pay college and vacations, and it helped.

I want to backtrack a little to the war in the United States.

Yes.

Your brother became a citizen too?

Yes.

At the same time that you did?

No. I think they made the soldiers citizens automatically. What we didn't know and what only came out much, much later, on the dog tag would be an H for Hebrew. A terrible mistake. Because when the Germans caught anybody who had dog tags with an H, they didn't put them into camps the way they would take other people. They put them into-- and you must know about this-- work camps where they worked them to death.

We didn't know that here. We would have worried even more. I knew one friend who went to the Aleutians and they didn't make the people who went into that area-- he wasn't a citizen. But I think the soldiers who were sent into Europe were made citizens. My sister became a citizen by herself but, as said, because I was a minor I became it with my father.

Do you remember when your brother was drafted and what--

Yes.

--the reaction of the family was?

Yes.

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And can you talk about that a bit?

Yes, he was Camp Upton for a while. That was nearby so he would come home and he brought buddies home. He was in the United States for a while. But as said, he was in the second wave on June 6, the invasion. And he went through a great deal.

And he went into Germany and he visited our governors. And he saw the destruction of the house where we lived. He took photographs, which I haven't located. I don't know where they are. Maybe Ellen had them. I don't know. His leaving was-- well, it wasn't so terribly sad because he was stationed in England for a while and we were beginning to feel that we were going to win.

When was he drafted? You mentioned the age of 17?

Yeah, when we came here he was 17. He wasn't drafted immediately. We came in '39. He wasn't drafted until '41. So he was 19.

Was he enthusiastic? Were your parents enthusiastic or were they reluctant to have him drafted?

Well, I think maybe a little mixture of both. Simply reluctant because of the danger. But certainly very patriotic. And as said, my father had this tremendous respect that all of a sudden this country could pull itself together. And there was this. Everybody thought the same way. It was very good because everything was for the duration, and everything was for the war effort.

And we all bought war bonds. And I became a member of the AWVS Junior group. I was not allowed to wear the uniform because I was an enemy alien and that hurt my feelings a bit. But we rolled bandages and we did all kinds of things like that.

And I remember that we were there also to escort the USO, to help visiting Army and Navy people. But as said, yes, once in a while we thought that-- I think my father became an air raid warden. It was thought that there would be bombing here but it didn't happen.

Did you have blackout at night?

Yes, yes. Absolutely, yes.

Did you have to paint the window panes?

No. No, but we drew curtains. It wasn't as strict. It certainly wasn't what England went through at all. But we were listening to tomorrow's broadcasts. The Times was read in the morning and the World Telegram was read in the afternoon. We were fully informed. One listened to the radio a great deal.

But somehow I felt-- well, in the beginning I didn't feel safe here. I must say, when we were in the second hotel, I remember this very clearly, that I kept a coat on a chair near my bed because one would constantly hear the wobble of the police or the fire department. And that always reminded me of the German situation. And it took me a long time to get over that. Well, I'm sorry, by the time we were in the apartment I was no longer doing that. But this is where I feel we did not go unscathed because there were things like that. And my father and my parents-- maybe not so much my mother. As I said, she was a more optimistic person, but my father had us feeling that we could lose the war early on.

It took a while before America entered the war.

Yes, yes.

Do you remember meeting any part-- you mentioned Sir Thomas Beecham. Do you remember meeting any of the expatriate artists or people who had--

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Yes.

--escaped your--

Yes.

Could you talk about that a bit, please?

For instance, does the name Claudio Arrau mean anything to you? OK, well, my mother had piano lessons by the same person in Berlin, but that's not how we got to the Arraus. One of my sister's friends-- lovely, and she's still alive, who went to Julia Richman-- they became very friendly. She was the stepdaughter of Hugo Kolberg. I don't know if that means anything to you. He was the first violin under Furtwangler for a bit. And he came here. He was very lucky.

He was married to her mother who was Jewish. And they left Germany when she was not allowed to go into her box in Germany as you might know. Very often, the first violin would be the soloist. Hugo was going to play something and Hitler was going to be in the audience, and she was not allowed to go into the her box. And they decided then and there that they should get out of there.

So Hugo Kolberg came here and, as said, was not Jewish. But he was spared the whole horror of the war. Well, the daughter and Ellen became these great, great friends. And through her, we became introduced to the NBC Symphony. And they were close friends of the Arraus, the family.

And so I spent a part of a summer at the Arrau house. Ellen worked, at one point, with Ruth Arrau, who was a photographer. And when you say meeting expatriates, at the Arrau house, I met AndrÃ© Breton. And his wife became his wife, Elisa-- well, I knew all kinds of people. I knew Bernstein's wife because of that and, of course, because I supered, I got to know-- I was [? Londgren's ?] page, so I was onstage with Melchior and Traubel. Not that I knew them, but they were very friendly. They were lovely. And we were all in love with Ezio Pinza and I supered with him all the time. But the expatriates I met at the Arrau house were very impressive.

Because Varian Fry helped bring many of those people over from France.

Who did, pardon?

There was an American who was the first righteous gentile named by Yad Vashem. His name was Varian Fry. And he was sent over to help artists, and labor leaders, and composers, and people who are in danger to leave Europe. This was before America entered the war. It was 1940. And AndrÃ© Breton, and Ã‰luard, and Masson, and Man Ray people.

Yes, yes. Well, I met Breton. And it was unfortunate because my French wasn't good enough. But I also met people like Grete Sultan. I don't know if that means anything to you. And I also met, through my Barnard connection, Paul Tillich, for instance. Well, I have a great friend still from Barnard who married Pauck. Does that mean anything to you?

He was here already. He came in '22. But he was very instrumental in Tillich's coming. And that was impressive. Tillich was a big deal for me to meet.

And you majoring in philosophy.

Yes.

Did you go to any classes at the New School?

No.

Because there were many Europeans who were teaching there, too.

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Well, I'll tell you why I was connected to that a great deal. I said I reviewed for the Barnard Bulletin which came out twice a week. I was not the Barnard bulletin editor. I didn't want that because I wanted the About Town which was the review thing. Every time Piscator was here-- I reviewed a lot of the plays he did. And I was able to take Gene and other friends because there was two tickets.

So my connection to the New School was only that end of it. But I knew about many, many people. And Piscator was doing fabulous stuff here. And he introduced Sartre's work and marvelous things. I said New York was just a treasure trove of culture. And I wished that my French had been better because I didn't get everything that was said at the table with Breton.

Where did Arrau have his house?

First in Queens and then they lived in Douglaston. And of course he was on tour a great deal. But he was quite a charming man. How come that you know all this? You're too young.

I wanted to ask you about how you met your husband. Was he from a similar background?

No. He was born in Brooklyn. On both sides, huge families. We met because the Old Vic was in New York for the first time. And it was the first time Shakespeare played the way it should be played, and it was fabulous.

Well, the last night, I had gone to interview Olivier and I have a whole thing that I can show you. The last night was Oedipus Rex and The Critic. And Oedipus Rex is the best performance of anything that I've ever seen. I was on line because there were no tickets. I was on line to go standing room that night.

And Gene went on that line and couldn't get in because only 30 people got in. And he had other tickets. He wanted to go to the matinee anyway. Well, at any rate, he saw me on that line. He had just come out of the air car.

He was out two weeks only. And somebody was on the line with me who was a great friend of his. When Gene went to Columbia later, this friend thought that he must certainly know me because I went to Barnard and he thought every Columbia man knows-- which was nonsense. But Gene wrote to me and I picked it up in student mail. I still have the letter.

And the letter ended up by saying if you are a child afraid of strangers, don't answer this. But if you are a woman-- so that I couldn't resist. So I called him in the dorms. He lived in the dorms. And we met and the rest was family history.

The greatest thing about Gene was that he had a fabulous memory. Bergson says, mind is memory. Gene was a fabulous student. I had to take copious notes. He didn't. I carried huge books. He had a little notebook with him. He made our very nice living as a writer. And I think he was pretty darn good at it.

What was his specialty?

He was a business writer. But by the way, one book is published. He wrote a book about his childhood in Brooklyn which didn't make it because it fell between-- it wasn't a novel and it wasn't a history. Nobody seemed to want it.

He was a very lovely man and it's a tremendous loss. I lost him two years ago. We had 58 very good years, but it wasn't enough. His background was not a truly educated one at all, but he was extremely educated because he read. He read, and read, and his memory was there.

So when did you get married?

In 1950. Oh, he wanted to get married early, of course, but I had to work for a while. I decided that I had to prove to myself that I could make a living, so we got married in 1950.

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And?

And we waited a long time to have children. Ned was born in '56 and Will was born in '60. And we are very lucky because they live nearby. That wasn't always the case when-- first of all, when Ned was in Princeton, Will was still with us. We lived in Scarsdale. We lived in New York where there were no apartments.

And I mentioned this before. My sister and her second husband had a baby and they were looking for an apartment. We were looking for a better apartment than we had. And Gene was working as a newspaper man at that point and his paper went to bed late at night on Fridays. So my brother-in-law and I went looking for apartments together. And in those days, there were no apartments.

But when an apartment opened on the side of a building would be a mention of it. And we were on Riverside Drive in the '80s and it was very cold. And we saw a sign. And the doorman said you wouldn't want it. It's 12 rooms and my brother-in-law said, we want to see it.

And we went upstairs and the superintendent showed up. And my brother-in-law said, this is big enough for two families. And the super said, would you be interested? And that's how the idea was born. In those days, they'd had not broken up the large apartments yet. There were no co-ops yet.

So then when the idea was born, we looked at, must have been 50 apartments, until we found one that could be divided evenly, where there were enough rooms, enough bathrooms, enough everything. And we found one on Central Park West, a luxury apartment that was incredible. It really had everything. We had two maid's rooms that was on the outside so they could be used as rooms. One became a darkroom and one became a dinette.

And there were three major bedrooms and one became the nursery. And our bedroom had its private bath and the Wolfson's had their private bath. And then as Ned was born, we lost the dinette but it was all right because the kitchen was an eat-in kitchen. And we had enough space. It was fabulous.

We had a foyer large enough so that we could have four card table sizes, so that we could have 16 people for dinner, which we did very often which was easy because it's very easy when two families cook. And then when Will was born we lost the darkroom. And we lived this way for nine years.

And we were going to get six room apartments in the same building and the Wolfson's came through. Ours didn't. We stayed in the large apartment for a while but it was going to be de-controlled. So we moved two blocks away. But we still-- the children were raised in the same playgrounds. The families are very closely knit because they grew up sort of as siblings instead of cousins.

And then we lived apart for 10 years. And then we didn't want to buy one house. We were going, again, to look for two houses, and then we realized that we could afford a much better house and a much better part of Scarsdale where the school was very important to us. That was really because Ned was off to Princeton already. Will still had to go through several years of middle school and high school. And my sister and her husband had a brand new child that was going to go to private school all the way up. In New York, of course, all the kids were in private school which was terribly expensive, actually. So we took a large house together in a good section of Scarsdale and lived that way.

And Will went off to Emory which was in Atlanta, which was far away. But as you know, he has his MBA from Wharton. And he met his wife in the first bank that they both worked in after they got out of college. She went to Wharton and he went to Wharton later. And then Ned met his wife at Princeton. She was a year under him. And they both have two children, as you know.

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