

## **Luisa Ahghit (?) Brightman**

**July 27, 2015**

**RG-50.030\*0826**

### **Abstract**

Luisa Julia Ahghit (?) Brightman was born January 26, 1924 in Milan, Italy as one of non-identical twins and had twin brothers who were 22 months older than her. Her ancestors came from Persia about 1,000 years ago. Her mother died in childbirth so she was raised by her father and nannies. After being stationed in London as an officer in World War I, her father was an engineer and when the business closed during the war, he worked in insurance and when prohibited from working there, he worked for a stamp company (had skills from his hobby). They always had help in the home, a summer home, went to private schools, and had nannies as expected in the middle class. Italy instituted a form of the Nuremberg laws in 1938 when Mussolini decided to join Germany and Japan in alliance. This resulted in Luisa's father being thrown out of the Fascist Party. The family was not religious but the children were Bar and Bat Mitzvah. During the war, Luisa could no longer attend public school so attended a private Jewish school, then the British Institute and when it left, she took up four years of accounting. The family evacuated their 12-room apartment in Milan (which was destroyed August 5, 1942) in '41 or '42 to the villa in the countryside. Food became scarce and the Black Market was used. Her non-Jewish friends no longer spoke to her. Luisa's brothers were placed in forced labor camp but her father's friend had them released. 10,000 Jews were secretly deported including some relatives. A friend warned them they would be deported the next day, September 15, 1943, so they packed suitcases and escaped over the border to Switzerland. First they were placed in a military garrison and fed and then the men were separated from the women and children. They each had assignments, were fed, corresponded with each other and permitted to leave at times. Luisa and her sister got work as Au Pairs. Her sister worked in Geneva and she near Sion until she got phlebitis and was sent by train to her parents in Chambery. They returned home after two years and secured another apartment. Luisa worked for UNWRA helping orphaned children from the concentration camps. Her father sent his stamp collection to a dealer in London before the war. After the war, Luisa and her sister went to London for a year as au pair and obtained the collection and brought it home. They lived on it as they had no money. Luisa would have preferred to be an architect but she did not have the opportunity to get the appropriate education. She designs furniture and does embroidery.

### **Summary**

00:00 Luisa Julia Ahghit (?) Brightman was born January 26, 1924 in Milan, Italy. She was one of non-identical twins. She was always special as also had twin brothers who were 22

months older than her. Her sister was Carla Fami Ahghit and her brothers were Jullio Eduardo Ahghid and General Fredo Ahghit. Ahghit is an old name as their ancestors came from Persia 1,000 years ago. The family lived in Legren (?) when the harbor was being built. They traded in coral and gold and became the bankers for the Grand Dukes of Florence. A cousin who was a professor of history researched the family history. A nephew who bears the name sent some papers. They came to Italy before the Sephardic Jews. Italy has a wealth of traceable materials. Cemeteries and Jewish tradition keep records so they are handed down though some was lost during the war. Their cousin found their name in some documents. Their niece in Lucca read in the newspaper that the Villa Ahghit was being sold so looked into it. It had not been occupied by the family for 200 years but the Villa still bore their name. Some things you read may be factual and others are not.

05:00 A tomb in Legren is dated 1100 and genealogy search was done. The research was started before the war. The cousin was a professor and persecuted so went to South America and then became a professor at Wesleyan. The cousin was Levey D. Ahghit Amorosora (?). Her mother, Olga Romari was from Trieste and Venice. Her father, Enrico Carlo Ahghit was president of the Jewish community in Pisa. The Romanovs were importers of grain from Russia and Hungary. In 1838 the family founded an insurance company in Milan and Venice. Her father was an engineer in Turin and worked for the Harvester Company from the US. He visited the US for his work. The Depression started and his company disbanded so he worked for an insurance company in Milan. The boys were born in 1922. Her sister is older by 15 minutes. Early in life they were upper middle class. They always had help in the home, a summer home, went to private schools, had nannies, had an Irish au pair and a French mademoiselle. That was middle class life in Italy. Out of a population of one million in Milan, there were 1,000 Jews. She felt she could count the Jews on one hand. The Jews in Italy were assimilated. There were no laws against the Jews. The government supported the church, temple and cemeteries. They subsidized them in the 1920s and 1930s until the war.

10:00 Differences started in 1938 when Mussolini decided to join Germany and Japan in alliance and instituted a form of the Nuremberg laws in Italy. The laws were different as they recognized Italian Jews as preferential citizens. Her father was a volunteer officer in WWI as he was considered Italian. Foreign immigrants who were Jewish, were interned immediately in a camp. Italy believed that if you did good for the country, the country will protect you. Some Jews were exempt from persecution. Life got more difficult. It was a pleasant life as they attended school. The boys did not do well so they had tutors. Summer vacation in Milan extended from July to October. They would go to the seaside, mountains and the country and return early November. Now she realizes that she had a privileged life. The family was not religious but her mother was more religious than her father and insisted the boys be Bar Mitzvah. The girls were Bat Mitzvah but they did not

learn much as only had a few lessons. The boys were Bar Mitzvah together and the girls were combined with all the girls who turned 13 that year (about 6 or 7). The Rabbi told them just to open and close their mouths as they did not know anything. All the gentile friends had communion wearing beautiful dresses and a party and they desired a celebration, too. The family did not keep the Sabbath.

- 15:00 One brother wanted to celebrate Passover so their father ran it once and never again. It was like someone telling a story rather than a tradition. The family knew they were Jewish. When the laws became strict, her father spoke to each child separately whether they wanted to convert to Catholicism or remain Jewish. The father would not say, "No" if they desired to do so but all remained Jewish as they did not want to throw away their inheritance. Some Jewish things were passed down including: 1) a royal menorah from the grandfather's house in Pisa from the 16<sup>th</sup> century which they gave to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, 2) Books of the Bible that were ordered by an ancestor and sold to the Yale Library Museum. Nothing was written in the books. She has miniatures of the books. The history of the sale to Yale was sent to the nephew and he became religious. Luisa feels the nephew and his children should know about it as the miniatures were left to the four children. The nephew wanted to buy it from her siblings but they refused. Therefore, it was sold and the money was divided. It did not have any religious meaning. She could not read it. It had been in the family a long time. Perhaps it was bought or ordered to be printed.
- 20:00 Luisa's mother was an artist and played the piano and painted. Her mother died of childbirth so was raised by her father and nannies. She had a nanny until after she was married. Her nanny organized the help in the house when they were young. The nanny stayed until she was 14 and was like a surrogate mother. She helped her mother organize the help in the house. That was how Bourgeois life was conducted. It was not like "upstairs, downstairs" as it was not 20 people but two people. A seamstress came every two weeks to do the mending. She let down hems and made the children's clothes. Only outerwear was bought in department stores. For something special, they would go to a designer to have a dress made. Her nanny, Balya, came from Udonay (?), north of Lenox (?). She was not closer to her than to her mother. The Nanny's word was law as she made them behave. After a certain age, Luisa was allowed at the dining room table but if she misbehaved, she had to eat in the kitchen with the help as punishment. She sometimes preferred that. This was normal in all households.
- 25:00 Most of the people they knew were not Jewish. Her mother's managing the household help is a job as must plan for the necessities of both the family and the help such as clothes and health. The children attended ballet classes, piano lessons, and painting classes. Her brothers had to be taken to various tutors as they were not keeping up their studies. Though they were brilliant, they were not disciplined to study. Their report cards were not so good. In Europe if you don't pass certain exams, you can't go on. It

all meant nothing as their life changed. Her mother was responsible for the financial part of running the household with the money the father gave her. She also ran their home in the country. It was amazing to go to the sea and the mountains. They did not have a car until her father bought a Ford in the 30s before the depression. When he returned from the States in '28, he bought a Model T but could not afford to keep it. Transportation was mostly by streetcars and taxis. Their school was within walking distance, about one or two miles. Her father went mountain climbing, was a hunter and a stamp collector. He had to leave his job as Director of the Insurance Company and went to work in a stamp collecting shop. He used to buy his stamps there and had sufficient knowledge so the shop welcomed him. The laws said that Jews could not work in a company with a large staff. The insurance company had thousands of staff. Her father was able to make a living. He was a collector for the banker in his shop.

30:00 Her father was close to the children though he worked long hours. He liked to take the children on a walk. In the summer, he would make a flower and vegetable garden. He always tried to spend time with the children and relieve the mother of managing four children. He would organize games and competition such as races and a soccer team. They were already four so did not need too many more children for games. They always had other children over their house. From her father, Luisa learned to swim, climb mountains and play tennis. Her mother did not care for sports. Luisa believes her parents were happy with each other. They were concerned about the children. They never took a trip without the children. They always went together to the seaside and the mountains. They were rather strict with those they associated with. The children were expected to have good manners. If a child misbehaved, the parents did not want the other children to copy them. Her mother tried to get them to be more religious so took them to Jewish shows but this did not affect them. They were also taken to the opera and concerts. They studied several hours per day and could not go out until they finished their work. They studied English and French. There was foreign help in the house to help them learn these languages. Her parents would speak Yiddish if they did not want the children to understand. Her father had a sister in Pisa who was unmarried. Her mother was an only child and her mother had died at childbirth. Her father's mother had died at childbirth when his sister was born. Dying at childbirth was common. .

35:00 Her grandfather in Pisa remarried. She hardly remembers her grandmother, Nonna Gratore, who died in 1938 when she was three and ½ or four. She remembers her in the kitchen. Her grandfather who died in 1929 had a long white beard. Her mother's father died around 1930 so she vaguely remembers him. He would come to the park with the nannies when he came for a visit and walked with them. Her father was the last Ahghit until her brother had a son so this nephew is the only one who carries the name. He has two girls. In Belgium there is Peter Ahghid, son of the older brother but he does not keep in touch with the family. The niece in San Francisco adopted her maiden name so her

children carry the name; she has a son and a daughter, Bar Mary Ahghit. In Europe, you usually wear a uniform to school. The boys wore a black overall and the girls white. Both were only down to the knees in 1930s and the girls could wear a ribbon or a bow at their neck. They wore their own clothes when attended higher schools. They attended primary school for five years and three years in private school.

- 40:00 They were not allowed to stay in school anymore. They attended two schools: a private Jewish school with five pupils and a British Institute. When the Institute left, they took up four years of accounting and public school. They were finished with private school. They were better prepared. The boys went to elementary school and Gymnasium where they were yelled at and not allowed to continue. She knew about three Jewish families in Milan. One was the father's cousins. Their social life was mixed religiously and the parents traveled. They had visitors from England and France and relatives from France so had a cosmopolitan atmosphere. Their friends would be friendly with both sets of twins. When her sister was eight, she wrote a letter to the father that she did not want to dress like Luisa as she wanted her own wardrobe and be different and this was accepted.
- 45:00 Afterwards there was some difficulty about what each was wearing. Luisa was the domineering sister. Her sister had to study more but she had a photographic memory so did not have to study much. The sisters were different. Luisa talked all the time but her sister talked only if allowed. Luisa was more like a brother who was the life of the party. Her mother was more outgoing and artistic. Her father was regimental as had been an Army officer and stuck to the rules. There were no other twins in the family. Perhaps so many twins were born after WWI because so many people were lost. A cousin twice-removed on her mother's side had twins. Her parents were sometimes storytellers. Her mother went to Paris for the National Exhibit when the Eiffel Tower was built. Her father talked of hunting in Northern Tuscany. Her mother complained that she had no siblings. She was brought up by her father and nannies though aunts and uncles took care of her and there were first cousins. Her father spoke of serving in WWI.
- 50:00 He was in love with a gentile girl and his parents did not approve so he volunteered in the service. When his father found out, he intervened and told him to become an officer. He became a lawyer and was sent to London for three years to represent Italy during the war and one year after it ended. He became enamored with all things British from tea to the way you butter your bread. Six officers in London who were Italian, French and British, became partners during the war and at headquarters at the Institute of Military Chiefs. There were two famous stories: one - Italian officers had to wear plus fours (pants ended under the knees) with more bandages to the shoes. When his father arrived in London and saw the British wearing pants, he went to a store and bought pants and designed his own. The other story - They were all junior officers, others were captain and colonel. After the meeting ended, they returned secret papers to the safe. There was a parade in Whitehall that could be viewed from the window. He walked into the corridor and saw a

man who was not in uniform and walked onto the balcony. Her father saw his general on the balcony and a man on the other side and he was in the middle with Winston Churchill. He attended weddings where he saw friends and family and connections who knew his family. He completed his studies and moved to Milan where he had cousins. After the war which interrupted his love life, he returned to Milan. In those days, your parents had to approve your marriage. Until then, everyone married in the religion as was the tradition.

55:00 Italy reunited in 1866 from 17 little countries. Differences were enormous between them. People did not mingle with people from different cities. Even now anyone from Milan treats people from Sicily like scum. A joke is told that Italy should have a hinge so the Sicilian can fall into the ocean. Both grandparents had to be from the same town to belong. Things are changing now. They spoke a patois, not all spoke the same Italian except for Florence where they speak the true Italian. When Italy was reunited, they did not all speak the same language. Education was not common as only the elite went to school. Even in a small country like Belgium, there are no signs on the highway directing you to Brussels as they speak different languages and some places do not want anything to do with Brussels. In Ireland they are trying to have a language in the south and some places have signs in two languages. The internet changes things. There was no discrimination in Italy until propaganda started in '38.

60:00 Her mother had to ask permission so they would not have to stay in the classroom when religion was taught. Her father told her mother that it is all right to learn about all religions instead of isolating the children but her mother won the disagreement. There were no special class for Jewish religion. For her Bat Mitzvah, a young Rabbi came to the house and the twins gave him a nervous breakdown as they did not know how to learn and he did not know how to teach. They wore pretty white dresses like the girls who had Communion. The family had a Christmas tree with no religious ornaments and gifts. One brother who was Bar Mitzvah once celebrated Chanukah in Pisa. Her father contributed to charities to help poor Jews. Italian Jews felt strange when they saw Polish and Russian Jews in big black hats like the gypsies. It was strange that they were dressed differently. Their apartment had 12 rooms for the six in the family and the help. They had a kitchen, dining room, a large living room with a grand piano, a room for the children to study and play, bathrooms, bedrooms and rooms for the maids. Their apartment was within walking distance of central Milan. When she visited about two years ago, she saw the house in the center of the city where she was born as women gave birth at home at that time. The address was 24 Bilnescher (?). Milan only had apartments.

65:00 A few single houses were added on the outskirts of the city. Milan had two rings. A canal was used to transport merchandise on the outer ring. The second ring was taken down a few years ago where there were fortifications of the city. They were born within

the circle of civil buildings. The apartment where she grew up had green lawns, two-way streets and no streetcars which were on the outer circle. The bombing of Milan took place August 5, 1942. Their house was destroyed. Luisa took the train with her father to Milan and got off and had to walk ten miles to school as the train station near the school was hit. As Luisa approached the avenue where the house was located, the sun was in her eyes and she thought she saw her house but it was destroyed by a bomb. They lived on the fifth floor and there was nothing left in the five floors below them though they formerly each held a grand piano. She saw a round little armchair with a broken leg which her father used was on top of the rubble. The home next door was not hit. She could see the library with books falling down. A hot day they walked to a restaurant and her father took off his jacket and the waiter told him to wear it. She has a photo of the area. It was the beginning of the ban. She knew things would never be the same.

70:00 Her address was #7 Via Blanca Maria de Saroya. She was three or four years old when they moved into the new apartment built in the 20s with electricity, an elevator, marble staircase, a balcony, high ceilings and French doors on most rooms. When they heard sirens, they opened the French doors so the percussion of the bands would not break the glass which had sticky paper and they opened the windows. She ran to her room and saw B54 fly and drop bombs and became fearless. She made a game of it whether the bomb would fall in her apartment or next door. They evacuated to the villa in the countryside because it became too dangerous in the city around '41 or '42. They were aware of danger. The family had no history of persecution in the Italian Jewish community. They had a cousin who was a Senator for life and became Secretary of State. Most of the Jewish community welcomed the Fascists who represented order, discipline and the return of Italy to glorious ideal. When a man speaks as well as Mussolini, he converts many people. The Jews supported the Fascists emotionally as they had discipline.

75:00 Italy was in turmoil so welcomed the Fascists who had tradition and wanted to unify Italy and bring work and order and have things function. Her family favored the Fascists. Some people were radical, some had no affiliation with parties and were persecuted by the Fascists by being sent away from the country. Mussolini was on the right. Leftists were not with the party in 1922. Russia had the idea of Communism which was a leveling situation where you could not have the very rich and the very poor. It was a new experiment. The intellectuals went way left and the moderates went way right. Italians dislike any type of government, and anything to do with power against Italian romantic ideals. The family never mentioned Hitler in 1933. It was the height of the Depression and her father was transitioning from being Director of a Harvesting company to become a Director of an insurance company. He had to study.

80:00 He never discussed finances with the children. They knew something was going on. The parents did not discuss politics with the children. There was a Fascist organization for the schools and Luisa attended games where 3,000 children performed in an arena. One

was for Hitler before the Nuremberg Laws when she was 12. She has no recollection of discussing Germany though knew of Hitler as Mussolini thought Hitler was a great man. She heard that on the radio and in the newspaper. Hitler visited Italy and Mussolini visited Germany so she was aware of it. Her father belonged to La Nazionale Fascista and the first prohibition was that Jews were not allowed to join the Fascist party. Italian laws moved slowly. If you were a good Italian, you were exempted. The laws were for foreign Jews. If you were a good doctor, you were exempt. Like all Latin countries function that the law is not for everybody.

85:00 If you are a little better, you do not have to follow them. It is happening in Greece now. The news kept getting worse. If you were in a university going for your Ph. D, you were permitted to finish but you could not enter the university. Therefore, families sent their children to France to study. Like in the movie, "Garden of the Finzi-Continis," the girl had already started in Venice so she could remain but the boy was sent to France. In '38 were the first laws to register as Jews as they had not registered by religion previously. You were given a pink card. The punishment for not registering was prison so there was no hesitation among the Jews to register. Italians would not make enemies among all people so did not take it seriously. People who had relatives in Russia, Poland and Hungary made plans. Her family did not make much plans but decided to go to England as afraid the children could not attend school. In '39 her mother got sick and it was wartime with economic crisis. Her father lost his job so he worked on his philatelic endeavors. Mussolini came to power in '22 and marched on Rome around October 24<sup>th</sup> from Bologna. He conquered the right to govern and one of the first things he did was break relations with the Vatican City because the influence of the church in Italy was enormous. That is why the church had a subsidy from the government. In '29 there was a reconciliation with the church was difficult to negotiate but was achieved. They were permitted to keep the Vatican and the summer residence of the Pope and have the defense of the Vatican assigned to Italy. They could keep the Swiss guards and did not have to report their income. They accepted Catholicism as the official religion of the Kingdom of Italy. It was a tremendous success as France had thrown out the church and, to this day, has no part of it.

90:00 Mussolini was successful because he had something for the common people. He established the requirement that school attendance was required and all schools were the same so the country would be unified. The many states were divided. At the time all the big powers had colonies supporting them but Italy had none. They got Libya as a colony. They had Eritrea and in '35 obtained Ethiopia which had similarity to Italy in its grains. It had a lot of land and few people and no infrastructure. War in Africa was popular as they thought Ethiopia would support the motherland. Luisa's family was involved. The son of a farmer was sent to serve there and thought it was a wonderful country. Luisa's family wrote to him and it lifted his morale. He was 19 years old and fond of monkeys.



In '38 the Nuremberg-type laws were passed. It was the first time there was anti-Semitism in the Fascist party. The office dedicated propaganda against the Jews. They made up stories about how conniving and subversive the Jews were as they worshipped money. The Italians copied the Germans in this way.

95:00 If the family emigrated, they could only take a limited amount of items and would forfeit their right to their belongings. They sold properties to friends to divest themselves of their property so the government would not take them. The law got strict for everyone. You could only carry a certain amount of money so you couldn't use the black market. Food was scarce as they were not importing food. Coffee and sugar disappeared and meat was scarce. The Black Market flourished. People from the countryside were frisked to see if they had eggs or poultry. There were coupons for certain food items. The sugar ration for one month was less than one pound per person per month. Eggs and milk were rationed. The currency was coupons. There was straw in the bread. There was no famine, just deterioration in what food was available to eat. It was difficult for growing children. It affected everyone, even non-Jews. The family needed to find the Black Market or they did not have certain items. There was no butter so used margarine and that was not always available. They used linseed instead of olive oil. Soon all food was scarce. Growing children's teeth deteriorated. Some of the rich escaped the country. They all knew that something was coming. Her family did not feel that way. They had never seen foreigners who were not extremely rich.

100:00 They knew Russian Jews who were in the fur business and one was a ballet dancer. They arrived in the mid '30s and bought a fantastic apartment. They went to the ballet, had tennis lessons and attended private school. When the laws started, they immigrated to the US and Luisa saw them later in New York. Her family felt they were Italian and could not change their nationality. Luisa walked on the street and her best friend, Mina, was on the same side and crossed over without saying, "hello." They were friends since they were young so she realized her friend was anti-Semitic. Luisa was already thrown out of school. She felt the poison in the system. Leaving school was difficult as her mother also attended it. In 2013 she visited the school and learned it was going to become a museum. It was beautiful overlooking a garden with fresco on the ceiling and marble on the floor. Luisa realized she had been privileged. At the time she did not feel rich as there were similar buildings all over Italy. Now that she came from the US, she realizes it. At the school, they treated her with deference saying, "Senora, come with us." They showed her around. It made her feel the same as her life was once but is no longer. The school was called Via Squalor Mila Manzoni (?) or Women's School. Last year she looked in her papers and saw the letter her mother obtained from the school president that indicated she attended three years and graduated. It was signed by the grandfather of her niece's husband so she gave it to the niece as she did not know the grandfather.

- 105:00 When the schools were closed to the Jews, the newspapers published that people from certain schools could no longer attend but could find their own schools. Jews were only allowed in elementary school. Luisa believes this was announced in the summer when they were in Venezia (Venice) and her parents tried to find out which schools were available. They found the British institute, an accounting school. Most announcements were to crowds in the squares when the weather was nice. They announced that Jews should not be with non-Jews. Some friends thought this trouble would blow away. They thought that Mussolini would be out of power and the war would be over – *laissez-faire*. That Italy was not Germany. Such things were never done before. Italy was neutral when the war started. In '41 Italy and Japan joined Germany, the Axis powers. They were afraid they would lose the right of a part of France where the people spoke Italian and was thought to belong to Italy.
- 110:00 Then France surrendered. The Italians did not know what was happening to the Jews in Germany as they kept it secret. They said they were employing Jews to work for them and did not mention concentration camp. In Italy 10,000 people were secretly rounded up. People disappeared and no one knew where they were taken to. Five years writing was found on a retaining wall in a railroad station where people were placed before deportation. There was complete secrecy of deportation. She saw a non-Jewish friend who was an officer in the Greek campaign for the Germans. They wanted to ask his father where he was when Italy surrendered. His father was the partner of her cousin who was an attorney and the father was a CPA. She went unannounced to the office which was not the usual procedure. He took her on the balcony and closed the door and asked her what she was doing there as the cousin was taken.
- 115:00 She was asking about the son, not the cousin. The family were on a lake and their slightly mentally retarded child was in a private Catholic school as they had converted. The family was taken and the child remained in the school throughout the war and died 20 years later. That was the first time they found out about picking up people. They found out about it after Italy surrendered in '43. Italy went to war in '41 or '42. Sicily was invaded and the Americans came up the boot and Italy surrendered after Rome was conquered. The King was abducted and surrendered. Italy was cut in two as the Germans took a piece and the allies took a piece. It took two years to get back the rest of Italy. Mussolini created headquarters on Lake Garda and created a Republic allied with the Germans and tried to negotiate to disintegrate allegiance to Germany.
- 120:00 She was in Milan on the day of surrender and everyone thought they all would be freed but Germany invaded the rest of Italy with armies on the battlefield and became the supreme power. Mussolini was a puppet. Luisa's family considered options and found none. She lived in the part that Germany controlled. The line was below Pavia and Bologna from the Mediterranean to the Adriatic above Florence. Venice, Trieste, Turin and Genoa were in the German part. They lived in their country home in Venezia as their

home was destroyed. They could take the train from Venezia to Milan. People disappeared from her father's side. Their villa was in the valley with railroad tracks nearby and a river on the bottom. They could hear the noise from the armored divisions on the water side. It was the Italian Army leaving Italy and entering Switzerland to give up arms. Her brother said he is the same age as the soldiers and should join them. His parents gave him gold coins, kissed him and he left. The other brother was away as he had been abducted for labor camp.

125:00 Luisa worked for an insurance company and her sister also worked. Both brothers were drafted for forced labor in '42. Her father was thrown out of work. The boys worked in a quarry to break stone. The job was usually given to prisoners at hard labor. They were in their '20s. Her father knew the President of Italy under Mussolini and contacted him. The President took care of it the next day as the boys were released. This was typical of Italy where "one hand washes another." The mafia is not just criminals. If you want a job, you must know somebody. Even now there are no employment agencies. Her father saw his sons' hands were bloody so had to ask a powerful person to help. They were about a month in the camp.

130:00 Her father was thrown out of the Fascist Party in '38 when the Nuremberg Laws were applied. Mussolini could not hurt anyone so this was the only thing Italy did. Mussolini was like an actor. There was curfew in Italy except for doctors and firemen. Their doctor came to their door as he was sent by the head of Police they would be picked up at noon the next day. They each packed a suitcase and put on mountain boots. Her parents took valuables and put some gold coins and jewelry in the hem of her skirt. Her father took a book out from the Bernanke Library and went towards Lake Lugano. He visited good Fascists and asked them how to get taken out by smugglers. There was a tall woman who climbed mountains and hid in bushes when German patrols came. They were almost at the Swiss border and saw a wire fence with bells on the top. They saw a spot that could be lifted and her father said that he is an officer and cannot leave his country. Luisa insisted he leave and she was the first one to leave. There was a short officer from 1895 who said to come and he took the four suitcases and they walked to Switzerland. They felt hysterical elation that they made it.

135:00 They walked about two hours. There were Germans around but neither saw the other. The Swiss brought them to a military garrison and served them polenta (cornmeal mush) and salad and Luisa laughed hysterically as the two were never served together. Her father told her not to laugh at what she was given to eat but just eat it. She remembers her father told her how to behave if something strange is presented. They were given a piece of cake and had not seen anything made with sugar for years. They were fascinated with how good it was. They were all placed in one room and had to go to the bathroom before the door was locked. It was a jail as they had no other place to put them. They were told they would be woken up at 7 AM to shower and be interrogated. They were in

Billingsha (?) in Cachina (?) County where Italian was spoken, Switzerland has three divisions: Italian, German and French. They realized they were in a jail as people had been there before – gypsies, German military, British escaping from Italy, and Polish military but no Jews. They were taken to a restaurant for breakfast in a small town. A difficult thing happened as a man in the group would give information to authorities so her father went and found out they would later be moved.

140:00 Luisa would be with her sister and mother and her father would go elsewhere. This was a terrible shock. They had few belongings compared to others in the group. They each had their own suitcase. Accommodations was limited and they could not isolate the husband and wife in the same area so they placed the men in one area and the women in another and would be reunited later. This announcement brought chaos, crying, screaming and hysterical. They were sent to Rovio, a children's summer camp on a hilltop. It was a beautiful building with small beds and they divided the young from the elderly. The older people went to the teacher's residence which had bigger beds, leaving the younger people in the smaller beds. There were about 200 women and children and they established a routine. After they got up, they would be assigned tasks such as cleaning, cutting flowers, wash dishes, wash clothes and then be taken out for a walk with two armed guards. They were about 80 years old and allowed the children to play with their guns. The people could correspond with their relatives as the mail was efficient. Every two or three days they would receive a note from her father. Her sister had a high temperature and it was diphtheria so was sent to the Lugano Hospital for 40 days. Her father was in a camp similar to theirs in an old hotel in Lugano and he could wave to her from the street.

145:00 Her first brother went to the Army. Stories they heard were misleading. They said that if you stay in Switzerland for a week, you would be accepted. Her brothers escaped to a haystack in a barn and raided the chicken coop for eggs and found cheese. The older brother came home and said he was shot at. He was draft age and they were picking up all draft-age men. This happened two months before just after the Armistice. At the railroad station, they made all the young men line up along the train. When it moved, her brother jumped up into the railroad car and a railroad man asked him why he was there. He gave him a cap and told him to walk around the rail and bang on the nuts. He would be an official railroad man and would not be arrested. The brother walked 20 miles and got home. At night he joined a group of men that were going to cross the border to Switzerland. He went into a barn and walked up the stepladder and saw his younger brother so the twins got united. Eventually they surrendered as they had no papers. The Swiss checked to see if they were circumcised. Many Italians escaped as they were fed up with the war, with poverty, with the lack of food and hoped for a better life in Switzerland. One brother was sent to Luzern University and the older one was sent to Cuchina to school.

150:00 They received a postcard with an Italian stamp and discovered that if you give a half pound of rice with the letter, the rice is sent to Switzerland to buy stamps and sugar which is returned with the letter to Italy. Italy had no sugar and Switzerland had no rice. That is how mail was sent. There was no official mail. The family was accepted in Switzerland as Luisa's father knew someone in the government which made things easier. That way her father could prove who he was. It was an expensive phone call costing a 5 lira gold coin and it was bribery. At lower levels, officials in each country accepted bribery so refugees were able to enter. Luisa was with her mother for a month or six weeks while her sister was in Lugano Hospital. Her father appeared on the train to Zurich. They were sent to a military camp with 300,000 people. Europe was consumed by war. Military and civilians including gypsies and people with deformities were escaping. There were POWs from Holland, Poland, Hungary, Russia, France, Spain and Italy. All converged on Switzerland. The Swiss sent back those they thought were fakes. They did not know what to do with so many refugees. Luisa's group went to an old mill where they weaved long lengths of fabric. They built three stack bunks and slept on straw and had a blanket and a pillow. They used a stepladder to get to the second and third bunks. There was one washroom for 600 women and another for 600 men.

155:00 They were united for meals. Sanitation and showers were on the ground floor. There was a choice of jobs. She chose to clean the toilets as it was the shortest job and no one wanted it and it gave her freedom. They were given a loaf of bread daily and she cannot remember where she kept it. They were happy. They put on shows, played bridge and had free time to walk in the park outside in the cold and snow. She does not recall what money they had to rent bathing suits. Snow was outside and they swam in a warm pool which was luxury. They thought she should go to school. She and a friend from Venice were sent to a camp near Aarau, near the German border. An old Army man took them there and got lost on the way. He carried the luggage and they carried his gun. There she met her sister. At the camp, they learned to knit socks with four needles. They spent two months there with about 40 or 50 women. She learned how to cook, clean, keep house and to ski.

160:00 It was a winter school for children. The authorities tried to make them happy. There was a Dutch camp nearby for men and boys and they had parties together. The Dutch had escaped from prison camp in Germany; there were no Jews. She met some Jews and people of different nationalities. When she was near Zurich was the first time she saw numbers tattooed on two tall Russian women who escaped from prison camp in Germany. They were carrying a dead body of a guard to be assured acceptance into Switzerland. Some people spoke Russian and could translate. When she saw the POWs was the first time she had an idea what was happening behind the border. It was dreadful and she realized how lucky she was. The Swiss helped protect them. For helping, they could be made subject to brutality. Luisa had cousins in Sungarten (?) who came to the

camp with some of their clothes. They also got clothes from organizations. Her cousin was crying and asked the commander to permit them to come home with her. Eventually, they heard the two sisters could work as au pairs in Geneva. Her sister stayed with one family until the end of the war. Luisa was hired by a couple who had a beautiful house on Lake Geneva but she was moved to their father's small chalet on a mountain near Sion. He was about 80 or 85. She had a good time until she got violently sick.

165:00 The doctor said she had appendicitis and needed to go for an operation. It was late August or September and the surgeon was a hunter and had left for the mountains. Luisa developed phlebitis. They treated it with ice and hot compresses and it got worse. She was alone in the hospital and called the Italian Consulate in Sion, and told him her ailments. The Consulate's wife and other people came and said they must send her to her parents in Chambery in the French part in the mountains. She took the train west and saw her brother in a train going east. He was climbing mountains to get supplies, medicine and weapons for the insurgents against the Germans. He had left school and did not return until after the war. He was instrumental in getting the family a place to live when they returned to Italy. A Swiss family occupied their country home and they had no place in Milan. He got them an apartment. He met them when the Italian government took the house in mid-July as papers had to be made. They returned to Como and saw the brother in uniform and had commandeered a truck to take them home. They stayed in a farmer's quarters in Venezia until an apartment became available in Milan.

170:00 The family had left Italy on September 15, 1943 and were in Switzerland for two years. When Luisa arrived in Chambery, she could not walk so was placed on an armchair on a wheeled cart and taken to a hotel at the end of the village. She felt like Marie Antoinette going to the guillotine. She did not want to scare her parents so they did not know she was coming. She stayed with them until the end of the war. A revealing thing happened. There was a family from Tübingen (?) with a girl her age and they became close friends. The girl's sister was a doctor who joined the Partisans and was deported to Germany and they did not know what happened to her. She was Jewish. Luisa got a telephone call asking if she knew Nissen. She knew them but there were 1,000 people and did not know where they were. The Red Cross was calling that the girl's sister was alive and well in Dachau and would be repatriated. Luisa saw the Nissens and cried and told them the daughter was alive. It was a most moving experience for her. By then, Luisa knew of people who went into concentration camps and did not return. She met the daughter who later committed suicide like Primo Levi. Luisa worked for a year for the UN repatriation (UNWRA) in Corona with children from the camps.

175:00 They were like wild animals as they grew up by themselves with no parents, no ethics and were used in medical experiments. She tried to make a bridge to teach them something as they never had a family. They would try to run away as wanted to be safe. They would go to the train station and take any train and be brought back. Some spoke

languages that no one around spoke. They needed affection. They never trusted people. Luisa helped them with housing and clothing and directed them to classes for literacy to learn to read and write. They needed to learn to hold a pencil and needed medical care. The children were paired up with families from all over the world. The children in Cremona were five to eleven years old and some were born in the camps. Others were abducted and brought to Germany. She did not know if they were Jewish. Some of their origins were unknown as the children did not know.

180:00 Some of the refugees wanted to kill a guard from a camp but some people intervened and he was arrested. They did not know if the man was a guard. Luisa was with her sister and parents in Chambery, Switzerland, when the war ended. The Swiss tried to isolate them from the news which could create turmoil but through word-of-mouth, they learned of invasions. There were no newspapers but they had a radio though it was forbidden. Once a month they got money and tickets to visit their parents but were not permitted into the dance hall. Refugees with sufficient money could rent a place and could do what they wanted in the country. They did not wear anything identifying them. They were permitted to visit villages. They had some money as charities such as AJDC gave them fifty cents a week. Christian charities gave to Christians and liberal groups sent tooth paste and necessities. Luisa had some freedom when she was not in the military camps. Switzerland is a small nation of three million and they cared for so many people. Luisa cannot imagine the US taking 20 million people in three months.

185:00 Look at current events in the Arab States, Africa and Europe. Some European nations do not want immigrants. Her father made an expensive phone call to an influential person in Switzerland, a member of the government. That is how they got accepted as refugees or they could have been turned back. It was someone her father knew from his philatelic work, a minister. It happened several times. If you are prominent and in need, people help each other. When the persecution began, her father had a great stamp collection that he sent to London to a famous stamp collector who kept it for him until after the war. Luisa and her sister went to London for a year as au pair and obtained the collection and brought it home. They lived on it as they had no money. It was their only asset after the war. You never know which connection will enable you to continue. There must be other people with similar stories. People had their property taken, sold and now regained though the original owners may be dead a long time. After the war, her mother was in the first camp in Rovio. The Swiss authority asked them to surrender all their valuables as there was no safety in the camps and giving asylum was costly.

190:00 After the war, they took a franc per person per day for maintenance. They would sell some of their jewelry and return the rest. Luisa thought it was fair but others did not. Luisa was realistic as Switzerland spent a lot of money on them. If you escape and they save you, what is it worth? After working for UNWRA, she wanted to have distance from what she saw. She saw changes after the war since '38. Luisa despaired of her

youth and what she could have accomplished but she could not as has insufficient scholarship. She designs furniture and does embroidery which is important to her. She would have been an architect. She cherishes building and thinks there is permanence beyond your life that are valuable. You are put on earth to contribute, not to take away. That is the sad part that she feels now as she did not accomplish what she could have. She is not leaving a spiritual inheritance. Luisa appreciates what is beautiful. She has not done what she loved to do. Time went by and it was not available. She feels more Jewish as a ring in the chain represents the connection. She is just a human being, not different and does not want to be different.

195:00