

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Elen Elke Chajet Murad on November 12, 2013, here in Washington, DC. And I'd like to start by thanking you, Mrs. Elen, for coming to speak with us today. We're very interested to hear your story, very grateful that you are willing to share your story.

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

We start our interviews really at the very beginning. So that's where I'm writing. My first questions will be with you. I would like you to tell me your name at birth, your date of birth, and where you were born.

OK. Elen Elke Chajet. I was born in Paris, France, May 27, 1935.

How do I spell Chajet?

C-h-a-j-e-t.

And can you tell me a little bit about your mother and your father, their names, and where they were born?

OK. My father was born a [PERSONAL NAME] or Chajet. We used to call him Abel--

Abel.

--in Paris, of course. Chajet in Hebrew would be translated into Chayat. And my father was a tailor. His father, grandfather were all tailors. He was born in a shtetl, Janã³w, or Yaneve in Yiddish, Lithuania. And he was born in 1886.

Can you tell me his first name again? I didn't quite catch it.

Abel--

Abel.

--or Tzvi Abel.

Oh, Tzvi Abel.

Yeah.

OK.

But we used to call him Abel.

Elen, why don't you take just a sip of water?

Could you?

Yeah, OK.

And make sure she just looks at you.

OK. Can you see me?

Yes, vaguely.

OK.

Your shadow.

So he was born in 1886?

I think it was 1886, yes, in a family of eight, nine children.

OK, so that's from Eastern Europe.

Yes.

What about your mother?

My mother was born in Lithuania also in a shtetl called Eisiskes or Eishyshok in Yiddish. Her name was Chana Burstein.

Burstein.

Burstein. Their name was changed a few times. The spelling of the name was changed.

Well-- and what year was she born?

She was born in, I think, it was 1903.

So she was quite a bit younger than your father?

Yes.

I see. How is it that both of them from Eastern Europe, and not from even big cities, but from small places, ended up in France?

Well, my father first was drafted in the Russian Army for the First World War. He was taken prisoner in Belgium, and at the end of the war he decided to go to England with a cousin.

Ah.

[INAUDIBLE] cousin had the same name. So his cousin was allowed to get on the ship. And from there, he went to Ireland. But my father then decided to go to Paris. He met my mother, and they got married in April of 1926.

So tell me, how did your mother get to Paris?

She had a cousin in Paris already, a couple of cousins, and they had sent for her. And when she was young, she was a dressmaker. So in the beginning, she worked with my father. And then in 1928, my brother Isaac was born, so she stopped working.

I want to, before we get to your life in Paris and your family's life in Paris, I'd like to find out a little bit about these places that they came from. Your parents, were they storytellers? Did they tell you stories of their own childhood?

Not much.

Not much?

You know, after the war they were different.

I'm talking before the war.

No, but they didn't talk too much.

No?

No.

So you didn't know much about either Jan³w or Eishyshok--

No.

--or any of these things?

No, until I went there last September.

I see. I see. So in your mind's eye, what kind of image-- did you know you had relatives there?

Yes, and my father had about seven siblings, married with children, and one brother who immigrated to Paris almost at the same time as he did. And, of course, they were murdered in September 1941.

The people who remained in Eishyshok?

Yeah.

And in-- yeah.

And my mother, in Eishyshok, also came from a family of eight siblings. One, the oldest brother, had gone to Boston in 1920 when he was very young. And the youngest brother came to Paris in the early '20s and got married and had a family.

So she had two brothers already in the United States?

No, one.

One.

The youngest one stayed in Paris--

Excuse me.

--and joined the French Army during the World War II.

OK. And the number-- and so out of eight siblings, three were in the West?

Yeah.

And five remained there?

Well, three were out of Eishyshok--

Three were out of Eishyshok.

--if that's what you mean.

That's it, exactly.

And five stayed in Eishyshok and were murdered also in September of 1941.

All right. OK, since you say that as you were growing up, your early years, there weren't any stories--

Well, very, very little stories. My father went swimming in the nice weather. They were very poor.

Were they? Do you remember that? Tell me about how you lived.

Well, we were all doing fine in Paris after my brother-- as I said, my brother Isaac-- was born in 1928. In 1931, I had a sister, my sister Eva or Hava. I was born in 1935.

The youngest?

No. Then there was a baby brother born in September of 1940.

Ooh, what's his name?

Leon, Lipman--

Leon.

--or Lipman. And of course, September 1940 was not a very good year--

No.

--to be born because the Germans invaded France, marched into Paris in May of 1940.

And you would have been a five-year-old girl then?

Yeah.

OK, let's stay back a little bit about your pre-war life.

Yeah.

OK, tell me do you remember where you lived and what were--

Oh, yes.

--the surroundings?

Yes, we lived-- my parents were religious.

I wanted to ask you that.

Yes. So we lived in the Jewish quarters in Paris called The Pletzl. This is the fourth arrondissement in Paris. And we had a good life, I guess. My father was doing fine. I went to--

Did he have his own shop?

He worked from the house.

OK.

But he was doing only men's clothing.

So he was a tailor from men's suits?

For men suits. Not for large company. He was doing it for himself.

OK.

He was self-employed.

OK. And so he had clients for--

Coming. Yes, he had mainly Jewish people or clients. And they were also non-Jews at the time.

And did your mother also partake in any of this activity? Or was she a dressmaker with him?

No, just in the beginning. But after my oldest brother was born in 1928, then she stopped working and--

And she stayed at home?

--he was doing fine. Yes. Yes, because my father was working from home.

And so did you see him a lot? The kids--

Oh, yes, of course.

--saw him a lot?

Of course.

He wasn't a distant kind--

No, no, no, no. Very, very nice. My father never raised his voice. Neither did my mother. We were a good family living a normal life.

Tell me a little bit about the-- did you have your own home? Or did you rent an apartment?

No, it was in apartment, an apartment building.

And do you remember anything about the--

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Well, describe it for me. Paint a picture.

It was a nice apartment on the-- we would call it here the fourth store. That was really what we called the third in France.

That's right. The third floor, but here it would be the fourth floor.

Yes, it would be the fourth floor. Lots of windows. Two very large bedrooms with marble fireplaces--

Oh.

--that, of course, we never used. The entrance was quite large. There was a bathroom on the left and a small kitchen. And from the entrance, you would walking to the large dining room. And at the end of the dining room was a very large room where my father worked.

His work room?

Yes.

OK. So were there any other rooms in the apartment?

Well, we had the two larger bedrooms and that was it.

So it was everybody?

Yeah.

A six family, six people in the family fit in three or four rooms?

Yeah, yeah. But they were large rooms. And we had the bathroom, which was, in a way, unusual. Because a lot of apartments had the bathroom in the hall--

Yes.

--and people had to share. So we had a nice place. My father was doing well.

So I want you to explain for me, earlier you had said they were very poor.

No. My grandparents. I meant my grandparents were very poor in Eishyshok and in Jan³w.

What was your grandparents' profession?

My father's father and grandfather were tailors.

In Jan³w?

In Jan³w. My mother's father was a rabbi and a shochet.

Tell me, what is that?

Shochet? Well, he's the one who takes care of the animals.

Oh, so making sure they're kosher?

Yes.

OK. Does that mean he also participates in the slaughter?

Yes.

I see. So he knew how to do it in the way that was appropriate?

Yes.

OK. So it must have been that he was quite prominent in Eishyshok?

Yes, yes.

Did your mother tell you stories about him, about what kind of a person he was and what kind of a childhood she had?

Well, she-- see, my grandparents passed away. They were young. They were in their early 40s.

That is young.

Yes, it is young. And from what, we don't really know. But my mother-- her mother passed away when my mother was three years old.

So in the early 1900s?

Yes.

1904, 19--

Yes.

So she didn't know her?

No, she didn't know her mother, but her father remarried, of course, because we have to take care of the children. And from what she said, their--

Stepmother?

--stepmother wasn't very nice. But that's all. So she never told her a lot.

Was she the youngest or the oldest in the family?

No, she was somewhere in the middle.

OK.

There were older sisters and brothers.

Did they help raise her? Were they sort of--

I suppose so, I suppose.

OK.

You see, up until the war came in Paris, I was five years old, so my mother didn't tell too many stories. And after the war, it was a different type of person.

Yeah, yeah. Do you remember whether they got letters from their families back in these towns?

No.

No.

No, no. My father's cousin who had left Belgium with him at the end of--

Abel?

--19-- my father was Abel, and his first cousin had exactly the same name and last name, who went to England and then on to Dublin in Ireland and settled in Dublin, used to receive letters from his siblings. But after 1941--

Of course not.

--they stopped.

So you didn't have a sense, I mean, in some ways, I'm trying to get a sense that in your family, you didn't have a sense, when you were a child, that there was a whole clan of people, many, many relatives somewhere far away?

No, I knew they were, but because I was only five years old--

Of course.

--I didn't know much. But my mother had a sister who lived around the corner from us, married you with her daughter, Esther.

So, in other words, you had at least some relatives around you in Paris?

In Paris. And my father had one brother, a wife, who had three sons.

OK.

But we used to see them, as far as I can remember, not too much, not too often.

Why would that be?

Because the war started.

OK.

And it was hard.

OK, I'm still talking pre-war days.

Yes, yes, I understand.

What language did your parents speak at home?

Well, we spoke Yiddish with my parents, but among with my two brothers, or my youngest one was a baby, my oldest brother and oldest sister, we spoke French. Never, never in Yiddish.

Never in Yiddish?

No, my parents were fluent in French, but it was a habit. They spoke Yiddish between themselves, and we spoke Yiddish with them, so we learned.

What were your older sister and brother like? I mean, were they-- describe to me a little bit about the relations between

the kids.

We were close, very close.

Yeah?

Yeah, and my brother was-- well, they were both very smart in school.

Were they?

I know that. My sister was playing piano, was taking piano lessons. So we were well off, not wealthy, but well enough. My brother was very sweet, and he was a big brother. My sister, who was three years older, four years older than I was, it was the big sister taking me with her to school when I was in nursery and kindergarten.

Do you have any memories of school?

Yes, a little bit.

What do you remember?

Yeah, I remember going there. And I was like a five-minute walk from where we lived. Because, as I said, we lived in the Jewish quarter, so most our neighbors and friends were Jewish. And in school, about 90% of the students or the pupils were Jewish also.

But was it a public school?

It was a public school, yes.

OK, so it was run by the French government, the state, basically?

Yes. But I went to nursery school. I remember going under their little door that was not higher than that and then kindergarten. And then war came.

What would you think, I mean, this is a hard question to answer, but do you have memories that you would say are your earliest memories?

The earliest that I can think of, I think I was about three years old, we're in the country, and I had an ear infection. I remember that, and we were together. And I was on my father's (VOICE BREAKING) shoulders. I'm sorry.

And your ear hurt?

Yeah.

Do you have any memory of what the countryside looked like?

No.

No.

I know it was a small house that I suppose my parents had rented for the summer.

So tell me a little bit about your parents, their personalities. You said your father never raised his voice.

Oh, no, no.

He worked at home.

Very nice, very nice always. I remember him taking care of my baby brother, who was born in September of 1940. My mother was not well, and he was working hard, taking care of the baby. And I used to go with my sister and buy the food shopping, to the grocery store.

What happened with your mother? In what way was she not well?

Well, she got sick after she gave birth to my brother.

OK. Her fourth child?

Yeah.

OK.

Then she was better, but it took a long time, a long time.

Had that happened after each of her pregnancies? Or was it--

No.

--just the last one?

I think it was the last one because she knew it was war.

So she was under stress?

Yeah.

She was under a great deal of stress. Do you have memories of her before the war of what her personality was like?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. She was singing, talking, receiving her cousins. She had a couple of cousins and, of course, their husband and their children, so they used to come to our place. And I remember--

Did she have help around the house?

No.

So she did it all herself?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And your older sister, did your older sister help out?

Oh, yes, of course, of course, of course. She had to.

So there's school life. There's people coming to the home?

Yeah, yeah.

You live on the third floor or the fourth--

Or the fourth.

--floor of a nice apartment building that has marble fireplaces and--

And the two bedrooms.

--and an indoor toilet, two bedrooms.

Oh, yes. Yes. Yes, we were doing well.

Did you ever go, let's say, to the center of Paris to walk around? Did you see much of the city? Or was your world pretty much the fourth arrondissement?

It was mainly the fourth arrondissement. But I'm sure that my brother and sister were going out of the area. But I was only five, so I was not really going too far. But I remember my sister taking me to the gardens, the park. There were a few not far from us. We would walk and play and come home.

You mentioned that your family was religious.

Yes.

In what way? Tell me how were they observant?

Well, there was Shabbat, of course. Kosher. My father was going to shul every day. And--

Did they go to synagogue regularly?

Oh, yes, on Friday night.

OK.

Yes, yeah.

And you and your brother and sister?

We used to go once in a while. But my father used to go every morning and every evening. And, you know, Shabbat was very important. We had the challah. My mother lit candles. Good memories.

Tell me, how did they look. In your mind's eye, how did they look? Tell us what your father looked like and your mother looked like.

My father was not very tall, maybe 5' 6", 5' 7" at the most. Brown eyes. My mother was short. She was maybe 5' 10", 5' 11". Blue eyes. Very, very curly hair, a little reddish, she told me, when she was young. And they had a good life together. I don't remember ever listening to them arguing. Well, everybody argues, but not fighting.

And you felt they liked each other?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

So there was warmth at home?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, we had a good life. It was warm. It was nice. I remember my sister and brother-- [CLEARS THROAT] excuse me-- bringing friends after school. And my father would tell jokes in French with an accent.

[LAUGHTER]

Did you have anybody in your world-- you mentioned your father sometimes had non-Jewish clients.

Yeah, very few.

Very few.

Very few.

Did you have any exposure to non-Jewish children and other people and so on and so forth?

No. No, not really. Because, as I said, in school--

90%.

--almost everybody was Jewish. And my father's clients who were not Jewish, we didn't talk to them. You know, they would come in, go into the back room where my father was working, and he would close the door. But when they were Jewish, we knew them. They were our friends. And sometimes they would bring their children.

And you would play with them?

And we would play with them while their father was being measured for a suit.

Did your mother make your clothes and your sister's clothes?

No, my father did.

Oh, he did?

Yes.

He did?

Yes.

Did he sew well?

Yes.

Did he make nice dresses for you?

Yes. And coats.

Oh, wow. So he not only made suits for clients, he more or less dressed his own family?

Yes, yes. I don't remember ever buying an outfit, even when I was older. [LAUGHS]

Wow. And your mother, did he make clothes for her, too?

Yes, of course.

And was she pleased with how she--

Oh, absolutely. We would go and buy the fabric and tell him what we wanted.

Well, in some ways, custom tailoring.

That's right. It's supposed to be expensive.

Yes.

[LAUGHTER]

Exactly. Chanel.

Yeah, that's-- well, it was not exactly Chanel, but it was nice.

It was custom?

Yes, yes.

Or as the British say, bespoke.

That's right. Sur mesure we say in French.

How?

Sur mesure.

Sur mesure.

Measure, because my father had to measure the arms, the shoulders, the legs, and called it sur mesure.

Did you have vacations in the countryside often? You mentioned your earliest memory being there.

I remember when I was about three. And, I think, after all that, it got difficult. It got difficult after all that because of knowing that the war was coming. And it was already bad in Lithuania, in Poland. So I don't think my father felt that he should, I guess, spend money instead of sending money back home.

That's what he was doing, huh?

Yeah.

Yeah. Well, this territory, the places your parents came from, the borders shifted.

Yeah, yeah.

Sometimes they were Poland. Sometimes they were Lithuania .

That's right, depending of the day.

Yeah, yeah. Did you sense, I mean, as a small child, very often the older people in the family, the parents, and sometimes even older siblings, try to keep the worrying things that are happening in the world outside, that is not have the child exposed to them? Maybe it's very hard to say, but can you tell me, did you sense that the atmosphere at home changed as 1939 came around and 1940 came around?

Well, we could hear our parents talking because we knew Yiddish. So they couldn't talk behind our backs, so we knew.

And there was the radio, and we could hear the news on the radio coming from Eastern Europe.

What kind of things would your parents be talking about?

Well, about the families left in Lithuania who couldn't come out.

Well, at that time, yeah, that's true.

It was too late to leave. And to leave, you needed money. And you needed, I guess, the right papers.

Well, by 1940, it was part of the Soviet Union and the borders were closed.

Yeah, yeah.

So you sensed this kind of nervousness?

Yes, yes, of course. Of course.

Do you have any memories at all of the day the Germans marched in?

We heard about it. And we know that they marched in Paris in 1940 and everything changed.

How?

So there was no television, obviously. But we knew because right away, the stores were almost empty. We had to wear the yellow star-- the word Juif.

Did your father have to sew those on?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, absolutely. I wore it also. Yeah. We knew that there was a curfew that started. I think it was about 8:00 PM for Jews. And we couldn't go food shopping until a certain time of the day. But by then, the shelves were almost empty.

And were you doing this with your sister and brother because your mother wasn't well?

Yes, yes. So we used to go out and wait in line, and the lines were very long. And by the time it was our turn, there was not much left in the stores.

Was it one line for Gentiles and Jews, or separate lines or separate stores?

I don't remember. I cannot tell you.

You don't remember?

I don't remember.

But you must have been small and all these other taller people in those lines?

Well, and I was small for my age at the time. But we waited in line. And I remember waiting and waiting. And it's tiring for a child to wait.

And it would be all three of you in the same line?

Yeah.

Why did you need to have three children go to one place? Why wouldn't it be that one child is in one line and another's in another line?

I don't know. That's how it was.

I see.

And we had rations cards.

OK.

So if we wanted to buy milk, it had to be stamped. And on the ration cards also, there was a big J on it for Jewish.

Do you remember, in those lines, whether anybody mentioned that you were Jews? People, let's say, out on the street. Did you feel more conspicuous than other people?

Yes, because it was almost like being, I wouldn't say naked, but you had that star.

You're marked?

Yeah, we're marked. That's how it was. So people sometimes would turn around and look. Some would just pass you because they didn't care.

Since you lived in a Jewish neighborhood, were most of the stores that you went to Jewish stores?

There were a lot of Jewish stores, but there were some that were not Jewish in a few streets near our building. So if we wanted vegetables, we would go across the street.

And the vegetable store was not owned by someone Jewish?

This one was not.

OK.

This one was not. Where we would buy the dairy was not Jewish. But then there were other stores a couple of streets away that were all Jewish, all Jewish. But they closed earlier.

They closed earlier in the day?

Yeah.

Well, tell me, in order to buy food for a day when you went out, the three of you, how many stores did you have to visit?

Well, sometimes two. Or sometimes we would go back home empty-handed.

Oh, really?

Yeah.

So you would have waited in all those lines, and then you get and there's nothing there?

Yeah. Yeah. (QUIETLY) [SOBS]

It must have been very hard for your father. I mean, very hard for you, but he had to carry it all on his shoulders.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Did his manner or did his personality change? Did you notice?

No, my father was always nice. Always sweet, always very helpful.

So he was a support?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. He had to. He had to.

And mother?

Mother wasn't doing too much because, as I said, she was not well.

And may I ask, was this postpartum depression?

Yeah, I think that's what it was.

So she was--

But at the time, we didn't know the name of it.

It must have been frightening for a child to see momma change.

Yeah. Yeah, of course. Of course, because she never did too much in the house. She couldn't. She was taking care of the baby. And, you know--

And that's about all she was able to do?

Yeah, sometimes she would cook a little bit, but mostly it was my father cooking.

What happened with his clients? You know, the people who used to buy suits from him before?

Well, after a while, they stopped coming. They stopped coming because a lot of Jewish people lost their jobs. If they were teachers, they're losing their job. If they work for banks or for the government, they lost their jobs. So no job, no money.

And no suit.

And no suit, obviously.

Did the Jewish stores eventually close?

Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. I suppose they didn't get enough customers. They didn't get enough food.

Did the stores that you went to, the shops, did the shop owners know you by name? Because you was around the corner or across the street?

The Jewish stores, yes. Yes, they would know.

But the Gentile ones, not?

No, no. No, they didn't know, although we used to go there also. But they were not friendly. In the Jewish store, the people knew us, and they knew my parents from years and years, for years. So they knew them by name, and they knew us because we used to go with my parents, especially with my father, shopping, food shopping. So they knew us.

And the ones that were not Jewish were not friendly, and they were not warm in that way?

No.

They weren't personable?

No, they were not friendly with anybody. I don't remember them being friendly with anybody. But we would go to the Jewish stores, and it was not only or saying, hi, how are you and talking about food, but there were more conversations, especially the adults.

Yes.

Especially with what was happening. So everybody had stories to tell. And it was a place to also mention if something was going to happen over night or when it got very bad.

So how did your father support the family when no one came to buy suits anymore? What happened?

Well, there was not much food to buy anyway. So you didn't need too much money. As long as the rent was paid--

Well, that was a question of mine.

Yes, so that was the most important. Well, you must have had some money aside put away. And the landlord was very nice. He was not Jewish, but he was very, very nice. He lived above from us. And he says, if things go bad, don't worry. I'll help you. And he did a little bit.

In what way?

Well, when It got very bad and we had to hide, he allowed us to hide in one of his little apartment that he had next to the one he was living in. And well, then, after that, it got so bad that that was not enough.

Do you remember seeing any Germans when they first marched into Paris in May 1940?

Well, they were walking down the streets everywhere.

And was this before you had to wear the star or after?

No, after.

After.

After. I remember after.

And did you have any contact with them?

No.

Or they have any contact with you? Did any of the soldiers make any comments or things?

Well, they were looking at us. And being a very young child and short, you know, they were looking. But at the time,

1940, there was nothing too bad going on. It started really in 1941.

OK, so you have the year when France is occupied. Life changes dramatically and drastically.

Yeah.

And there are shortages. Were there days that you didn't have anything to eat?

Well, very, very little.

What would it be?

It would be a piece of bread or bowl of milk.

And that would be it?

Yeah.

And these products you would buy daily? Bread and milk and so on, yeah?

Yeah.

This is, again, a kind of silly question, but I want to ask you. Did you have any refrigeration in the house?

No.

So the habit was, even before the war, that people bought what they needed to eat--

Every day.

Every day.

Every day, yes.

And so there was no stockpile and no reserves that one could have?

No, no, no. We couldn't stock up or anything. And how long do you stock up even cans of food?

Yeah.

You know, you can't. And most of the stores didn't have much to sell. But for Jews, who were not allowed to go shopping, to go to the stores, until it's almost the end of the day, most of the food already had been bought by the non-Jews.

So do you remember the hour by which you were able, you were allowed to go out? Was it like 12 noon? Was it 3:00 PM?

Oh, it was later. It was later. And 8 o'clock were the curfews, so wherever we went, we had to make sure that we were back home--

By 8:00 PM?

Oh, yes, absolutely.

So it would be like, late afternoon is when you could go?

Yes. So there was not much left on the shelf anyway. And after waiting in line for maybe an hour or maybe two, there was not much. And plus, with the ration cards you couldn't buy as much as you wanted.

Do you ever remember your sister or your brother buying things on the black market, in addition to the ration cards?
No?

No. No.

I wonder if there was a black market.

I don't know.

I would assume there must have been.

Oh, there must have been because-- there must have been. I don't remember my father bringing any--

Extra, huh?

--extra. And my father was very straight. I don't think he would have gone for something that was not really the way it should be.

You mean, even if the rules were cruel and unfair, he would not have broken the rules?

I don't think so. No. My father was the quiet type, good, nice, sweet, but the law is the law.

Were you afraid during this year? Do you remember? Were you afraid?

Oh, yeah. Oh, we were all afraid because we didn't know what was coming next.

What were you the most afraid of, as a five-year-old, six-year-old child?

I was afraid when I used to see the Germans because they were noisy. They were walking very fast and making noise and talking very loudly. And they had their guns. So that's frightening for a child.

Did you hear of people being arrested?

Yes. Yes, one of my uncles was arrested in 1941, and didn't come back.

And what relation? Was this a father's relative or mother's?

No, it was my mother's brother-in-law.

OK, so her sister's husband?

She had a sister-- husband. Yes. And they were neighbors.

They were next door to you almost.

Yes, two streets away. And they were neighbors who-- you would talk to them. I guess my parents would talk to them. And two days later, we would say, oh, what happened to so-and-so? Well, we don't know. Somebody said he was taken somewhere during the night and disappeared.

Your aunt's husband, that is, your mother's brother-in-law--

Yeah.

--do you know any circumstances of how he was arrested?

I know that he came from Eishyshok. I know that he was a tailor. And he went outside of Paris-- oh, I don't know-- maybe two or three hours south of Paris. I don't know if he was trying to-- what he was trying to do. He was caught and sent back to Paris. And from what I remember my mother saying, after a few days, they came and they got him and that was the end.

Do you know who "they" were? Were they German soldiers? Or were they the French police?

They were both. When they used to come at our door, banging at our door, they were always Germans and the Gestapo and French. Always, always.

So was this in the first year, or was this after 1941?

That started in '41.

OK.

'41.

Do you remember the first time they appeared at your apartment?

Oh, yeah. (VOICE BREAKING) Yeah. They came and banged at the door. It was always during the night, so nobody was ready. [SOBS] My mother wanted to heat some-- a bottle for the baby. So they pushed her to the floor. They beat her up. There was no time to wait. You see, we had to go.

They were arresting you?

Yeah. But up until 1942, they had rules that they were not keeping family's record, a baby under two. My brother was not two yet. And so we went to the police station, looked at the papers and so on. And we were sent back home until the next time.

So this was the first time that they had appeared, and it was arresting the whole family?

Yeah.

And had it not been for your brother, what would have happened?

We would have been taken away like other people, like neighbors and who we knew that were arrested. You know, people knew there is going to be a rafle, a--

What is that?

A roundup.

OK, a roundup.

A roundup tomorrow or the day after. So we used to look-- my father used to look for a place where we could hide. But you can't always hide. Where are you going to hide?

Well, especially with four children.

With four children and a baby who might cry. So we would wait. And they would bang at the door, like I said, and they would come in and they would take our papers, go through the police station, wait there for a few hours, because we were not the only ones, and then we were released.

But the first time this happened is when your mother wanted to heat up some milk, and she was thrown to the floor. Who did that?

The Germans, the French.

You don't know specifically whether it was--

They were always together. It could have been a German soldier. It could have been the French taking over and pushing her, beating her.

Did they speak in French when they came into the room?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, of course. The French soldier-- policemen.

Policemen?

They were policemen, not the soldier. I'm sorry. They were the French policemen.

And the Germans spoke French, or they spoke in German, or they didn't say anything? If it was Gestapo, you said, who came by.

Sometimes they spoke in German.

Did you understand any of it because you spoke Yiddish?

Yeah, I understand a little bit because of the Yiddish. My parents knew exactly, of course. But the French policemen were talking to us, hurry up, and we have to go. And, of course, at five years old, you're not an infant anymore.

No.

And by then I was almost six.

Do you have any idea how many times this happened? I mean, to have the knock on the door, to be arrested, to go to the police station--

[CLATTERING]

--to come back-- excuse us for a second. Can we break?

What happened?

I was hitting pause trying to get my best. Sorry for it.

It's OK.

We're OK.

And we roll?

Actually, we can break for a second.

Do you want to break for a minute?

No, I'm fine.

We're going to break for five seconds because we just want to--

What? Too, when we had what we call the big rafle, the big roundup of July 16, 17, 18, 1942, and the Jews were taken to-- have you ever heard about the Vel d'Hiv?

Vélodrome d'Hiver?

Yes.

Tell me about. What is that?

This was before the war. It was a big-- how would I say-- a big area where people would race on bicycles.

OK. Was it a race track?

Yes, an indoor.

It was an indoor race track

Indoor race track where people would-- I suppose they were professionals. And in July of 1942 when about 20,000 Jews were round up and sent there for at least-- some stayed over a week, but it took three days to round up the Jews. And at the time, there was no rule if you have a child under two, we're going to leave you alone. Everybody was taken.

Your family, too?

We were lucky not to be taken there. We were hiding in the cave of our building.

In the cave?

Under the building there was a cave where we used to-- we had a coal stove. Everybody in the building had a coal stove, not a radiator.

Right.

And that's where the coal was kept. We would buy the coal, and the man with a huge bag on his back carrying the coal would go down under the building. And we each-- people from every apartment had like a cage, a little place where we knew this belonged to us. This is our coal. And that's where we hid at the time behind the coal.

So it wasn't a basement, it was just sort of like a holding place as a cave?

No, we had to go down the stairs to get there. So it was really a cave. It was a cave. was large enough, but very dark. So you needed a battery tool when we used to go down.

So tell me, what's the difference between this cave and a basement?

Well, the basement, I guess, is where some people can live. But this was really a cave.

OK.

There was a big wooden door I remember. And you went down the stairs. And because there were several like little rooms, so we used to hide behind the coal. Not that the Germans didn't come down.

Oh, that's what my next question would have been.

Of course. But at the time, I guess, we were hiding far, far inside and they didn't see us.

Did other neighbors hide there, too?

Some of them during the bombings.

And what about the roundups? Would there be during the roundups the entire building would kind of go to the coal place?

No, no, no, no.

So how was it that only your family got to go?

We did because that's where we used to hide during the bombings that started also in 1941. And we grabbed our gas masks, I remember, and running down and spent some time until the siren would start again to let us know that, OK, it's safe now. So we knew about where to go downstairs. But then the Germans must have found out where all Jews were hiding. And they were looking everywhere anyway.

What's curious for me is why there wouldn't be more people in your building, your apartment building, who wouldn't go there, too. You don't know?

Maybe they had other places to go and hide.

OK. But when you went, it was only you and your family?

Yes, yes.

OK. And so during that roundup, that large roundup in July--

In July 1942.

--1942, you weren't taken. Your family was not taken because--

We weren't taken because we were hidden quite well. But after that, my parents realized that we had to separate. We couldn't stay together. And we couldn't stay all of us in the apartment because the Germans used to come and look for us.

So before we go to that, so this would be when you'd be leaving your apartment, do you remember your address?

Oh, yeah.

What was it?

16 Rue Sainte Croix de la Bretonnerie. It's a long name.

Oh, wow.

It's a long name. Paris, fourth arrondissement.

Wow.

And my aunt, my mother's sister, and her daughter, Esther, they used to live two streets away in the center of what we called The Pletzl. It was only Jews. They lived during those years across from the school.

Do you remember their address?

Yeah, 27 Rue des Rosiers.

Rue des Rosiers.

Like the roses, you know, the flowers?

Oh.

Just a couple of streets away. And my father had a brother who lived maybe I would say 10 minutes walk from us.

Do you remember his address?

His address was 65 Rue [FRENCH]. It was also the fourth arrondissement, but a little further away. Not exactly The Pletzl, where all the kosher butchery were, the fish market, and my school.

Do you have an idea of how many times before this big roundup for Vélodrome d'Hiver, or Vel d'Hiv--

Vel d'Hiv.

--is what you said, do you remember how many times the Germans had knocked on the door and you were hauled to the police and then came back?

Oh, many times, many times. It could happen once a week. It could happen twice a week. It was always the same routine, banging around 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, waking up. Not knocking, banging. And it was very frightening especially to a child and to my parents, I'm sure.

Of course.

Because it was, is this the end?

Yeah, you never knew.

No, no, no, no.

Did they ever take anything?

Not while we were living there.

OK, so it wouldn't be you'd come back and you'd find the apartment ransacked?

No. This happened after the war.

After the war?

When my parents went back to the apartment.

What did they find?

Nothing. Everything was gone, the floors.

The floors?

The floors, yes.

The wood floor?

The wood floor, the marble floor in the dining room. The electric wires were ripped off. The walls were-- how can I say-- full with holes. They must have been looking for money, jewelry, or whoever did it.

The owner of that building, was he still living there?

I don't know. I really don't know. I know that after the war he had moved. He had moved maybe during the war, but after the war, I know that he was living somewhere else. Yes.

So clearly no items had stayed?

Oh, no. No, no, everything was gone. Everything was. And the only thing is I don't know how my parents realized that they should save the photo album. So that was the only thing that survived.

So it must have been that they took it with them or something?

Yes. When they went into hiding themselves.

So let's go back to the height-- first of all, do you know what happened to all the people who were rounded up at this bicycle track?

Well, I know from my uncles, aunts, and cousins that they never came back. I know that they stayed a few days at the Vel d'Hiv. Then they were sent to Drancy outside of Paris. And then they were shipped to Auschwitz. And I know that they were murdered within a few days. Because I got papers from Serge Klarsfeld--

Oh, yeah.

--who worked on survivors and whoever died during the Holocaust. And there are books, and I have some of his papers.

And so were their names listed on transports or things?

Yes, yes, transport number, where they were sent, when they were gassed. So most of them within a few days or few weeks of getting to Auschwitz.

So tell me who in particular in the family had been rounded up and was sent there? Was this your mother's sister or was this your father's--

First there was my father's brother, his wife, their three sons. They were not taken to the Vel d'Hiv. They were taken during the day in a big truck. And neighbors had told my father, so I know it's true. The Germans came to the apartment, rounded up quite a few Jews. They were among them. And when the three sons, who were 12, 14, I think, and 15, came home from school for lunch-- at the time, we used to come home from school between 11:30 and 1:30, I think-- and when they saw their parents in the truck, they ran to them. So they, oh, those are your sons? You go.

So they took them, too?

Yeah.

Can you tell me their names of the family?

Oh, well, their name was Chajet because it was my-- their sons were called, one was Zalik, and the two others, I cannot remember. I have a blank, but they were young.

And the parents' names, do you remember those?

Yeah, Isaac was my uncle. And his wife was Sivre.

Sivre?

Sivre, I think it was. I do not remember them too well. I have a vague recollection of them. But I remember my mother's sister.

What happened with her?

Well, she was taken. She's the one whose husband had been--

Arrested.

--taken in 1941.

OK.

So she was alone at home with her daughter Esther, nine years old. And when the Germans came to get them on July 1942, she was told to pack a little suitcase. And my cousin Esther, [SOBS] nine years old-- I was sick that day in July. The windows of my bedroom were open, and I heard her calling. So I looked up and she said, you know, the Germans are coming, so I just came to say goodbye.

Oh.

It was sad. And I always thought I should have told her to come upstairs and I didn't. And I didn't say it.

You were seven years old.

Yeah.

And how were you to know?

Just didn't think about it. [SOBS] I'm still very sad about it.

What did Esther look like?

She was pretty, black hair, black short hair. I was a blonde, curly hair.

Did you play with her?

Yeah, I remember her so well, so well. And I remember her mother. I don't remember her father because-- I remember seeing him maybe once, maybe twice. But her mother, my mother's sister, her name was [PERSONAL NAME], Dora.

Dora?

Yeah.

[PERSONAL NAME]?

[PERSONAL NAME] was in Yiddish. So we used to call her Aunt-- Tante [PERSONAL NAME]. And Esther.

Your mother must have been broken up, too.

Never got found.

No?

Never, never. No. And then we decided it was-- we decided, my parents decided, it was time to separate, to be sent away. And that's when we went our, each a different way. We left Paris. And my sister Eva and baby brother Leon went to Normandy.

In Normandy, they were taken in by a nice couple. But my sister never talked about them. Never, never mentioned anything, even after the war even when she was older. Excuse me.

That's OK.

Never mentioned anything.

So how do you know they were a nice couple?

Well, she mentioned that. Well, my baby brother who at the time was two by then, very blonde, big blue eyes. I remember one thing that my sister said, was telling us, that there was a, how you call it, a priest there where she was with these people. And when she used to take my brother for a little walk, he would always manage to stop them and say, he's so beautiful and already Jewish. That's what I remember the most.

And at the time, just before the war, city children were sent to the country for the summer. And this couple--

And so you were, too?

No. Just my sister was sent to this place about three hours south of Paris, in a very little village called Arleuf in the Nièvre department. And this couple agreed to take my sister for the two-month vacation. And she had a good time. She was happy. And after the summer, she went back home and back to school and so on. My father remembered this couple very well. So he got in touch with them.

He had met them before?

I don't think he had met them. Because a train would bring the children to that little village and people would be at the train station and say, oh, I'll take these two boys for a two-month vacation. I'll take this little girl. A lot of people had farms so they were happy to have children, 10, 12 years old, to help for the summer. And it was great for the children because they had a good time. They were away from the city. And this couple--

Can I interrupt just for a second?

Yes.

There are a couple of thoughts that come to mind. Number one, it sounds like this would have been one of the few times that the children in your family would have been mingling and been associating with non-Jews.

Yes, but it was only my sister.

Only your sister?

I don't know why. My brother never did.

So that's the first thing is that--

Yes.

And the other thing, I mean, I'm trying to imagine what your father must have felt. That at such a moment, he's probably claspng at straws.

Yes, yes, of course.

He hasn't met the people.

No.

He's only heard about them from his daughter. And he thinks maybe they'll take one of my children. Is that right?

Yes, absolutely. So he got in touch with them, I suppose, by letters--

OK.

--because we didn't have a telephone, of course. And they agreed to take me in. So my brother Isaac, who was 14 at the time-- yeah, I think it was 14-- and I went by train to Arleuf. And I remember so well the train was packed with German soldiers. And there was nowhere to sit. And for about, I think it was about three hours South of Paris, we were standing. And I'm a child, I'm tired. I guess you learn from the hard times that that's how it is and you don't complain. So we arrived there, he dropped me off, and he went back to Paris.

And did he and you have the Jewish letter on you at that time?

I suppose we took them off because we couldn't have been in 1942 on the train packed with Germans.

They would have sent you to--

I suppose, because I do not remember.

Did your brother look-- excuse me for putting it this way-- did he look Jewish?

I don't think so. He had blue eyes. Both my brothers had blue eyes, curly hair. Well, curly hair, they say it's a sign of being Jewish. [LAUGHS]

But, you know, there are people who could be spotted right away and others not necessarily.

Yes. No, I have to say that even my parents had the straight nose. Like I said, there's Jews with a hooked nose. No, we--

They could have passed for Gentiles.

Yes, yes. I think especially with the blue eyes.

OK.

Otherwise, he still had the brown eyes. But taking after my father, I have, I think, green eyes. But nobody really thought. Once the star is off, I don't think there was a way to really recognize a Jewish child. But I heard that later on, after my brother Isaac went back to Paris-- I don't know how. I think from the people who were hiding me, they found a couple not too far away from where I was but in a different village who took in my brother Isaac. So he went back there. But I didn't know that until the end of the war.

So he left you there. Your sister and your baby brother are up in Normandy.

In Normandy with people they didn't know. I don't know how my father found these people. I don't know.

And she never spoke of them afterwards?

No. Just about the priest.

And this was 19--

She said they were nice, that's all. That's all.

Did she come back a changed person? Did you recognize her? I mean, it was three years. Probably different if you were in 1942.

There was a big change in all of us. And so I had forgotten how to speak Yiddish, which was very difficult on me because my brother was making fun of me. And I have to speak French with my parents, but they would answer me in Yiddish. So I would learn it again.

So you had forgotten Yiddish?

Yeah, it was three years. It's a long time when you're a child.

That's true.

Yeah.

That's true. So, yes, you're right. Not only your sister would have changed, everybody would have changed. But was she particularly-- what kind of a personality did she have? And was she a very outgoing girl? Or was she a shy girl?

She was outgoing. I think she was the one who was the most outgoing, more than my bother. My oldest brother was shy. So was my little brother. I guess medium. But my sister was very outgoing. And it was a big thing to take care of an infant. Because the baby--

It's a huge thing.

--was only two years old.

And she wasn't much older.

No.

She was 12?

She was 12 at the time. So it was--

It's huge.

It was a big, big responsibility, but the only way we could hope to survive. And my father was hidden somewhere in Paris, which he never gave too many details either. And my mother somewhere else. And none of us knew if we would survive the war.

So you had never had any idea?

No. Never had any contact at all until the end of the war. I was the last one to get back to my family.

OK. Let me go back to your sister for a minute.

Yeah.

So was she still outgoing when you saw her again? Or had she become more serious? How had she changed?

Well, she was more serious. Because don't forget, for three years she was taking care of an infant, of a toddler, for a young child. And she had to do some work for the family where she was hiding. They were not just going to take two children and not have at least one of them do some work. And they had the farm, so there were chores.

But after a while, after the end of the war, things got a little, I wouldn't say really normal, but a little bit because we had to. We survived and we're here. As sad as it was, my parents were always hopeful that some of their relatives would survive. So they used to go every day looking at the list. Every day or every other day, there were a list of survivors, a few of them. But they always come back empty-handed.

It is quite amazing, though, that your entire family did survive.

Yes. Yes, it is. Well, I would call it, we were lucky, it was a miracle, but also there were good French people. They were good. A lot of them were just telling the Germans where the Jews were hiding because they were getting maybe more ration cards or they just didn't like Jews. But we were lucky that my parents found three families for us. And they were lucky also. We were lucky that they found two families who agreed to hide them.

It's particularly amazing given the limited, almost non-existent, contact--

Yeah, with the non-Jews.

--that they had had with non-Jews before the war.

Yes, yes, yes.

Because that often could have been-- you know, people will help people they know.

That's right. That's right.

But they are less inclined to help people they don't know.

Unless you are a good person and you believe in goodness and helping, like these people who really took care of us. I was with this couple who was wonderful, wonderful.

We'll talk about them later.

OK.

Because I want to talk now, I guess, about-- I mean, we jumped. But those three years, I think we'll handle after lunch. But right now let's talk about the last time you see your parents and then maybe the next. So you remember going on the train with your brother?

Yeah.

They wouldn't let you go alone, you were a child.

No, I was too young.

You're too little. Somehow they must have gotten tickets for the train, which also could have been difficult.

Yes.

Do you remember, did they come to the station with you?

No, no, no.

Did they tell you where you were going to be going? Do you remember the conversation with them?

I just remember that they told me I was going to leave with another couple and, of course, to behave and be polite, and not to ask for anything that they wouldn't offer to me. I remember that. And, I had already grown up for four or five years without asking too much, so it was not so difficult. I was not going to ask for more clothes and more shoes or more because there were none.

Did you have any toys as a child?

No, never. That's why I built, I made that little wooden doll. You saw it?

Yes, we'll talk about that later, too.

No, I never had any toys.

So even before the war when you say your parents were quite well-off, and your father supported the family and you didn't want for anything, there were no dolls and there were no trucks?

No, no. We didn't have any toys. Some books. I remember books, but we never had, like you said, the trucks or the dolls or the--

Did you miss them? I can imagine a child would.

Yes, I always wanted a doll, a big doll, a talking doll, that I never got.

Did you ever get an explanation as to why not?

Well, it was very expensive. And what do you need a doll for? You have a baby brother and you have--

[LAUGHS] You have a live one.

Yes.

Do you remember saying goodbye to your parents?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I remember saying goodbye to my parents and--

Was this--

--we were hugging. But I knew I was going away. I knew I was going to the country. I knew I would not see them for a long time.

Did you say goodbye in your apartment?

Yes, yes, yes.

OK. Do you remember what they looked like as you were saying goodbye? Can you paint us a picture?

They were crying, you know? And then they knew that we're all going to be separated, not just me going away and they would stay together.

Were you the first to go?

I was the first one to go, yes. Because my parents, at the time, had gotten in touch with them. And they got in touch with another family, like I said, for my brother Isaac, the oldest one. But how did they find somebody for my sister and brother in Normandy, I don't know.

I'm also sort of curious about communications. How much there was censorship and how much there was-- your parents are getting in touch with people by mail, people that they don't know. And did the Germans have-- I mean, I know you don't have an answer to this question, but was mail being monitored and opened and read and then returned? Or was that, they were too busy doing other things that that was a relatively easy way to communicate?

I don't know. I don't know.

I know. I know you wouldn't. I know you wouldn't.

I don't know.

It simply is curious that--

I have wondered also, how on earth did they get it? I know that they had written to the couple who took me in. Especially the couple in Normandy, who took my sister and baby brother, I don't have any idea how on earth did they find them.

And you never met them? The family never met them after the war.

No, no. They only met the people who took care of me.

And they didn't meet the family that took care of your brother Isaac?

No, no. And I'm the only one who kept in touch with the people who I stayed with almost three years. I stayed in touch until they passed away. That I'll tell you later.

Yeah. So tell me, did your mother and your father ever talk about who they were with or how they survived that time?

They were hidden, each one of them, in a different area of Paris. I remember they were telling me it was in a very small home. So I don't know. They were getting a little bit of food once a day. But they also didn't know. My father didn't know where my mother was, and my mother didn't know where my father was. And, as I said, after the war, they really didn't want to talk about it. And us children, even when we grew older, we didn't want to ask questions.

Why?

Because it was sad. You know? (VOICE BREAKING) Now I'm sorry. I should have.

I think people do what needs to be done at the time or don't do what doesn't need to be done at the time. I think that there are rhythms of life, and that person has to be ready to be able, particularly with things like this.

And they were not ready to talk.

Yeah.

No.

Well, did you tell your own children?

Yes, yes. And Gary here knows most of it.

So I'm just going to say for the record that Mrs. Elen's son, Gary Murad, is here today as well. He's brought his mother. And he is one of your children.

He's my youngest one.

Tell me how many children do you have?

I have three, a daughter who has three boys. The oldest one is going to be 17 at the end of the week.

Oh, wow.

The second one is 15. And the little one is going to be 10 in February.

What's your daughter's name?

Judy.

Judy.

Yeah.

OK. And then--

And I told my grandsons.

You did?

Very little, very little. Just that the times were bad and I was hiding. But they don't know all the details. That's why I said if I have the video, I would show it to them.

Of course, of course. And you have another son, you say?

My oldest son Jeffrey has a little boy who is going to be seven in February. And Gary's not married yet.

[LAUGHTER]

And your own children, were they curious when they were little?

Well, I don't know if they were curious, but I started telling them, showing them pictures of their grandparents, my parents, and the two great-grandparents. I have it, the only picture I have from one of my grandfather and one

grandmother. And just talking a little bit.

OK.

Because I don't have any pictures of the rest of the family. Everything disappeared during the war. Everything was taken away.

Let's talk a little bit about your brother.

Yeah.

Your two brothers and your sister.

Yeah.

Let's start with the child who would have had the most-- the oldest.

Yeah, Isaac.

That would have been your brother Isaac. He was how old by 1945?

He was born in '28. So that makes him 17.

OK. When he came home in 1945, how long did he stay with the family?

He stayed with the fam-- oh, their family away?

No, with your own family. That he comes back to mother and father.

He never married, so he stayed with my parents always.

I see. I see. And did they end up staying in France?

My parents stayed in the same apartment. The owner kept the apartment for my parents.

Did he?

Yes, which was very nice. He even took my father's sewing machine. That was very important because how can you work without the sewing machine? And he gave it back to my father after the war. But my brother was working with my father at the time. He was not in very good health. He was always very, a sickly child, my oldest brother. And he never married, so he stayed. And my parents left Paris in 1965 and went to Brooklyn, New York.

Uh-huh, and he went with them?

He went with them.

OK. So for 20 years, they were in Paris together?

Yeah, yeah.

Who did the repairs on the apartment?

I don't know.

You don't know.

I'm sure--

It must, I mean, because it looks like not just your items were taken, but it was major structural renovation.

Yes, yes. Everything had to be redone, but my father was renting it.

Yeah, so he didn't own it.

No, he didn't own it until before leaving Paris. That most apartment buildings were up for sale and people were buying their own apartment. So at the time, like in 1962 or '63, my father finally bought the apartment. But at the time, I suppose it was the owner who had to repair it. But I remember also we had wallpaper on the walls. And my father had to hire somebody every so often to change the wallpaper, and he had to pay for it.

This is after the war?

After the war. So I wonder if he had to pay for the repairs.

It's a question.

I don't know. I don't know.

It's a question, yeah. Clearly, if it had been his property, he would have had to.

Yes.

But when it's not--

Yes.

Yeah. What happened with your sister? Did she stay with your parents?

My sister-- yes, well, after the war, of course she stayed. And she finished her studying and got a job as a secretary and got married in 1955 in Paris with a young man who had gone through-- a survivor from Eastern Europe, from Poland, I think, who had moved to Brooklyn, New York. He was on his way to Israel to visit a sister who had survived. And he met my sister, and they was married very fast. And then they both went to Israel to visit his sister, and then they went back to New York. So she lived in New York with her husband.

In Brooklyn?

In Brooklyn, I mean, in Brooklyn.

Yeah. What part of Brooklyn?

The religious part--

Well, there are a few.

--because he was very religious.

There's Williamsburg.

No.

Bensonhurst?

No. Forgot the name of it, I did.

Flatbush.

No--

Flatbush?

Flatbush.

Flatbush.

OK.

13th Avenue, in that area.

OK. So it was very fast if she met him while he was on a trip?

Yes, well, he spent-- well, he was supposed to stay a few days. He had a brother also when they escaped the Holocaust, and he was teaching my baby brother for his bar mitzvah. And one day he mentioned that, oh, his bother was coming from Brooklyn on his way to his Israel. And we said, well, that's nice. We would like to meet him. And he met my sister. But Hasidim, very, very religious.

Did your parents like him?

Yeah.

Yeah?

Yeah. He was a nice person. He was good.

And your youngest brother, tell me, what was his path then after the war?

Well, after the war, he went back to school. And then my father sent him to a yeshiva just outside of Paris called Yavne, Yavne Yeshiva. And he studied there. And when he turned 18, my sister from Brooklyn insisted that he should come to America. Because at the time, there was a war going on between France and Algeria. So he went. He immigrated to Brooklyn and finished his study there in a yeshiva, of course. And they got married a few years ago.

A few years ago?

Yeah.

So he waited a long time.

I think he was, yeah maybe his late 30s, 38 maybe, to get married. And he has three children.

And he lives now in Brooklyn?

Yeah, he's still in Brooklyn.

I'm curious, I mean, does he have any memories of this family that he stayed with?

No, no. He doesn't remember. He just knows that he was with Eva in Normandy. But he doesn't remember. And Eva, at the time, was trying to tell him, but he couldn't remember. He was too young.

Yeah, of course.

At two, three, four years old, it's--

Well, I've been asking you about your memories, but between the ages three and five, one has impressions, one has a scene in one's mind.

Yes, yes.

And that's about it.

Yeah.

You know?

Well, like I said, I remember my father holding me because I had an ear infection, but that's all. Then I remember, then it seems to me that I was just going to the store waiting in line for food. That I remember. And because I think these are things that stick in your mind because they're not normal really.

No. You're right.

That's why.

Neither. They're so totally different instances, but having an ear infection is not normal.

No, no.

And being in line is not normal.

And being in line for hours and waiting and for food. And maybe there is just a little bit to buy or nothing because there is nothing left in the store. This sticks in the memory of a child of four or five years old.

Yeah, yeah. Well, I think maybe we'll break for right now.

Whatever.

And I think lunch will be ready in about five minutes.

Oh, wow.

It should be.

There you go.

OK, I'm good.

This a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Elen Elke Chayat--

Chajet.

--Chajet Murad--

[LAUGHS] Yes.

--on November 12, 2013. And before we go forward, I want to clear up a few things. We spoke in the very beginning that the two towns that your parents came from in Eastern Europe were Jan³w and Eishyshok. And we mentioned that they were in Lithuania. But it seems that that's not entirely so. Is that true?

Well, it changed from Polish hands to maybe Lithuanian hands and maybe even Russian hands.

OK, so what we're talking about are towns that were in this territory that was on the borderlands--

Yes, Yes.

--of Poland, Eastern Poland, and Western Ukraine, Northern Poland, Lithuania. So Jan³w, from what I understand, it was west of Bialystok.

Yes.

And Eishyshok had been at different times either in Polish hands or in Lithuanian hands.

That's correct. That's correct.

OK.

It was not too far from Vilnius or Wilno.

OK.

Yes.

The other thing that I think we wanted to clarify was that your brother Leon, he got married at what year would you say?

I think it was 1974. Oh, '72.

And he had come to the United States--

In 1958.

So it took a while. I mean, he didn't--

Yes.

--marry young.

No, no, no.

I see. I see. And does he have children?

He has two daughters and a son. And the oldest daughter is married and has four children.

Oh, wow.

The middle daughter is not married and the son is still studying.

Are all your siblings still alive?

No, my sister Eva passed away in Brooklyn, New York, in 1970.

Young.

Yes, she was young. And Isaac passed away also in Brooklyn, New York, in 1996.

I see.

Never married.

And Leon?

Leon is still living. He lost his wife a couple years ago, but he's still living in Flatbush near Brooklyn. And he's a happy grandfather of four grandchildren.

That's a nice legacy.

Yes, Yes

So let's now go back to the part of your story that we kind of deliberately left to the side. Because it's such a crucial part, I wanted to devote time to it, more time to it.

OK.

Isaac accompanies you on the train to this small village south of Paris.

About three hours.

About three hours. What was the village name again?

Arleuf.

Arleuf. And did he bring you to the house of this couple who were going to take you in?

Yes, he brought me to their house.

And you do you remember your first impression of what it looked like?

Well, it was very small, very small.

Was it in the middle of the village or somewhat--

It was in the middle, yes, in the center of the village. It was such a small village. There were maybe five, six, or seven roads.

Wow.

Not even streets. And that's where I spent the next three years.

Was it the first time you had remembered being in such a small place?

Oh, yes, absolutely.

Because it's so different from Paris.

So different, with the big streets in Paris. And our apartment was not very small, not too, too big, but it was much bigger than the house.

It also seems that if there are only six or seven streets in a village like that that everybody would know everybody.

Yes. And everybody knew I was Jewish.

Really?

Yeah.

Were there more Jewish children in the village?

No, I was the only one.

You were the only one?

I was the only one.

So tell me, do you remember when you first met Mr. and Mrs-- what were their names?

Dussert.

Dussert. Do you remember that moment when you first saw them?

I remember they hugged me right away. They seemed happy to have me. They didn't have-- well, Madame Dussert had had a son from a first marriage. Her husband had passed away, and this was second husband. And they didn't have any children, so they were happy to have me.

Ah. Did her son live with her?

No, no, no. Her son was already married and living in Paris.

So he was grown up.

He was an adult. And he already had a son himself. She was a grandmother, but she wasn't in her 40s.

Wow.

Yeah.

Wow.

Yeah.

So you were a child coming into their world--

Yes.

--their grown-up world. Did your brother stay there long with you?

No, he stayed overnight, and he took the train back to Paris.

Do you remember saying goodbye to him?

I remember it was sad. And I remember he said, well, don't worry. I'll be back soon, very soon. And I didn't know that he came back, but I never saw him for the following three years.

During these years, would you think about your brothers and sister often?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

And your mother and your father?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I missed them.

Yeah, of course. Of course, you were a child.

Yeah.

Did you have any fear that something might have happened to them?

Yes. Because we didn't correspond. There was no way of sending letters. We couldn't take a chance. So once I was with the Dusserts, that was it. It's as if a door had been closed.

You know, and this is one of the reasons why I was so curious before how your father got in touch with them to have you taken in. Clearly, mail can be intercepted. Mail can be read.

Yes.

Letters can be read, and yet he had made these arrangements not in person, but through the mail.

Yes. It was amazing. I think the whole thing is almost like a miracle that this worked out.

Yeah. So how did your new life begin? Aside from the fact you had no family, how did your days change? You were now seven years old?

Yeah, I was seven years old. And, see, when I arrived there, of course I didn't know them. I was very bashful, a bashful little girl, but right away they embraced me. They kissed me, they hugged me. And they were not religious. They were not rich. They didn't have a big house. They had no running water. The toilet was in the back.

In the back? Outside the house?

Outhouse, I think they call it. They had a very small yard where they grew vegetables. So my job was, first in the morning, to go and get buckets of water from a well that was further away. Then I had to feed the dog and the cat, which was fine. Feed the rabbits that were in the back of the house in a cave. Very, very dark cave. And then I would play a little bit. And when school started, they sent me to school that was one room with maybe, I don't know, a dozen, two dozen other children in one room.

In one room, and they were of different ages?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

So these were all the village children?

Yeah, yeah.

And did you get to know them?

Yes. Yeah, so while I was in school. But after coming home, I only had one friend, a little girl who lived across the street from us who--

What was her name?

Yvette.

Yvette?

Yeah. And we became very, very good friends. She was maybe a year or two years older than I was. But she didn't live there year-round. After the summer, she would go back to her parents' house. She was spending the summer with her grandmother. So it became very lonely after she left. But she used to come back for every vacation and Christmas vacation, Easter vacation.

And so you would resume being with her and playing with her?

Yes.

And her grandmother knew that you were a little Jewish girl?

Yes, yes. Yeah, it was a small village, so there were not too many people and everybody knew.

Going back to the house you lived in, was it attached to other buildings or was it its own separate building?

It was a separate building.

OK.

You mean in Arleuf?

In Arleuf, yeah.

They were all separate little houses.

OK, OK. So there wouldn't have been neighbors that-- like in your apartment in Paris, there were neighbors that you'd have in the same building.

Yes.

There was nobody like that here?

No.

Were the neighbors that were closest to the family, were they kind neighbors? Were they friendly neighbors?

Yes, yes. It was so small that everybody knew everybody. So they were nice.

So you never felt mistreated in the village?

No, never by anybody, no. No.

And they knew you by name?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, they knew my name. They knew that I had come from Paris.

You never had to have a false name?

No, because my name is Elen. So there was no--

No false papers?

No. My brother Isaac, on the other hand, had to change his first name. He cannot be called Isaac.

Yeah. What did he change it to?

Robert.

Robert.

I don't know why Robert.

Did he have to find a way of having identity papers that said Robert on them?

Yes, yes.

But did you have different identity papers?

No, I had the same papers. And I had the big J on it for Juif, Jew. So that became a problem later on.

So tell me-- well, here's a curiosity. Maybe your father didn't have time to have different papers for you, but the Dussert-
- is that how I say their names?

Yeah.

They also didn't think that you needed to get false papers or didn't know how to do it?

I don't think they thought about it even. Because who thought that the Germans would walk in into that village?

Did they?

They did. They did in '43.

Do you remember that day?

Oh, yeah.

Well, tell me about it.

They walked in-- (VOICE BREAKING) They walked in early in the morning. I can remember. It got very noisy. And there were the motorcycles, the trucks. And right away they asked, they ordered, everybody to come out of their house with their identification papers in hand. I couldn't show mine, so that became a big problem.

And Madame Dussert said to me, make believe you play with a dog. Go toward the back of the house and find a place to hide. So that's what I did. I played with a dog a few minutes, and then I went into that cave where we kept the rabbits. It was very, very dark and very crooked, I remember. The walls were not square. And I found a place to hide. And I stayed there for a long time, very, very scared.

Did you hear things going on outside?

Yes, of course. I could hear the Germans running and going, screaming, yelling, you know, schnell, schnell, because they were looking for resistance, you know, the people. They were not looking for Jews in that small village, but I still couldn't show my--

Of course.

--my ID. So they were yelling and running. I could see some coming very close to the cave, but it was so dark, and there was no doors. The only thing we had in that cave was the cage with a few rabbits.

So if there was no door, what did the opening look like to get in there?

It was a big opening, but it was so dark inside that you couldn't see anything.

And was it right in the backyard?

Under the house. When we talked about the cave, it was not a basement per se, it was really a cave. I don't know what they kept there. They kept, I think, the wood.

Potatoes maybe? No?

No, potatoes we didn't have too many potatoes. Not enough to--

To keep.

--to keep. No, they had a wooden stove to cook on. So they had the wood under there.

And you got to it from the outside of the house.

From the outside, going into the backyard, where was the little garden with the vegetables. And just in front, the entrance of the cave. So I went in and I stayed there hidden far inside in one of the crooked little passage. And until, oh, I must have stayed there for hours and hours. Until finally, it got quiet. So it got quiet. I waited for the Dusserts to come and get me, but they didn't come.

Oh.

So I was scared. I said, what happened? Maybe they, you know, not that they would forget about me, but maybe they were taken away. So finally I got out of there. And everybody was already-- the street, the road, the street was empty, so everybody had gone into their house. So I went back inside. But coming out of the cave, I had to go alongside of the house. And across from where we had a house, where we lived, were the house of the mayor. And the Germans had been so mad that they couldn't find any French resistance. They burned the house, the mayor's house-- he had a big house-- and they shot him.

Oh!

Yeah.

Did you see that? Did you see his body there?

I saw the body because nobody wanted to touch it. Everybody was afraid to go even near the house. So the house burned down to the ground. It was never rebuilt. And nobody wanted to touch the body because everybody, I guess, was afraid that the Germans might come back.

Yeah.

So he stayed maybe a day or two. And I remember they buried him in the little cemetery.

Did he have a family?

I think he had sent his family away. Because I know that he had a wife, but I don't remember ever seeing the wife. Children, I don't know. I don't remember. Otherwise, I would have remembered seeing them in school.

What a cruel thing.

Yeah. And after that, life went on.

So when you went back into the house, you saw the burning house of the mayor? Or had it already burnt down to the ground?

Oh, it was still burning. It was still burning, burning. And I know that it burned all the way down.

And when you went back inside, Mr. and Mrs. Dussert were there?

They had just walked in.

I see.

And they were happy to see me, and I was happy to see them.

Yeah.

Of course. That was the, I think, the scariest time in my life, I think.

Well, you were in such danger. You were alone.

Well, couldn't show my ID. And plus, I was very young and to stay in the place that was completely dark alone, not knowing what was happening, if they were going to find me, find the Dusserts or who knows what.

Well, the other thing is if everybody knew everybody, and everybody knew who you were--

Yes, but nobody spoke.

Nobody?

No, no.

Were there other people in the village that you got to know?

Yes. Oh, yes.

Who would they be?

They were people who had farms or some garden bigger than ours because ours was very small. People where we used to go and get the fresh milk because they had cows. And there were some people that the Dusserts had known many, many years in another village that we used to go and visit. I remember very well. As a matter of fact, I have a small picture with the whole group. But nobody mentioned me. Nobody said that I was a little Jewish girl. And they knew, they knew what would happen anyway.

Do you have any impressions? Again, this goes back to the world you were born into and grew up in, and now all of a sudden you're in a totally different world. Are there things that struck you as odd or as strange or as just different because you were now with non-Jewish people? You were with Gentiles. You were with people who came from a different background. Do you have any memories of things like that?

Yes. I remember even the food. I remember once-- there was not much food, very little food. We had some carrots, maybe a potato, a bowl of milk before going to bed. But they did the same thing. It was not only for me.

That's right.

But I remember once they had one of their rabbits killed. And it was terrible because I used to be the one to feed the rabbits. And I couldn't understand how on earth could they kill their own, almost like a child. And that was the only time that I remember having meat of some kind. But they was great people. They were loving. They were good. And they were wonderful to me. They were wonderful. They told me once, maybe twice, that if something happened to my parents, they would adopt me.

So tell me a little bit about them and how they made their living. How did they stay alive? Did he have a trade? Did she have a trade?

She didn't have a trade. But her husband was much older, like maybe, I don't know, maybe 20 years older. And he was retired. He had told me that when he was young, he was working in a circus. He was running the horses or jumping with the horses. And that's all I can remember that he told me. And he was a wonderful man also. He passed away in the '50s.

Well, tell me, what particularly made him wonderful to you?

He was nice. He was taking me for long walks. He was telling me stories when he was in the circus. And whatever he was doing, we were like a father and daughter. Little things. We would go, the three of us, in the summer, I remember, there was a little lake, a little lake, and he would take me swimming, showing me how to swim. And there were good times, but there were some very lonely times. Because I didn't really play with the other children, only my friend Yvette who at the end of the summer would go back to her parents.

So what would you do during those lonely times?

I would walk. During the school year, I would go to that one-room school. I loved it.

And what was the teacher like? Or were there more than one teacher?

There was one teacher for all the ages, different ages. But I don't think we were more than maybe, I don't know, 20 kids at the most.

Do you remember her or his name?

It was a woman, but I don't remember her name. She was an elderly woman. That's what I remember. And I used to walk home very happy because I had a good grade, or I was able to read the book. And then the summer would come and my friend Yvette would come. So that were the best times, best times.

What would you do with Yvette?

We used to play. Across the street there was a big empty lot full with glass, and we used to make believe [INAUDIBLE]. She was older, so she was a teacher, and I was her pupil. And she would show me how to write or read me stories. And she didn't have any toys either. I don't know why.

Did you ever meet Mrs. Dussert's son who lived in Paris?

No. You know what? One time after the war I remember some gentlemen came to our apartment. And he had a suit made from my father. And when he left, my father said, you know, this is Madame Dussert's son. I said, oh my goodness. If I had known, I would have talked to him. But I was shy so I don't even think I would have been able to talk to him. And that's the only time I ever heard about him. So I don't know what happened after that.

So during the time you were there, he never came home?

No.

He never came to see his mother?

No.

Did they ever travel at all?

No.

They stayed--

I know that she had two or three sisters in a different area of France. Because I think she was one of the oldest, after the war she went. Oh, before she passed away. She passed away in the mid '70s. I know that she went to live with them. That's all I know. Because by then she was a widow.

Did you ever feel any-- you said before they weren't particularly religious.

No, they were not at all. They never went to church, not even on Christmas Eve.

Really?

No. And I remember Christmas Eve, the snow and the bells ringing.

Did you ever want to go to church just to see what it looks like?

No.

No?

I had no-- why should I go to church? Even being very young, I knew I didn't want to go there. it was not my place. It's like when we ate that rabbit, I knew it was not right. [LAUGHS] But, you know.

Did you ever eat food that would have been non-kosher.

The rabbit, I guess.

The rabbit. I see.

I don't think rabbit is kosher. But I remember eating rabbit once. We had maybe chicken once a month, at the most.

Did they have chickens?

No. They had to buy them--

They had to buy them?

They had to buy the chicken.

Was there any feeling-- it feels from what you describe, a very isolated village.

Yeah, a very, very small village.

And did you, aside from the time when the Germans came in and shot that poor mayor and burned his house down, did you feel that there was a war going on?

Well, one day we were walking through the woods with the Dusserts. I was walking with them and another neighbor. Yes. And we came across young men who were like hiding behind the trees. And they had guns with them. And that was after the Germans had left. And, of course, we knew who they were because I could hear the people, the adults talking about them. What are you doing? Why are you hiding and so on. And they said, well, make sure you don't tell anybody. We don't even want our parents to know that we're part of the group.

So they could have been village boys? They could have been local boys.

Yes, but maybe from another village, I guess. But they were partisans. And that's the only time that it really brought back the war to me. Because after that, I didn't see any more Germans. That was it.

So it was that one time in 1943?

Yes, yeah, yeah.

And when you went into the woods, that's when you see the partisans?

Yes.

But otherwise, there was no German presence?

Not in that village, no.

Was there a local police station?

There was a very small a police station. Very small, maybe a couple of guys. And because they were a part, were born in that village, everybody was friendly. So there was no crime. They were not going to arrest anybody. They were--

And they were not police like the French police had been in Paris?

No. Oh, no. Oh, no. No. No, there was no problems with them. Life went on very easy after the Germans left. People were afraid that they might come back. But they didn't come back.

What did most of the village live from? That is--

The farms.

Farms?

Yeah.

And what are the sorts of things they grew there?

Well, they had corn. You know, all the vegetables, like peas, tomatoes, salads, cabbage.

So the place didn't go hungry?

No, but we didn't have really anything but-- for us, for instance, in the little garden we had the vegetables.

OK.

And we used to go to some of the neighbors in the summer to help them with getting the-- climbing on the cherry trees.

Ah, to pick the cherries.

I remember picking the cherries. That was fun.

Yeah.

We used to play with the cherries and throw them to each other.

[LAUGHTER]

But that didn't last very long.

No.

So when the season is over, there is no more cherries to eat.

Well, did you can? I mean, did--

No.

--Mrs-- no?

No. Mrs. Dussert didn't can. Maybe she didn't know how. So whatever we ate came all from the little garden or something that she had to buy. I remember one of my tasks also-- you were asking me earlier-- was to go once a week to the bakery or the grocery. No, it was the bakery. And we were allowed one small round loaf of bread for the whole week.

So there was rationing?

Yes, for the whole week.

OK.

So it had to last. And it smelled. I can still smell it, warm out of the oven, and I never dared picking on it. Because I knew that Madame Dussert wouldn't be very happy. And I didn't-- I was young. I was shy. I didn't want to make any waves. I didn't want her to yell at me, why did you start eating the bread? Although it smelled so good.

Well, tell me, did you ever get in trouble like a child sometimes does?

Oh, let me see. Oh, one day-- there was next to us, you know, it was a lot of grass, a lot of trees-- there was a very old

tractor. And she had told me not to climb on it. And, of course, with Yvette and I, we used to climb on it and hide, and she never knew about it. But one day she was coming out of the house and she saw me alone on the tractor and she got upset. Said, you could have died. You could have fallen and died and hurt yourself. I don't remember. I was a very docile child, I think.

Yeah. You were docile and they were kind.

And they were kind. They were wonderful. They loved me. They were good people. You know, there were some good French people. Not everybody were just going behind the Jews and going to the Germans, the Gestapo. Some, of course.

Did you have any toys at the Dusserts?

No. No, that's why I built my little doll.

Well, tell me about that little doll.

Yeah, well, I wanted a little, I wanted a doll so bad, and I never got any. And one day I decided-- I was alone because my friend Yvette had gone back to her parents-- and, yeah, I decided I'm going to build a doll. So I tried with a big piece of wood, and it was too difficult. And plus, I needed a knife. So the smaller the piece of wood to build the doll, the less problems I would have to cut it because it was already small. And that's how I did it.

And so you made yourself a doll?

Yeah.

From a stick of wood?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And did the doll have any clothes?

Well, I had showed it to the Dusserts, and she found a small piece, a tiny piece of clothing in her sewing box. [LAUGHS] And it was fun.

Did you name the doll?

No.

No?

No, I didn't name the doll. But I loved it, and I had her in my pockets. And she was with me in bed. And this is one item that I really took back with me to Paris when I left Arleuf. That's it.

Was that it? The only item you took back with you?

Yeah.

Was the little doll that you made?

Yeah, that's what I had.

And for the record, I can say that today you've donated that little doll to the Museum.

Yeah, but I took a picture of it the other day--

OK.

--so I can save it and show my grandchildren. [LAUGHS]

Do you have a picture of it here?

Yeah.

Why don't we see that right now if possible.

It's in my pocketbook.

Ah, OK.

It's in my pocketbook, so I don't know what you want to do.

Yeah, well, we'll just take-- the idea is that the viewer--

I'm rolling now, if you want to talk about--

OK. So tell me, what did that doll mean to you.

It was my friend, my treasure. My best friend. It was like part of my family. That's all I had to talk to when I was alone. You know, kids talk to their dolls.

Yes, they do. They talk to something that is theirs.

Yes, and that was mine.

How many inches tall was she? Or how many centimeters, do you think?

I don't know.

Maybe about 5 or 6 inches at most?

At the most.

Mm-hmm.

Just like that. But it was enough to know it was my toy.

Yeah.

My own doll.

Did you ever see the toys? Did other children have toys?

I don't think they had toys. I know there was a little boy next door who had a bicycle.

Well, that's a big thing.

Oh, I wanted a bicycle. But Madame Dussert said, I'm sorry, we can't afford it. And once he lent me his bicycle. Once, I remember.

Could you ride a bicycle? Did you know how?

Well, it was a very small bicycle, and it still had the little wheels on the side.

Oh, you mean the training wheels.

The training wheels. Because he was my age, but he wouldn't let me try it again. So I was upset for a while and was can you do? But I had my doll, and I wouldn't give him my doll.

[LAUGHTER]

I kept my doll.

Yeah. Let's break. Just hold on for a second. OK, I want to give you back the camera.

[SIDE CONVERSATIONS]

Stop it.

Thank you.

Oh, you're very welcome. That's all.

Tell me when we're rolling.

What else do you want to know?

Are we rolling? OK. So that doll kept you company?

Oh, yes. I loved it.

And did you ever show it to other children?

Yes, especially to my friend Yvette. We used to play with it because she didn't have any toys either.

It's amazing how imaginative children are.

Oh, absolutely.

Were there any other kinds of games that you would play together that you remember?

Yeah, we would run. We would talk. We would pick up flowers. We would hide from one another. We would climb trees and get chestnut in the fall when she was coming back from her parents' house. And we would peel the chestnut and try to eat them, but it's not very good. No.

Did you ever feel fear after the time you were hiding in that rabbit cave during those years when you were with the Dusserts?

Well, the only fear that I had was that the Germans would come back. Because once in a while even the adults were talking about it. They didn't find what they wanted. Are they going to come back? Are they going to tell us to show our papers again? What are they going to do? Are they going to shoot the men and take the young people?

Did people have radios?

Yes. And we listened to the radio.

And what kind of news was on the radio? Was it news in-- were you part of occupied France or Vichy France?

No, we were occupied.

You were part of the occupied France?

Yeah. But once in a while, I remember listening to the BBC. Because I remember the music-- doo, doo, doo. You know that music, bang, bang, bang?

Mm-hmm. So they would listen to the BBC?

The neighbors would come, gather around that huge, huge radio. And, of course, I was not allowed to sit next to the radio because I was too young. But the adults would listen and then they would talk.

And then that's how they kept informed about what was going on?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Were any of the village people involved? Were they in the military of any kind? Were they drafted by the Germans? Or any soldiers coming home or anything--

I don't remember seeing any soldiers coming home. I don't remember.

And now, that reminds me that you had a relative, didn't you yourself, who fought in the French Army?

Yes, my mother's youngest brother.

Tell me about him.

Eli.

What happened?

He came to Paris also in the mid-'20s.

OK.

He got married, had three daughters. And in 1940, he joined the French Army. He was taken prisoner in Tunisia.

By the Germans?

By the Germans.

OK.

I have a picture of him. I didn't bring it. But that was another miracle for him because his name was Eli Burstein, a Jewish name. But they didn't-- they left him alone. He was taken prisoner by the Germans, but they didn't do anything-- the fact that he was Jewish.

So they didn't separate him out from the rest of the prisoners?

No, no, no.

Was he kept in a prison in North Africa?

He was until the end of the war when he came back to Paris, yes.

So his entire war experience was in Africa basically?

Most of it. Most of it because he was taken prisoner pretty soon after he joined the French Army and he fought. I don't really know where.

What happened to his wife and children?

They were hiding. They lived outside of Paris, and they were hiding there. And nobody mentioned anything about it after that. She didn't want to say anything.

But they survived?

They survived. And at the end of the war when my uncle came back, his wife passed away maybe within two years. And so he was left with three little girls.

Did he marry again?

No, not in France. Not in France. But in the early '50s, he sent his three daughters to the oldest brother, Avraham, who had left Eishyshok in 1919 and was living in the Boston area. And two, three years later, he joined them near Boston, Dorchester. And he was working as a cab driver.

As a what?

Cab driver.

As a cab driver. In Paris or in Boston?

In Boston. In Paris, he was driving a bus.

Uh-huh.

So when he came back from the war, he went back to his old job. And then his wife passed away, and he was left with the children, so he had to do something. So when his brother mentioned he could send his children to him, he started the papers to come and join them. He had to--

I see.

--he couldn't let his three daughters live--

On their own.

--with an uncle. No, they were younger. And when he came to America, within two or three years, he remarried to a very, very nice woman.

And did they live out their lives in Dorchester?

Yes. No, Dorchester for maybe 15 years, and then they moved to Florida. Yeah.

OK.

Then they passed away, of course.

When they lived in the Boston area, did you see them often?

Oh, yes, absolutely. Because this was the one uncle that I knew very well. When he was working in Paris driving the bus, he used to come to our place at least once a week. And my mother would make him a nice steak. She was--

And this was after the war?

After the war. So I knew him very, very well.

And did he talk about what had gone on with him?

He used to tell stories. You know, when he moved to Florida-- and we used to have a place in Florida. We used to go and visit him and his second wife. Especially my son Gary used to love to listen to his war stories. I guess he can tell you more stories than I can.

But he would ask him about those things?

Yes, yes. And he would tell all the stories.

OK, so he was one of the family members who did speak?

Yes.

But it was several decades after the war already?

Yes, yes, yes.

OK.

You know, after the war, I don't think anybody wanted to talk.

Yeah, yeah. Is it because you think they weren't ready or because they didn't think anyone cared?

Both. I think it's both. Who wanted to listen to sad stories?

Do you think, I mean, when you came back, it sounds to me like you had happy memories from your time in Arleuf.

Yes.

Did you tell your parents about those things?

Oh, yes. Yes, I was telling them because they asked me, how was it? Because we hadn't had any contact in almost three years, and they wanted to know. And I brought some of the clothes with me. I even brought my wooden shoes. You know the wooden shoes that people used to wear in Holland?

Yes. They had those in the village?

That was the only thing. There was no leather shoes. So that's what everybody wore. So I remember I brought them with me to Paris. And my sister and my brother said, what? You're not going to wear this in Paris. So, of course, they were thrown out. I wish I had saved them--

If you had those still, yes.

You know, so many things. But at the time we didn't think we should save for the future-- your memories, souvenirs.

Well, when people are living through something, they don't think of it as history.

That's right.

They think of it as, this is the time, this is our lives.

Yes.

And what's so unusual?

That's right.

You know?

That's how it was. Why save it? It's two pieces of wood.

Yeah, I can use the space for something else.

Yes, yes.

So going back to the village. Again, the Germans never came again.

They never came back.

They never came back.

We were lucky for that. But we were scared. Everybody was scared.

Yeah. And food, people had enough to eat, but it wasn't particularly plentiful.

No.

Did you ever go hungry?

Yeah.

You did, huh?

Yeah.

And why? Is that because the Dusserts were not particularly well off?

Well, they didn't have much money. He was retired, so I guess he was getting a small pension. She had never worked. I don't think so. And the house that they had was rented.

So it wasn't theirs?

They didn't own them. They didn't own their house. I learned about it much, much later. And they only had a very small garden. So we had whatever was growing.

Did you have your own room in that house?

Yes, upstairs.

So describe to me a little bit about their house. You described your Paris apartment very nicely. What did it look from the outside? What did it look from the inside?

It was a stone house. And open the door, there was a small room that was the kitchen where we cooked, washed because there was no bathrooms. He got the water you needed to wash. And there was a small table in the corner and a buffet with shelves, you know?

Mm-hmm.

There were two chairs and a big box. And I used to sit on the big box. And then there was the living room. A very tiny living room was very, very dark furniture-- the table, the chairs. The buffet it was very high also very dark. And at some point, they had put in a small bed.

In the living room?

Yes. In the corner. And I slept there, I think, by the end of the war. But before that, I used to sleep upstairs. Then when you came in, you opened the door and it was the house. But before going there, there was stairs, very steep going upstairs, and there were two rooms there. There was their bedroom. And in order to go to the second bedroom, you had to cross their bedroom. So at some point, I remember sleeping there.

In that second bedroom?

The second bedroom. And then-- maybe I got too old, I don't know-- seven, eight years old, they put me downstairs in a - it's a bed, but without the headboard. Just a mattress.

Mm-hmm, just like a mattress.

That's all.

Well, in order to get to the bedrooms upstairs, you had to go from outside the house?

No, because there was like a little entrance and the steep stairs went upstairs.

Ah, I see.

And before taking the stairs upstairs, if you opened the door on the left, that was the kitchen and the living room. So it was very, very tiny. Very tiny.

And were all the houses the same? Did they look the same?

No, some were a little bigger. The mayor's house, I remember, used to be very big. At least in my eyes it was very big. Maybe not that big, but much bigger than ours. And some had more stairs. My friend Yvette, who used to spend her summers with her grandmother across the street from us, also had a very small house. Maybe the size of ours, very small. The kitchen, as soon as you come in, with a table and a stove. And a little dining room or living room in back. And then the stairs to go upstairs to a couple of bedrooms. That's all. And no bathroom. No running water either. So it was hard. It was hard times for people living there.

During those years when you were with them, do you remember crying?

Yeah, I wanted to go home. I wanted to see my parents.

So that's what you would cry about?

Yeah, yeah, in the beginning. And after a while, they used to tell me, don't worry, don't worry, don't worry. That you're going to see them.

So they would see you crying? It wouldn't be that you'd be alone and in your bed or something?

No, no, no. They would know. They would know. Especially in the beginning because I was with two people I didn't know. Although they were wonderful, loving people, good people--

Of course, they were still strangers.

--but they were-- yes, that's right.

Yeah. Are there any other memories that you have from those three years that stay in your mind? Yeah, that--

We used to take long walks in the woods with a dog, not their cat. And we would stop at some farmers that the Dusserts knew. We would buy some fresh milk. Sometimes they would invite us for a little meal. Otherwise, then we would come back, come back home in the little house.

Did you have enough clothes? You were growing.

Well, I'd wear the same thing for a week and then it's washed. And in the meantime, you wear something else and then you get back to the original clothes.

But between 1942 and 1945, you go from age 7 to 10.

Yes.

And at home, your father sewed your clothes.

Yeah.

And what happened here? Did it get stitched or opened out?

Well, stitched. Or sometimes she would add on something at the bottom of my skirt because we didn't wear pants at the time. Or in the summer, I had one pair of short, I remember, with a little top. And Madame Dussert would wash it maybe once a week. So the next day, because it had to dry, I would wear a little skirt and something else, and then go back to the shorts for the summer. And in the winter, winter was cold. We had a lot of snow in the winter. So I wore a warm dress. I remember having a dress with long sleeves and a sweater. That's all.

Do you remember the day-- well, first of all, were you in the part of France that was liberated by any Western forces? I didn't see any foreigners.

You didn't see American soldiers or British soldiers or Canadian soldiers?

No, no. We were just told the war was over.

How did you find out?

From the people. They were talking and I heard the war is over. So everybody was happy, but we never had any foreign soldiers coming to the village.

OK. It was just life went on.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Trying to find food mainly.

And tell me, your birthday is when?

May.

What month, May?

May 27.

So the war ended right before your birthday?

Yes, yes.

And you turned 15 or 14?

14.

10. Excuse me, 10.

No, in '45, I was 10. What am I talking about?

You were 10.

10, yes.

10 years old.

So I was already a big girl.

And when did the first news come to you that there were family members still around?

My brother Isaac came to get me. Came to get me and he said, well, we're waiting for you. We're going to go back to Paris.

Was it from one day to the next? I mean, he came up unexpectedly and--

That's all I remember. There must have been a letter or something, but I never saw anything. And when I was ready to-- in a way, I was happy and shocked. Because I hadn't seen my family in three years, and I was so young when I left.

Was it hard saying goodbye to the Dusserts?

It was very hard because I didn't want to leave, but I didn't want to not go back to Paris. So I was--

You were torn?

I was torn. That's exactly it. I was torn. I wanted to go back and see my parents. I wanted to have a bathroom. You know, little things that seem so unimportant, especially for children. But having to go to the outhouse was awful. Awful even for a child.

And no running water, so we would wash every day in cold water. And once a week, Madame Dussert would heat up a

huge gallon, or not gallon, like the trash barrel with water. And she would pour some in a little container or something, and that's how we would take a bath. So that was something, I said, oh, at least I will be able to do. You know, to take a good bath. But on the other hand, I really didn't want to leave them. I had gotten so used to them. And they were sad to see me leave.

Were there tears?

Of course, of course. And there were tears when I got home. And I couldn't speak Yiddish, so that was even worse.

[LAUGHTER]

My God, oh boy. But I kept in touch with the Dusserts. I kept in touch until the mid-'70s until she passed away.

Was this on a regular basis?

Oh, yes. We used to write letters. I used to send them matzo.

Did you?

Oh, yes, because I knew that she loved it. She loved it. He didn't care about it, but she loved it.

And did you see them again?

Before I left Paris. I came to New York in November 1960. In August, I went back to Arleuf to say my goodbyes. Monsieur Dussert had passed away in the mid-'50s, so she was alone. But I always sent her letters because we didn't call at the time. There was no phone. And she would answer me. And I still have some of her letters.

Do you really?

I just started to translate in English so I can show them to my children--

Oh, that's amazing

--and grandchildren. Yes, yes. And as a matter of fact, when my sister got married in Paris in 1955, we invited her.

Did she come?

And she came, absolutely. She was so happy to be part of the family.

Oh.

She saved my life and she was a good person. So it was the right thing to do.

But I still have the impression that you only saw her a handful of times after the war. You kept in touch by writing--

Yes.

--but not so much in-person.

No. I think it was difficult to go back to Arleuf not because mentally, but I had to take the train. It was a longer journey, and I was in school. I was studying. And then I was working. And then I don't know.

Well, it's also it doesn't sound like everybody was very well-off. You can't take the time and--

No, that's right. That's right, that's right. And the only time she came to Paris is for my sister's wedding. I don't know if we had sent her money for the train. I don't want to say anything because I don't know.

Is that the first time she met your parents? The only time she would have met your parents?

I think it was. I think it was, yes.

I can imagine how wonderful and, at the same time, strange.

It was.

And this person you never met before who is so connected to your life because they saved your child.

That's right. That's right. But, excuse me, when I used to write to her, I always mentioned, my parents are sending you their best and something to so she would know that my parents knew and were grateful for what they had done.

When you saw Isaac, how did he look--

Skinny.

--the last time? What?

Skinny.

Skinny.

Because he was a very sickly child. And to have spent three years in a farm and having to work the farm. Not like me. I was not doing anything besides feeding the rabbits, getting some water, or going, you know, nothing big, but he had to work in the fields.

What did he have to do?

In the field, you know. In the farms, you have to take care of the cows. In the fall, I think you have to get the food for the--

The harvest.

--yeah, harvest. Harvest, that's what it is.

Was his family kind to him?

They were good. He worked, he was fed. And they kept him alive.

Did he maintain contact with him?

No, no. I don't know why. I really don't know. Neither did Eva. I don't know why. I'm the only one who kept contact with the people who saved my life.

And your parents, did they keep contact with those who hid them?

I think they saw them a few times after the war. And then, you know, life goes on. Everybody's busy. I know there was one man who used to come because after the war my father started working again.

The same job?

The same job, a tailor. But he was getting a few survivors, very, very religious. They had come from the concentration camp. And they were ordering my father to make them the black, long silk coat. You know what I'm talking about?

Mm-hmm.

That the Hasidim wear.

That's right.

And within a short while, I guess, or maybe a year, I don't know. that's all my father was making. And that's when we started hearing so many stories.

So what happened to the community in the fourth arrondissement? Did it come back to life, or did it change in a way that just never was the same?

It was not the same because so many people never came back. It was the people who came back at first didn't want to talk. Because maybe one father came back or he didn't have his wife nor the children. Or one wife came back. The children didn't usually come back. That was-- the school where I went in that area called The Pletzl, that was really the religious spot, has a plaque-- 165 children (VOICE BREAKING) died. No. But life goes on.

And my father got busy after the war with these survivors. And most of them-- It's very weird because most of them ended up in New York in Brooklyn. So when my father finally in 1965 went to Brooklyn with my mom and my oldest brother Isaac, he had his clients there. He was already in his 80s.

Oh my goodness.

But they came to see him. They wanted more of these--

They want coats.

They wanted the black silk coat. And they knew.

Did your father continue making clothes for the family, too?

He was making us the winter coats. And, yeah, he made suits for us. A skirt and jackets.

You had mentioned at the beginning of our talk that after the war, your parents were never the same. How?

They were sad. Sad. (VOICE BREAKING) You know, we survived, the children. But all the children-- [SOBS] my father was the only one who survived of nine children. It was hard. And my mom was always very fragile mentally. Although she had her two brothers, but she didn't see them.

The first time she saw her brother who had left Eishyshok in 1920 was when he came to visit us in 1950. 1949. 1949, because he invited my sister to come to America as a tourist, and she came. So she hadn't. But I can remember after the war, she was writing pages and pages of letters, like 10 pages, sending to her brother Avraham in Boston. And her brother Eli, as I said, we used to see him once or twice a week because he was driving a bus, and he always stopped by.

And how did she find out about what happened in Eishyshok?

Well, there was no news. No news. You write, you send letters, no news. And, you know, deduction. But we knew. We know because we went last year to Eishyshok. And we know that there were all murdered in September of '41.

But is that something you found out only last year?

Exactly when they were murdered, I think it was when Gary came back. He had gone to Eishyshok, he was mentioning, in 1996. And he was taken to see the memorials. The cemeteries are all gone, so you can't find anything. But we knew, nobody--

Responded.

--responded.

You knew that they were gone. You knew that they had been murdered, but you didn't know details until decades later.

Yes.

Is this the thing?

Yes, yes, yes, yes. But we knew from my mother's sister and her daughter Esther, who live nearby, we knew that they had been taken, like I said, at the Vel d'Hiv and Drancy outside of Paris. And then we knew they had been taken to Auschwitz. That we knew. And my father's brother, wife, and sons also. That we knew. Although, as much as they knew, they would still write after the war. They were still reading the lists of survivors hoping to find a name. That's right and there was no name.

When your parents were sad, you say, did they ever laugh again? Did they ever joke around?

Not my mother, never.

Never?

No. My father, when I used to bring friends at home, sometimes used to joke with them. Excuse me. But my mother, never. My mother never laughed. It was too sad.

Was it hard getting to know them again?

Yes, it was. It was because when I came back from Arleuf, they were almost like strangers to me. I had left, I was so young. I didn't know much about them. But they're still mother and father. So after a short while, you know them. You know they're your parents. And they're important, and they love you, and they do everything they can for you.

I remember talking to some people who said that sometimes their parents had been through so much in surviving themselves, and they were lucky to survive, but they were empty inside and couldn't give their children anything anymore. Whereas the foster parents hadn't had those terrible experiences and were stronger and were able to take care of the children better.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, my parents-- my mother never laughed. She was never well after that. But she loved us, we knew.

OK.

If something happened, if we are not talking or not happy, she would ask, what is it? Are you sick? You're not feeling good? Or you want me to make you a cup of soup? Although, she barely cooked. And my father was doing everything. My father was really the breadwinner, the cook, the--

Sounds to me like the spine of the family.

Yes, he was, he was. And he's the one who really lost everybody. He only had his cousin from Dublin, who used to come and visit us once in a while after the war. But Dublin to Paris is not so far.

No.

But with four children, you have to realize, we're alive. The six of us were alive, and that was important.

It's a miracle in some ways.

It was a miracle because some of my friends didn't come back. Some of my friends lost their mother, father, one sister, two brothers. (VOICE BREAKING) We were lucky. We were lucky thanks to good people. It's not only luck, it's also being able to find the people who took care of us, who wanted to agree to keep us.

And, like I said, the Dusserts said they would adopt me if something happened to my parents. And there were good people. Even the people who saved my two brothers and my sister, they were good French people. They didn't do it for money because they never received any money. They just knew that it was the right thing to do, to save children, to save human beings. Yeah.

Tell me how your life went in the 1950s. In 1945, you were 10--

Yeah.

--and so I assume you started going to school again.

Yes.

And then how does your life-- you stayed with your parents the whole time?

Oh, yes, until I left in 1960. Yeah.

What did you do? Where did you go to school? What happened?

Well, I went to school, went to college. I worked in a large company.

As what?

I was a secretary in charge of six other girls. I was just working with a large company, and I loved it. And when my sister wrote to me and said, you have to come to America so our parents and Isaac would follow-- because she had been in Brooklyn already since 1955, after she got married. And Leon had gone to Brooklyn in '58 when you turned 18, yes.

Well, if I go to America, then we would all be reunited. So I started making the papers, and I got cold feet. And I said, I'm not going. I don't speak English. I'm happy. I have all my friends in Paris. I have a job I love. And I stopped it, and my sister got upset. So a few months later, I started again with the papers and having the-- it takes a long time. But I finally arrived in Brooklyn. I spent a week at my sister and brother-in-law and their children. And my two uncles, my mother's two brothers, came to visit me. They took me back to Boston. And a few days later, I met my future husband.

Really?

Yes.

How? How did that happen?

One of my cousins who was born in Paris-- my uncle Eli who had the three daughters-- one of them had met my husband. My husband came from Cairo. He was flown out in 1956. You know, all the Jews had to leave. He spent two years in Paris, but we never met. And she met him when he came to the States through a Jewish organization.

And when I arrived in November 1960, she called him up, can you go? My cousin Elen just came from Paris. Maybe

you want to meet her. So he came to my aunt and uncle, where I was living with. And, well, right away, we found a lot of things in common because he spoke French. And my English was very, very, very bad. Just a few words at the time, but I got a job right away.

Oh, what did you do?

I worked in an insurance company typing the policies.

And in Paris, what was the business of the company that you worked in?

It was a company called Materna, everything for the future mother and baby.

Ah.

It was a very large company started by a Jewish man after the war. I loved it. It was great. And that's why I didn't want to move. I was happy. But then I met my husband and we got married six months later.

What is his name?

Marcel.

Marcel Murad?

Murad.

Murad.

Yeah.

And you lived at first in Dorchester?

No, we-- yes, in Mattapan.

In Mattapan.

--with my uncle, who had come to the States in 1920. But he and his brother Eli who lived in Dorchester had come to visit me in New York, in Brooklyn, and they both brought me back.

I see.

They said, oh, come and meet cousins that you don't know who were born here in the States. So I said, OK. So I packed a little suitcase because I had to go back to my sister and brother-in-law.

Of course.

But then when I met my husband, I didn't want to go back. So I stayed with my Uncle Abe until I got married for six, seven months.

And then where did you move?

We first moved to Brookline. You know Boston area, so you know Brookline?

Yes.

So we lived there almost two years. And then we bought a house. My husband had gone to law school. So he was really starting to work full time. So when my daughter was born two years after we were married, I quit my job and we moved to Framingham. And at the time, my husband had been working also in Framingham. So that was perfect.

I have a very funny story. I found a cousin, third cousin, not really first, but still a cousin. Her bother had come to Paris. He was born in the States. He was an American soldier, Earl. And he came to Paris to visit us in 1951. We didn't know who he was. Rang the bell. Didn't speak a word of French, of course. Two words of Yiddish only. And it was very hard to communicate.

But my sister had spent a year and a half in the States with our uncles in 1949 to 1950. So she was able to explain who he was. He was the son of a cousin of my father. She had come from Jan³w, Yaneve, in 1890 maybe. So her children were born here. She came, she was maybe two years old. Her children were born here. And seeing this young American soldier was amazing. We didn't know we had cousins alive.

That's right.

And the funniest part, he fell in love with my sister Eva, but she didn't want to marry him. So he went back after his time in Paris as a soldier. He went back to-- where did he live? I think he lived in Fall River with his parents at the time.

And when I got married, one of his aunt, another cousin of my father that he didn't know-- no, a cousin of mine, a first cousin of mine on my mother's side, wrote a little article in the Jewish Advocate in Boston-- Elen Chajet from Paris married Marcel Murad from Cairo. And she was living with her aunt and uncle, a Burstein, and the address in Mattapan. So this aunt of that cousin Earl on my father's side called up my uncle and said, you know, I think we are relatives of your niece Elen Chajet because that was my mother's maiden name. And sure enough, it opened doors. More cousins, third, fourth cousins, but still cousins.

Yeah.

And we are extremely close, extremely close to this part of the side of the family.

Well, after such a loss, it's such a gift.

Yes, yes. For me, it was unbelievable. And we all got along. Even my husband Marcel got along with all of them, which sometimes the men if they don't get along with some relatives, forget it. You cannot see them. But we all got along so well. For me, it was, like you said, a gift because I didn't have any cousins, only the three for my Uncle Eli. And two went back to Paris a few years ago to live.

So when did you start telling your children about your life and the war and what went on and what happened with you?

I think I started with Gary when he was four or five years old before telling my other son and my daughter. Because he was more interested. Maybe because I started telling him. He loved playing with soldiers. And when he was 19, he joined the Army Reserve while in college. And he went for another, I don't know, five years, six years. And he always loved playing with soldiers outside. His brother didn't care too much. They know, but they're not like Gary. Gary's really the more interested in my background.

Well, you know, it is interesting that in families, not everybody is the family historian--

That's right.

--but one child ends up being the family historian.

Yes, and he is.

It's just there.

Yes, he is. He's the one who took me to the trip last September to Lithuania, Poland, who listened to most of the story, who is involved with the Museum here.

So tell me, did you ever go back to the village? Arleuf?

Well, we went back. We were in Paris. We always used to go back to Paris, even my husband Marcel because he's fluent in French. He lived in Paris. He was educated in Cairo in the French schools and so on. And he has uncles and aunts and cousins in Paris who had left Cairo also in '56. And he met my friends. I am in touch with three of my very, very, dear, dear friends. That we go back to fourth grade--

Wow.

--together. Yes. And they've been here visiting us, but especially one couple. And so we always loved to spend time together. And one year, one of my friends, my very dear friend Joe, took us. I asked him to take us to Arleuf. I said I haven't been there since 1960, since I left Paris. I really want to go back. By then, it was early '90s. So it was my husband, myself, and my son Jeffrey, who's older than Gary by a year, and Joe, who was driving the car, of course.

We get to the village and Marcel says, what? That's where you spent three years? There are four or five streets and even said, there are two streets. I said, no, Marcel. There are about five.

[LAUGHTER]

And the main area of the village is where the church is, of course.

Of course.

That's where. There are the church in the place. And then you have a few stores, the butchery, the bakery, nothing-- a general store, you can buy everything or almost. And he said, that's where you spent your life? Part of your life? I said, well, it's better than being somewhere else far, far away. And we drove up to the house. We passed-- the house was here. And across the street I could see the remnants of the mayor's house.

Still?

They never touched it. The people left it as a memorial. And a little further, across from like that, diagonal, from where I spent my three years, was the house of where my friend Yvette used to spend the summers with her grandmother. So we drove by. And I said to Joe, stop the car. The door, I could see the door open maybe this much, 2 inches, and an old lady all dressed in black looked out, and she closed the door. And I said, Marcel, this is Yvette's grandmother. I remember her-- Madame Cormier. I even remembered the name.

So we made a U-turn, and we stopped the car. And I went and I knocked at her door. So she opened again a little bit, looked at me. She was ready to close, and I started talking to her. And when I mentioned-- first, I mentioned her name. I said, bonjour. Hi, Madame Cormier. And I told her who I was. She remembered. She didn't remember my face, obviously, after so many years, but she remembered me and said, oh, the little Elen.

And we talked. And besides, I have to mention, when I went back in August of 1960 to say goodbye to Madame Dussert, she was there, the old lady, and my friend Yvette. And I took a picture of them. So when I went back like 30 years later, 30, 35 years later, she was surprised that I would come back again. And at first, she didn't know who I was until I mentioned my name. She said, oh, it's so nice. And we started talking.

And my husband was taking the movie. At the time, it was the camera or the movie. So it was great. For that, I was happy that I decided to go back on a whim. I wasn't really thinking because I knew that Madame Dussert had moved away, and then she passed away in the '70s. Anyway, but I was surprised to see that lady at the time was 95 years old.

Yeah.

Yeah.

You know, as you speak, and you've been very specific about the places that you were, giving us the address of your parents' apartment in Paris, and about how the village looked, and that they were across the street and so on, it's sort of like people who live there now it's something that is not visible what had happened before.

Oh, no.

There is the memorial to the mayor. In Eishyshok, there are the cemeteries and maybe--

And the memorials.

--a memorial.

Two huge stones and it's written in English and Lithuanian.

And in Hebrew maybe or not?

Hebrew or Yiddish-- yeah, all Hebrew or Yiddish, I don't remember-- saying how many Jews were murdered there. So there is one for the women and children and a little further away for the men.

But what people-- it's sort of like life goes on.

Yes.

Trees grow on top of things that were once fields.

Yes, yes.

And it's hard to imagine that there had been another life that had been there before.

Yes, that's right.

And is there something you would want people to know about those former lives who are there today? Either whether it's the children from Eishyshok or the children in the village, of Arleuf, of their grandparents, their great-grandparents and how everyone kept quiet. You know, it's--

The only thing we can do, I think, is to talk about it, to show movies, to the books, like Elie Wiesel has written. And there have been so many, many books written about the Holocaust or the Shoah, like they call it in Europe. I don't think there is one person who doesn't know that it happened. It's not possible.

Is this part of your daily life?

I think about it a lot. I think as you get older, you think more. It's weird. (VOICE BREAKING) Weird.

Where do you feel that pain? Where does that-- how do you put words to that?

(VOICE BREAKING) I feel the pain for my parents [SOBS] who have lost all their relatives. That's the pain I feel. Not for them because they survived. My parents survived, but all their siblings, married with children, all the other people, the young people who didn't make it.

And I feel also, you see, when you have-- a few months ago, they were mentioning on TV the name of a few Jewish

people who won the Nobel Prize, whether it was chemistry and other physics. How many more Jews would have won, would have maybe invented, created things? I don't know. This is what makes me sad when I think about it. More now than when I was younger. It's weird. It's weird because my friend in Paris told me the same thing.

Really?

Yeah.

She thinks about it more, too?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Getting older, you think. You have some memories you forget. You know, you get older, you went through so much of life. Whether you get married, you have children. Of course, everything is wonderful, but that memory that you cannot forget. No.

And in, when was it? In 2008, I finally, finally got around to have the Dusserts named Righteous Among--

Nations.

Yeah, the picture. Which was I should have done it a long, long time ago, but I'm glad I did it. I'm just sorry that there is nobody. I cannot find anybody to give them the certificate. And when we go to Israel in February-- we're going to a wedding, my husband, Gary, and I-- I am going to go back to Yad Vashem. And I want to see where they put the plaque. There has to be a plaque there.

Well, is there anything else you'd like to add to what we've spoken about today?

No, like I said, there were bad people, very bad people everywhere, but there were some good people, people who knew wrong from right or right from wrong, who saved lives. And it's too bad there were not more of them.

Well then, I'd like to thank you. Thank you for what you've done.

Well, thank you. Thank you for having me.

You're welcome. You're welcome. And this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Elen Elke Chajet Murad--

Thank you.

--on November 12, 2013.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

Thank you for having me. It's really-- I should have done it many, many years ago.

I'm glad you did it.

And thanks to Gary. I have to thank Gary, who really got the ball rolling.

Can I do something unusual. Gary, could you come up?

This is not going to work--

No?

--but--

Just have him stand behind his mom, that's all.

OK, well, we'll try it. We have a mic and everything. It's not--

OK.

I'll talk about it.

Hi, sweetie.

OK.

Good job.

Thanks, my love. Thank you. Thank you, mon chÃ©ri.

Can we get that?

I really appreciate it. Without you, I wouldn't have done it.

Is it rolling? OK.

I kept postponing all the time, saying, I should do it, talk to somebody, tell my story. And he made me do it. Je t'aime.

Gary, what does it mean to you? I mean, I don't mean that as in a sort of trite way, but how come it is that you are the one who's the family historian? Why do these things mean something to you that maybe-- it doesn't mean it's not important to your siblings, but it doesn't touch them in the same way.

I think I've always enjoyed history. Probably when she told me what she was like when she was younger.

Yeah.

So that was part of it. And actually, it really started, I was interning for Joe Kennedy, who was a congressman in Massachusetts back in the early '90s. And I remember reading an article about the Holocaust Museum opening. It was 1993 was when I was interning. And I showed her the article. And in it it mentioned the Tower of Faces and Eishyshok and Professor Eliach. And I tracked Professor Eliach down at Brooklyn College and put her in touch with my mom. So they had that connection because Professor Eliach's grandparents had the photo studio in Eishyshok.

Right.

And she was born in Eishyshok.

Yeah, so that really got us started and sort of knowing the museum was here and the fact that this ancestral home of my grandmother's family was part of the Museum. And then I got more involved in the Museum over the course of the years. I went to their annual New England dinner. And now I co-chair the Next Generation Society for New England, which is under the auspices of the Museum.

I got invited to one of the-- I had gone to Eishyshok and JanÃ³w in '95 when I was traveling. So that sort of made it an even more personal connection. And then involved with the leadership stuff with the Museum, knowing they were taking the trip to Lithuania last year in Eishyshok was on the agenda, I made sure that my mother--

Oh, yes.

--and I were able to participate in the trip. So in between all that time, I had done some research online and even here with Jude Richter from the Museum staff. I had given him a little bit of the information I had gathered. And he provided a little bit more on what happened to family members from Paris who were deported.

So Jude Richter, to make clear for the tape, his part was working with the International Tracing Service. And that was the archive from the Red Cross that we've gotten and from Bad Arolsen a number of years ago, a digitized archive. And the museum is the repository for it. So does it mean that with each step when you would become involved, your interest would become greater, or you would find out things?

Yeah.

How does it propel?

Well, like I said, yeah, I agree. I think it started in '93 when I knew about the Museum and the connection to Eishyshok. And then she had told me the Dussert story years ago, of course. And so I kept talking to her over the course of a number of years, you know, you really should try to get them named Righteous Among the Nations, just reach out to Yad Vashem. I made a few calls. I finally was able to print the application, put her in touch with a woman there. I think I talked to someone here as well about it, who was able to introduce us to folks at Yad Vashem. That obviously took a few years. I think it took three years before they even--

Yeah, almost, almost.

--approved them. So in doing that and wanting to almost-- she knew the names of the cousins that had been sent to Auschwitz or who had been rounded up, and I wanted to know what happened to them. So that kind of kicked in a little bit. And, I guess, getting involved with the Museum is just--

It sounds to me like, and I'm sorry to interrupt--

Yeah, no, please.

--right at that point, but it sounds to me that without the Museum, this wouldn't have happened like it did.

No.

Oh, no.

Absolutely not.

We need the Museum.

And we had been to Yad Vashem--

It's wonderful.

--when I first went to Israel in '85.

We went also.

But it's about the same as having it where you live and having this resource--

Of course.

--and being able to get involved with it in some way and allows me, I guess, access to people, by being involved in the Museum, who can be even more helpful because I'm involved and for my own personal edification of what happened to family members.

And what does it mean to you when you learn these things?

I mean, I guess, it's important to be able to have names. You know, I think there's that project Every Victim Has a Name. And, for us, it's a lot more personal than, say, some of my Jewish friends whose families have been here from the late 1800s who have no real personal connection to the Holocaust as our family does because my mom's from France and our family was from Eastern Europe. So it's been an opportunity to, I guess--

Does it all shape you?

--memorialize people who never had been memorialized.

They are not forgotten.

They're not, but they are because there's certain names we don't know--

I don't have all the names.

--and what happened to them, but now we know what happened to a lot of them.

Yes, a lot of them. But a lot of them also, because my parents didn't really talk about it, it was so painful, that I don't even know the names of all their siblings. And I certainly don't know the name or their children.

Right.

I think that somebody in 1941, who lives in a village where they have scattered relatives all over the world, I don't know how they would feel, but I think that it would be, to me, like a miracle that 50 years, 60 years later, there would be people who they never met, who they never knew, who were connected in some way to them by relations, but for whom their fate was important. They never met them. They never knew they would exist. They were born later, you know? But can you imagine what it's like? Like today, if something happens to me, why would it be important to someone--

50 years from now.

--50 years from now, who I wouldn't know and who wouldn't have known me?

I think a lot of people want to know their roots and where they come from. And because of the Holocaust, it was so tragic and so many lives were cut short. And but for luck-- and I've said this to her before-- her father, for just a tailor--

That's right.

--with probably a minimal education, I mean--

He did a phenomenal thing.

--for him to see what was coming--

That we survived, the six of us.

--and to be able to find places for his immediate family to hide when his brother down the street was not so lucky or her mom's sister who lived down the street was not so lucky. But how this tailor was able to figure it out is amazing.

Yeah.

It is amazing. And, like I said, thanks to good people.

Yeah.

But there were a lot of bad people who didn't care, who didn't want to do anything.

Thank you. Thank you very much, Gary, for being part of this and certainly for telling your mom and sort of gently trying to convince her.

Sometimes not so gently.

[LAUGHTER]

I pushed and nudged.

He pushed and nudged, but I said yes. I'd do anything for him.

So why don't we take a look at the photographs right now--

OK.

--that you do have.

Yeah, I'm almost-- we're rolling.

OK. So, Mrs. Elen, tell me, what is this first photograph right here?

This I am standing near the little lake where I used to go swimming in the summer.

In Arleuf?

In Arleuf.

And that's those shorts that you were telling me about.

Those shorts and the little top. [LAUGHS] I was standing.

And the next one in the middle?

The middle is we were visiting some friends, and I wore my beautiful dress, black with some pink that my father had made for me that was really too big when he made it.

And you grew into it.

And I grew into it. That's right.

And that was when you were in Arleuf, too.

In Arleuf, so 1943.

OK, and the picture, the next picture.

The next picture is my sister's wedding in December 1955 in Paris. My parents are on the right. I am behind them. My brother Leon, brother Isaac, and my father's cousin from Dublin, Ireland, with his daughter and son-in-law on the left.

And they're all in that photo?

They're all in the photo.

OK, well, thank you very much for sharing these.

Thank you very much for having me.

OK, done.

Done.

That's great.