

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Herta Griffel Baitch on May 10, 2016 at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum facilities here in Washington, DC. Thank you very, very much, Mrs. Baitch, for agreeing to meet with us today to share your story, your experiences, and with that, to allow others to know about what those were and how that fit into the large mosaic and picture of the tragic time of the Holocaust. So we are very grateful for that.

Well, I'm grateful to be able to tell what I can. for you.

Thank you. We're going to start at the very beginning. I'd like to find out as much as I can about your pre-war life. I know that in some cases, with some people, that can present some challenges. The reason why we try to go in as much detail as we can is that we want to get a sense of the world that you were born into, the forces that shaped you, the first initial ones, and get a picture of what this world was before it was lost.

So my very first question is, could you tell me the date of your birth?

March 10, 1933.

And what was your name at birth?

Herta Griffel.

And where were you born?

Vienna, Austria.

What was your father's name?

My father was Wolf and my mother was Berta.

And what was her maiden name?

Nagel.

Nagel, OK.

N-A-G-E-L.

Were they both from Vienna?

No, they were both from Krakow.

I see.

And my father was living in Vienna. And as I understand it, my mother was taken from her small town to Vienna to find a husband.

Did she find him, then?

She found him, yes.

And so if they were both from Krakow, did you have extended family in Vienna, or was it just the three of you?

There was no other family except for an aunt who was my mother's sister-in-law. In other words, she was married to my

mother's brother.

I see, OK.

And her name was Lotte, Lotte Nagel.

And so you had an uncle as well in Vienna, or just the aunt?

No. No, she was a widow.

Oh, I see. Did they come from large families, your Parents

I don't know. I don't think so. I just have the sense that there were no large amount of relatives at all.

Did you ever visit Krakow to visit the family?

No. Well, recently-- no. No, never. Never. They never spoke about it.

OK. And did they ever speak Polish with one another?

No. Never.

And what language did they communicate in?

As far as I know, it was German. Sometimes Yiddish, but mostly German.

OK. So they spoke both. They spoke both.

Yes.

And do you know what their citizenship was?

Well, it wasn't Austrian.

So it must have been Polish.

It must have been, but they didn't have any papers. They had no papers.

I asked this question because very often that made a difference.

It did, as I found out later. It did make a difference.

And another interview that I've recently done also illustrates, you know, there are pieces of the puzzle that you don't realize until somebody's life story is put out in front of you. It has to do with Poland, part of it having been part of the Russian Empire, part of it being Austro-Hungarian, and part of that having gone to Prussia in the 19th century. So when it became Poland, many of the people who were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire who were born in Poland then went to Vienna.

My mother was not born in Poland-- in Krakow. I'm sorry. She was born in [POLISH], a small town, a very small town. I'm sorry about that. She is not from Krakow. She's from Poland.

But she is from Poland, from this little town.

Yes. My father was born in Krakow. I made a mistake.

That's OK. Do you know anything about your grandparents' lives?

None. None.

I want to ask--

OK. So you have no real knowledge of the larger family that your parents came from other than they were not from Vienna.

I didn't know that my mother was born in this small town until I got the paper from Yad Vashem that she was taken to [POLISH] and died there. That had her city of birth on there. I thought she was from Krakow, but she was from [POLISH].

And what year did you get this document from Yad Vashem?

It must have been about 12 years ago.

So that would mean 2004--

Approximately.

Which is over 50 years, at that point, 60 years from the end of the war, such a small detail, but it's an important detail when you don't know it.

I never knew that. I never knew that. We looked it up, and it's a tiny little town. Lots of farmland around it.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

No. No. I was the only child. I was an only child, yeah.

If someone would ask me the questions that I am asking you, I'd find them hard to answer, but I'm going to ask them anyway. Can you tell me, in your memory, what your earliest memory might be from childhood? What kind of image comes to your mind?

The image that I think of when I think of my childhood is one of secrecy, shushing, rumors, and sadness and fear. Just that's the kind of overall feel that I have from my small years.

How sad.

Yes. Well, I didn't know any different. I tried to make sense of it.

But you know, a small child's life is based on a feeling, is based on emotion.

Yes. That's what I remember. The only nice remembrance that I have is of singing Yiddish songs with my father.

Really?

Did he have a nice voice?

I don't remember his voice, but he loved to sing. So I even have that book that my mother packed for me with--

Those songs?

Those songs. Yeah, she didn't want me to forget them.

And was there any one song in particular that he sang that you remember?

Well, the one that I am most familiar with was [YIDDISH]. So-- [YIDDISH].

[YIDDISH]?

Yes.

OK. Tell us what does that mean?

I think [YIDDISH] means on a fire of some side. I really don't-- fire [YIDDISH]. Is a [YIDDISH]. It's in the words, [YIDDISH]. So there was a fire, [YIDDISH].

And that's what stays.

Yes. Yes.

That's what stays.

And that's the one that's most popular in this country, so.

Do you have any memory of your father as doing something? Do you have memory of him working? Do you have a memory of him at home?

I don't have a memory of my father in our grocery store. He was not a well person. And I recognized that. And it was my mother that was a strong-- seemed to me the strong person at home.

So let's step back a little bit. One of the questions I usually ask is how did your parents support the family? That is-- and you kind of answered it now. So what was your father's business? What did he do?

They had a small grocery.

Was it a neighborhood grocery store?

I don't know. But I have a feeling that it was not too far away.

OK. And did your mother work with him there?

Yes.

Do you have any memory of your neighborhood in Vienna?

No. I have very little memory of my childhood, of friends, of school.

What about the place you lived?

That's a question mark in my mind. My mother's letters had an address that she wrote letters to me from. But in later years, we went to that address in Vienna. And it did not seem like the same place. I did not relate to it in any way.

It might have been that she had to move. Yes. Yes, I learned that. Yes. And I don't know what the address was on my records because I had no-- my records were private with the agency. So I never found out much information about where I lived and so forth.

So again, in your mind's eye, do you have any image of a particular room from your childhood, a bedroom, a living room, a kitchen?

No, I don't. My most vivid memory is of my mother and me going to the streets for a parade. And it was an immense parade. And all the Nazi banners and bunting were all over the place. And I remember the sound of the boots of the soldiers, and loud music, and a lot of Sieg Heils. And I didn't know anything about what was going on. And my mother, I remember her squeezing my hand. And I said, what is this? And she said, it's going to be very bad. That is the only vivid memory that I have. I remember the pounding on the pavement, on the street.

What can you tell me about your mother? Is she someone who is more in your memories than your father?

Yes. Yes. But not as much as I would think. Not as much as I would think I would remember of my mother. She did embroidery. And she worked in the store. And I think I was taken care of by another woman when she went to the store. I don't remember the store. I don't know whether I'm protecting myself, or I have no memories of hugging my mother, kissing my mother. I don't have those memories.

Or of the reverse, of her kissing you and hugging you.

Yes. I don't have those memories. I don't have any memories of my schooling, of friends. That's been a blank. Until I came to the United States, and even for about a week or so until I went into my first foster home, that has all been a blank.

And to this day?

And to this day, I don't have a memory of being in my mother's arms. And there is one memory that I do remember. We were sitting in a chair at the end of Shabbat and waiting for the stars to come out. That is a memory. That is a good memory. And we were waiting for the stars to come out, and my mother said that there's a moment just after Shabbat ends, and the stars come out, something like that. She said you can see God. And I remember being in a chair with her.

That's about the closest memory that I have. Even leaving, I remember that she told me I was coming to the United States, and that another Jewish mother would take care of me, and that I had to be very healthy.

And these are things that-- I remember being in a shul. I think it was a shul. And people were crying, and she made me leave. My father was holding a Torah. And I just assume now that that must have been a Yizkor service because people were crying, and she wanted me to leave.

For those people, myself included, who don't know what a Yizkor service is, could you tell us?

It's usually on Yom Kippur. And it's a part of the service that remembered where you remember your parents, and you say a memorial prayer for those you've left behind. And in the old days, they didn't want children around. And I remember my mother telling me to go outside. So I think those three things.

I don't remember singing with my father, but I know I did. I know I did, but I don't remember it. The chair, sitting in the chair watching the stars. The shul. And the parade. The parade is the most vivid thing that I have.

Do you have any memory of their personalities?

I have the feeling that my father might have been more outgoing than my mother. I think my mother was very quiet. I'm really not sure.

So I have a few questions that probably, if you know the answers, they would not be from memory, but from things you found out. But you can let me know. Do you know what happened to your father and to the grocery store once there was an Anschluss of Austria to Germany and the Nazis took control? How your family was affected?

I understand. I don't remember Kristallnacht. But we did lose our grocery store. And my father was taken by a truck to some sort of labor camp.

Do you remember seeing the truck?

There were trucks in the neighborhood that took men back and forth. They came back at night, and they were rounded up in the morning. And this went on for a time. And one night my father came home and he died.

At home?

At home, yes. He was not well to begin with.

Do you remember anything about that?

I guess we had a funeral. I remember being in the cemetery, and I know my father had a grave. It was bigger than I was. And I remember it being green. And I remember my mother putting a hat on me. And she always tried to hide my braids. And I remember that I felt like a boy when she did that. Also, during the parade, she put a hat on me and stuck my braids. I don't know why, but I do remember that she seemed to be protective of my long braids that I had.

So are there any feelings that you associate, any emotions? I mean, they're the ones that we would normally think when a child loses a parent.

I don't have that emotional knowledge. I just have these memories. Of school, of friends, of neighbors, I don't. I just-- I do remember that he had a large gravestone. I don't know how my mother arranged it. But she did.

Do you remember ever feeling hungry?

No. No.

OK. So even when the store was lost, you don't remember hunger as a result of that?

I think my mother came home with some sort of a pot. And now that I'm older, I would assume that it-- could it have been from some sort of a soup kitchen? I remember her coming home with a pot. So I guess I have more memories than I think I do. I just don't have the emotional memories at all.

We often find, when we start an interview, and we start a process, that one thought comes up, and it triggers another thought, and it triggers a third thought and so on.

Yes, yes, because I don't speak about this very often.

Of course. So it's not surprising.

I do remember her coming home with a-- it had sort of a pot with a tight lid on it. And at that time, after we lost the store, we went to live with my Tante Lotte, who was my mother's sister-in-law.

So this is very interesting. You just anticipated the next question I was going to ask because the picture I'm getting, first of all, from what you tell me, is vague. You know, it's sort of like through a mist. And there are episodes, one here, one here. But there are also episodes that feature your mother and your father and yourself and nobody else by name, not even the lady who takes care of you.

No.

And so then I wanted to ask about, how do you know Tante Lotte? How does she figure in the story?

We went to live with her, and then it was the three of us. It must have been an apartment. And I remember one night, we heard people with boots, and they came into our apartment. I think it wasn't the first apartment. We heard it. We heard it.

And they came in the apartment, and they were shouting. And they were looking at things and throwing things around. I don't know what they were looking for.

Were these men?

These were Nazis, and they were in uniform with beautiful black high boots and hats. And so that they were not the brown shirts that we saw in the parade. They were much more well-dressed. And there were two or three of them. I don't remember. And after they looked to see what they needed to see, we were sort of cowering in the corner. And when they left, my mother went to this little stove that had a little ash tray in it for ashes from the wood stove. And she had put some money in there, wrapped around into a tight bundle.

Like in a cloth or something?

I don't know. But I remember her looking in this little drawer, and the money was there. They didn't find it. And I remember us being very happy.

Relieved.

Relieved. Yes. And it was shortly after that that my mother tried to find a way to get me out.

Do you have any memories of Tante Lotte, what she looked like?

Only from her picture. I don't remember her much at all. I don't remember much.

Was she much older than your mother?

She was older. That I know. She was older.

And your own parents, I mean, I know that you have some photographs of them. Yes but is your knowledge of how they looked from the photographs or from something else in your mind's eye? Or is it even possible to tell?

Yes. My Tante Lotte looks like herself. My father, I remember him looking like that. And my mother, yes. Yes.

So it's not like you look at the photographs and you say, I guess these must have been my parents. You recognize them.

I recognize them because I always had them with me. I always had those with me. Is there anything that you remember your father ever saying that was like a special saying he had, like you said your mother did when know you find the stars come out, and if you look very carefully there, you might see God. Did you ever remember your father saying something?

I guess I remember more than I thought I did. I know that there was a time that we were going, I thought, to America. But I found out later that it was never to America. It was to Shanghai.

To China, OK.

And my father was sick, and we couldn't go. And I always thought that it was America. But I found out later that it was to Shanghai.

So there was talk of leaving.

Yes.

There was talk between your parents of leaving.

I think that was the feeling with everyone. But I don't remember anyone specifically at all.

And did you attend school?

I must have. I don't remember attending school at all. I always had my passport, and my handwriting was beautiful. It really was. For seven years old, it was very good. And when I came to the United States and was put into a classroom, the teacher tried to make me copy the American ABC because I used the German script. And the H was different, and the G in my name was different. And I had to try to copy what was on the top of the blackboard.

And it was different from what you had learned. So obviously, you must have been at school to be able to learn it.

Obviously-- exactly. I looked at my handwriting, and I said, I had to learn this somewhere.

So when you're talking about passport, do you really mean report card?

No.

No, no, there was a passport?

My passport.

And you wrote inside your passport?

Yes, under my picture.

Ah, you signed your name.

Yes.

I see. I see.

In script.

And what kind of passport was it? Did you have citizenship of any kind?

No. I was [NON-ENGLISH].

[NON-ENGLISH]. So stateless.

Yes. And it was not a passport. It was a-- I gave it to the museum. I don't remember.

An ID card of some kind?

No, it was a passport, but it had something else written on it. I can't remember.

That's OK. Those are things that we can find out about by looking at the document. What we're doing now is seeing what was taken from you, basically, and how much of this world that you were born into you still were able to retain, and how much was lost. And so that's part of the story.

I think the emotional part was lost, any kind of-- I don't have any emotional feeling about seeing my father's gravestone or-- the parade is the most vivid memory that I have. And the second one was looking for the stars.

Well, the interesting thing is also, when we started talking, you said that the very first memory is an overall one of fear, of shushing, of some secrets of some kind.

It was not happy. It was a very unhappy, not nice feeling everywhere that I remember. I don't remember laughter. I don't remember-- I don't remember going places, you know.

Soon after the place where you were living with your Aunt Lotte and your mother was kind of violated by these well-dressed--

I thought they were officers.

Nazis, I guess. And your mother says, OK, now she's going to look for a way for you to get out. What is the next thing that you remember?

I remember her telling me that I was going to America and that another Jewish mother would take care of me.

And do you have any feeling from that?

I didn't understand it. I don't think I understood it. But I remember her saying it, and also that I had to be very healthy.

Yeah. You spoke with her in German or in Yiddish?

I think it was German.

OK. Do you still speak German? Can you still understand it?

I've forgotten everything. I've forgotten Yiddish. Well, yes, I forgot the German completely.

I mean, it's hard to imagine what must have been going through her mind.

I can't imagine. I can't imagine it. I've had seven-year-olds, and I can't imagine what she must have gone through.

So what's the next memory? Do you remember leaving Vienna? Do you remember leaving Vienna?

I do. My next memory was I was being examined, and I have a vaccination scar on my thigh. But I didn't know what it was. And that was the only mark that I had. And I remember keeping my arm up against my thigh so that nobody would see it.

During the examination.

During the examination. And the next thing I remember is my mother packing a suitcase. And we went to the train station.

Do you remember anything about that trip to the train station from where you lived?

No. Just remember being at the train station.

Do you remember, was your mother crying?

I don't remember. I don't remember whether I was crying. I assume I was. But I remember that at the train station, there was a lot of commotion. And I'm not sure, but I think there were other people there besides the children that got on the

train. Maybe they were hoping that their children would at the last minute be able to come.

But that's the sense that I had because there were a lot of people there, more than just the mothers of the children that left. And I understand that the children were chosen because we didn't have a father, that our fathers were either killed or had died during that time.

Right now we've been talking along one line, which is what do you remember? Let's stop and pause and fill in the gaps of what was actually taking place that you found out later. So do you know the name of the organization that helped you get the paperwork done, and what country gave the visa, and where you were going? Things like that. Can you tell me, what was behind all this?

I found this out in 2006, when I met one of the children. Someone found and gave me the list of the nine children who came.

So you were one of nine children.

One of nine.

And you don't remember those children?

No.

OK. So your mother was not on the train, but you were.

No. No, just the children. Just the children were on the train. And my friend that I met through that list, Stella, was 13. I was seven. So she remembered everything and told me how the whole process was put into place. The agency that brought us was the German Jewish Children's Aid Society. And that's the agency that when I got to the United States, there was a social worker from that agency in Baltimore that brought me to Baltimore to my first foster home.

So this agency, was it based in the United States, or was it based in Germany?

I think it was based in the United States.

OK. But it was called the German Jewish Children's Aid Society. OK. And why wasn't your mother able to accompany you?

Adults could not come. I think the immigration was very tight. I don't know how we got out. But no adults were allowed to leave at that time, November 1940.

This is quite late. The war has started.

Yes.

Do you have any memories of a militarized Vienna, aside from the parade that you already told me about that, you know, tanks and soldiers and things like that?

Outside of the parade, no, because I don't think that I was in the streets. I don't remember being in the streets.

But I'm just surprised because 1940, and November 1940, the war started.

Yes.

They're already in Poland.

And people were not allowed to come here anymore. So I always thought it was kind of a miracle that-- and I received the list of names from a woman. Well, it's a long story.

We'll talk about that a little bit later. But for right now, I take it you never saw your mother again.

No.

Did you know at that time that you may not see her again?

She did tell me that she was going to try to find me. Her plan was to go to Cuba-- I didn't know where that was-- and then to the United States, and that we would be reunited.

So it wasn't she was saying, I may not see you again.

No. I remember her saying that was her plan. That was her plan. She didn't know when, but that was her plan.

Did you ever hear from her after that? I received letters for about six months, and I wrote to her. And after about six months, the letters stopped. And my foster mother told me that something must have happened to her because obviously, she knew where I was. She had your address.

She had the address.

This was already in Baltimore. She would have had a Baltimore address.

Yes, she had the address of my first foster home.

Do you remember what she packed in your suitcase?

I remember what I brought here. There was a picture of my mother and me. And I was wearing a dress that she had packed in the suitcase, very pretty dress. She packed a doll. And when I look at the doll, I don't remember-- I don't have any connection to this doll. I don't know whether it was a doll that I played with or that maybe she put in there for later. I don't have a connection with this doll.

And she packed other embroidered nightgowns.

That she embroidered?

That she embroidered. The doll, books, prayer books that people gave me. The little blue songbook she packed.

That you would sing with your father from that.

Yes, Yiddish songs. What else? That's basically what I have. I have a picture of the two of them, a marriage picture.

Was that also in suitcase?

In the suitcase. And my Tante Lotte's picture. Picture of me when I was a little bit younger. And a picture of her and my father.

Is that aside from the document that you got from Yad Vashem of the detail of where she was born? Is that what you have?

That's what I brought with me.

Were you able to find out anything else about your family, about your parents later?

When we were settled in Baltimore, my husband and I, we had two boys. I got a letter from HIAS.

And that is the-- what's that?

Hebrew Immigrant Association--

Aid Society.

Aid Society. Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, HIAS. And it was a letter, and they said that there was someone looking for me. She said that she was a cousin to my mother, and she lived in London. And she just found out through HIAS, and they gave her my address. And there was a letter from her. And they gave me the letter. And evidently, my mother had packed a package and sent it to her.

I don't know how it got out of Vienna. I think a non-Jewish person must have sent the package to a non-Jewish person that my cousin lived with. I think she was a domestic. She came to London on a Kindertransport, and she worked as a domestic.

This cousin.

This cousin. And someone picked up the package for her. And she wrote to me at my first address, my first foster home address. But the letters were returned to her, no one at this address. And it was addressed to me. So I never got those letters when I was at the first foster home. I never got the letters. They were returned to her, and she couldn't reach my mother by then, and she assumed that I never made it. And she had this package that she just kept.

And we did meet her around 1964--'64. And she had this package that had not been opened all those years. She said she prayed that someday she would find me.

Oh my goodness.

And it was a very strange story as to how she got to HIAS to find me, if you want to hear the story.

Yeah, I do. I do.

My cousin Adela Dula.

This is the lady from London. This is the lady. Her name was Adela Dula. And she lived in London, and she went to Israel to see relatives. And their bus broke down, and they were in a gas station of some sort with other passengers. And she started talking to a woman from the United States, and she said, I always hoped that I would find my cousin's child, Herta.

And she was saying this to this woman that she was sitting with. And this woman was from Detroit or something like that. And she said she had just been to Baltimore, and she had seen a newspaper article, and she remembered the name Herta. And she said, why don't you contact HIAS? Maybe they have her address. And so she contacted HIAS in Baltimore. And that's how I found her-- she found me.

Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh.

It was an amazing story.

What was in the package?

We-- my husband and I went to her house. And she lived in a very small house. And we sat in her kitchen. There was one light hanging from the ceiling and some sort of a stove. And she showed me the box. And when we opened it, it had

a tablecloth that my mother had, she said, never finished. My cousin said my mother said it was never finished. And it had silver candlesticks that she said were obviously from my grandmother. It had some spoons in it and some knives and forks. And it had some earrings that she thought were not good. She thought that they were paste.

And what else did it have in it? It had-- oh, it had my mother's rings that she wore, the earrings I remembered her wearing.

Oh my goodness.

She had packed those in that little box inside the big box.

So you remember your mother wearing certain earrings.

I do remember her wearing earrings all the time.

And this package comes into your life in the '60s.

Yes. In 1962 I got a check from the Austrian government for my mother, and the check was for about \$162.

For what?

For my mother.

For your mother?

For restitution for my mother.

\$162.

And some cents. And I turned that check over to the Associated Jewish Charities. And it was the beginning of their yearly campaign. So they a newspaper story out of it, and it had my picture and my name in it. And that's what this woman in the gas station remembered. She remembered--

It's cosmic. It's cosmic.

She remembered that there was a story about a Herta in the newspaper when she was in Baltimore. And that's why she told her to--

I mean, but when I think of this-- you get a check for your mother in this amount, which is-- there's a German word called [GERMAN]. It's ridiculous. \$162.

I thought so. I thought so.

And it's for your mother. And you turn it over to a charity.

I didn't know what to do with it.

That makes a story--

That brought of me here.

That brought you here, of how you brought here. But as a result of it, you get a package from your mother.

Yes, in about 19-- the following year, maybe, say '63.

It's like there's karma. There's something up there.

Yes, it was amazing. And Adela told me what she knew of my family, my mother's side.

So you also get a gift of knowledge.

She told me about my mother's family and about my mother. She evidently lived with us for a few months. And I don't remember her. I don't remember her at all.

So what did she tell you that was new for you, that was news to you?

Well, she told me that my mother's family was evidently very educated, and that there was someone in the family who was a treasurer for some Duke, and that his picture was in some palace.

In Poland.

In Poland.

So from this little nothing village, there was an educated family.

Yes. Evidently they-- I learned afterwards, I learned more recently, that this person who was a treasurer to the Duke must have been someone who collected taxes. Someone explained to me, when I told them the story, that it must have been someone who was like a treasurer for the Duke. He must have been a tax collector.

I mean, another amazing thing is that this cousin kept an unopened package.

She must have been about 10 years older than me. And she seemed rather poor. And she had married a man who was a survivor, and he had died. And they had a child who was-- he was very religious. But I think he had a disability, a mental disability. And I wrote to her. I wrote to her. We kept on a correspondence. And then I stopped hearing from her. And her son wrote a small letter saying that she died of breast cancer.

And this was how many years did you have a contact with him?

About two years. Not very long.

Not very long.

Not very long. And the items that were in the package, are they still with you today?

Yes. I've turned over most of them, along with my suitcase.

But that is amazing.

Because they started to deteriorate. And I didn't really--

The tablecloth, when you say it's not finished, was she embroidering it?

It's embroidered. And it really seems finished except for the edging. The edges are not-- it seems to be a very soft, inexpensive material, and the edges were rough. But the embroidery was furnished as far as I can tell.

And was any kind of note with this, or your mother's handwriting on an address label, or anything like that? No. No. And you recognized the earrings that were in there.

Yes.

I think that's just amazing. It's an amazing story.

There are a couple of amazing stories. And they are all fairly recent. And meeting these two women that I was able to contact from the list of nine--

That you were on the train with.

That I came to the United States with, to New York.

Do you remember anything of the journey? We've kind of stopped your story there. You get on a train. Your mother says goodbye. She hopes to reunite with you via Cuba. And then what happens?

As far as I remember, we were in Lisbon. And we were walking to a boat.

Were you accompanied by an adult?

I didn't know. I didn't know. I just remember the children. There were children.

All girls? Boys in there?

They weren't all girls.

There were no girls? It was all boys except for you?

No. It was two boys and the rest were girls. There were nine of us. And the only thing I remember of the trip was the cobblestones in Lisbon going up to the boat. And I saw water that I had never seen before. And I remember the boat was black, black side, and it had a huge American flag painted on it.

And of the voyage itself, I don't remember where we slept or ate.

You don't remember if you were seasick.

It was cold. It was December. I don't remember being cold. I don't remember being seasick. I've never gotten seasick. And I remember being on a deck. And some sailors were trying to teach me some English words. And then I remember one morning, everyone was running to the railing, and they were pointing. And they told me that it was the Statue of Liberty and that we were in America.

Do you remember seeing her?

No, I didn't see the statue because it was very misty and raining. And I didn't see it. I couldn't even get to the railing. But I think I asked what was going on. And then that's what it was.

And then when you landed, any memories, first memories of landing?

My first memory was of Mrs. Beser.

Who's Mrs. Beser?

Rose Beser was my social worker from Baltimore who came to get me and take me to my first foster home.

Just you, or the other children too?

Just me. Just me.

And the other children, did they go to Baltimore too, or did they go to other places?

No. I understood that some of them had relatives and some were going to foster homes.

Did you ever see those kids again?

I met the two women in, I should say, about 2008. Through the computer I got a list of a woman who was doing some research in Vienna. And I got a list of these names.

Until then you didn't know.

I didn't know who I came with. I know that there were eight other children.

So we're talking 60 years later. No, more than that.

More than that.

We're talking 68 years later.

Yes. And that's how I found out what the process was, how we were chosen, how we were examined, and how we got our papers. And she told us. She told me about the boat and how some of the kids were sick and where we slept. We slept on the floor of a ballroom with other children from France. And she filled in all these questions that I had. She had so much information.

And we met in her home about-- I think it was around 2008. So that was just a few years ago.

Yeah, it's eight years ago.

And we had such a wonderful meeting. It was Stella and her husband and her daughter and daughter and son-in-law. And we brought my son and my husband. So it was--

A family thing.

Yes. And it was just so amazing when we met each other.

What made it amazing? Was there a connection? I mean, of course, the information.

I had no idea what she looked like. I only spoke to her on the phone. She had an accent. And I didn't know what to expect when I phoned her. I dialed a number that I found. And I said, is this Stella? And she said, yes. And I said, I hope I'm not going to disturb you, but we have a history together. We came to the United States together, and I just found your name.

And she said, Herta. Herta. I remember your braids. I helped to braid your hair.

Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness.

So we arranged to meet, and we went to Scarsdale, where she lived, my husband and I and our son Dan. And he took this tape. He taped our meeting, the whole meeting, for about an hour and a half.

It's like you have a gift of your own history to give.

That was emotional and amazing. It was also amazing to meet my cousin, of course. But to see one of the children that I

came with, well-- so between my cousin and Stella, they filled in a lot of--

Had you been searching all the time? Did you always want to know? Or was it something-- some people close the door and say, I don't want to know.

I didn't close the door, and I didn't mind talking about it. But it was very little reason to talk about it. No one really asked me about it. I mean, my family knew that I was from Vienna, and they knew what I was about. And they knew about the things that I brought with me.

But the Jewish Museum of Maryland decided to do a program on people from Germany, mainly, and Austria, who came to Baltimore to settle. And they asked me to bring anything that I had. And so I brought my suitcase and the doll. And they had an exhibition of about 20, 25 people and their small stories.

And shortly after that, I was called by the museum. And they said there was a woman in Vienna. She lived in Salzburg, but she was doing research for a paper on children who left Austria during the war years.

So the Maryland exhibition was not exclusive to Austria. It was to anybody.

No. It was only German. It had to do with German Jewish people who settled in Baltimore. So this woman contacted the museum to see if there was anyone she could speak to that would be a contact for her to do her paper. And they called me and asked me if I would speak to her.

So this is all through the computer. I was just learning the computer.

And the internet.

And the internet. And we had this wonderful correspondence. And I told her everything that I remembered. And she did a book. I was not the only child that she featured. There were others. None of the nine, none of the nine children I came with. Most of them were older and they came before me. And she did all this research. And she found the list of the nine children.

So even though you were the only one she featured, she's the one through whom you got the list of the others.

Yes. Yes. So when I got the list--

Did you contact the others on the list?

I tried. The first person I was able to contact, I spoke to his wife, and she said he would not speak to me. She was very interested, but she said he was ill and he did not like to talk about his past. But he said that he knew that one of the boys was deceased. So that was two people.

And then I reached Stella. That was three. And shortly after that, I reached Melanie. And she also lived in the New York area, and she was very interested. And so that was four.

You're five.

I'm five.

There are four more.

My daughter found an obituary somehow of one of the children in some newspaper. I've forgotten where. But she found the obituary. It wasn't in Baltimore. It was-- I can't remember where it was. But she had died only a few months after I got the list. I could have found her. I could have found her. So my daughter found her obit. So that was--

Now you're down to three.

Three. The other three, two were sisters and one I could not ever locate those. So that was the nine of us.

Can we cut for a second?

OK.

Wait a minute. Hold a minute. Ricky's going to run back here so he can start it.

So are you rolling?

We are.

Yeah, OK. So before lunch, we were talking about many different things. But I think we brought your story up until the point where you got to Baltimore. And because we have, as a museum, many different collections, and sometimes were able to find pieces of a person's story through some of the other collections that we've got.

And just recently, by coincidence, one of my colleagues who has been very involved with documenting your story was able to find this. And this is Anatole Steck. So I'm going to pass on the microphone to him.

I need to be back by my mixer. I'm sorry.

So before our break, we had talked about your story in many different ways going back to your cousin, where you found that amazing package from your mother. And I think chronologically, we brought it up to the point where you got to Baltimore.

And now I want to turn, briefly, this part of our interview over to my colleague, Anatole Steck. Because he has something else that he'd like to share with you that we think is relevant to your story that he found just a little while ago.

The museum recently acquired the research collection of Leonard and Edith Ehrlich, two survivors from Vienna, who spent a good 40 years researching the history of the Jewish community of Vienna during the Holocaust. And having emigrated to the United States, they spent many years interviewing survivors from Vienna who were in the United States.

And those survivors-- these interviews were done in the 1970s, so the survivors whom they interviewed were often individuals who had a role within the administration of the Jewish community of Vienna. The research collection includes dozens of these audio cassette tapes, which the museum only recently digitized. And we still have not gone through all of the cassette tapes.

But we started to do so just only recently. And we came across one interview that was conducted in December 27, 1974 in New York in the Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. And it is an interview with Margaret Feiler, the name who you will recognize. She is the only adult chaperone who was on your transport. And the interview, all in all, it's about three hours long in and she recounts everything that she did for the Jewish community.

And at one point in the interview, she starts to mention an American committee for children which arranged for originally 30 children to be brought to the United States. And then in the end, eight or nine children ended up being on the transport. And that is the excerpt that we would like to play for you now. It's about nine minutes long.

[BEGIN AUDIO PLAYBACK]

- 20 people. They have been asked how they had voted. [LOUD BEEP]

Roll. Everybody quiet. Rolling.

- For a group of children. I think it was 30 odd children. There must be something on file on this-- probably not in this file, but she has the file-- children whose fathers had died in some concentration camp, either Buchenwald or Dachau, and whose mother had a quota, which didn't come up, Hungarian or Romanian or Polish. Such children, they made a group of such children of 30 odd children, and they arranged for foster parents here in the United States.

And the community intended to send, I think it was two social workers who also wanted to emigrate who had their own affidavits, to send them with the children to the United States. They all applied for visa around August, September. And of the children, only nine got visas for reasons which we never knew. And none of the two social workers got visa, and nobody else, not in September, not in August, not in September. I don't know how far back, but not in August, not in September, and not before I got my visa.

Now I started talking. Anyway, I'll go first. When I got the visa, they asked me whether I would take those nine children. And that's what I did. And that's how JDC even paid for my fare because I was the escort. They paid for those nine children's fare and my own.

And we came here. I went via Berlin, where I picked up the tenth child that also was in some position like that, and I brought her to the United States via Lisbon. It was the first transport via Lisbon through occupied France in a sealed train.

Now to come back to the visa, I asked people who had gone to the continent through social workers. And everybody else with whom I could talk-- because most of them came to the community and wanted to communicate to their relatives here that they couldn't come because they didn't get the visa. I asked them what were they asked because they were asked questions.

And there was one thing that they all had in common, all of them. There must have been 20 people. They had been asked how they had voted in the last election, in the last free election that Austria had, so sometime in spring. I don't know when it was. But when they got asked that question--

1934?

Right. No, no, no, no, no. We had elections--

Was there election between '34-'38?

Oh, yes. Yes, there was. But they had asked them-- can't really tell you what year it was because I know only the question. They were asked, how did you vote during the last free election? And all of them, every one of them, had said either Social Democrat or Christian Socialist. But there was no other party. Very few said Christian Socialists, but I know that there were a few who had said that. And the others had said Social Democrat. None of them had gotten a visa.

And the other questions, I didn't find any other question that could be leading to that. So I started thinking. And I was asked the same question. Now I didn't know whether you remember, but there was a so-called Demokratische Mittel [GERMAN], which I think got in all of Vienna. Well, it wasn't hopeless and fair. It was somebody who really-- I can't think why anybody would spend money on something like that, but it was idealism.

Now don't ask me whether I voted for that because I won't admit anything. But then I was asked, that's what I said. And all I can tell you is that I got the visa because we didn't know the word socialist. That was my [INAUDIBLE].

So anyway, I got the visa. And then I came for the examination, you know, you had a medical examination. This was the second point for the American Consulate, or against it, whatever you want to say. They asked me two questions. One said-- one question was, what is your true hair color, implying that it was dyed and [INAUDIBLE]. And the second was, in what months are you pregnant?

It was what?

In what months are you pregnant? These are the two questions. So I mean, you can imagine the atmosphere. This was the atmosphere. So anyway, I got the visa in October. I left on November 30. I brought the children out. I don't think it's here on file, and I don't think I have it. I had written a column for the newspaper that the community [INAUDIBLE] And I wrote about how I brought out the children, and it was very interesting for the people who were left behind.

So that was the story of, in those days, of the immigration. Now of course, this ends what I know myself. Now one other thing. Murrelstein had always wanted to emigrate. He was very anxious to emigrate. But he also [INAUDIBLE]. And so the only hope was that a job offer would come from the United States. And he was afraid-- first of all, he didn't want to stay. He could never understand why I wanted to stay. But I was optimistic, and he didn't understand.

Number two, he was afraid that the more he knew and the more he was involved with the Gestapo, they may, in the end, not let him go, not let him even survive. He was always afraid for his life. Said he's getting deeper and deeper into this, and he's not going to survive.

So when I went to the United States, I promised that when I come here, that I would see Rabbi Jung, and that I would talk to Rabbi Jung and ask him to get him a job offer as a rabbi.

Who's Rabbi Jung?

Rabbi Jung has a community, a synagogue on the west side. I can give you details from [INAUDIBLE]. He is of German extraction. He is not a refugee. But when you talk to him, you can hear Israel. The first thing I did-- I don't know whether it was the first week or the second week-- but you see, I started working as a nursemaid in New Rochelle in January, the end of January. So all this was the end-- the last few days in December or the first two days in January. Before I did anything, I went to Rabbi Young. I was admitted to his study and I started talking.

And he cut me short and he said, not a word about Murrelstein. Don't mention the name to me. I know a lot about him. I said, wait a minute. I've been working with him. Don't tell me. I know all about him. There is not a thing I'm going to do. He should be happy his name's mentioned in the United States. And he practically threw me out. I mean, he was polite enough to say goodbye.

So I wrote it. I wrote to Murrelstein about it. And this is what I want to tell you because, you see, I don't know how Murrelstein behaved in Theresienstadt. I can imagine that all sorts of things happened. It could be because of the atmosphere in Theresienstadt was quite different to the atmosphere in Vienna, and I don't know what people do to survive, to feel that they have the fate of others in their hands. I don't know. All sorts of things can have happened.

But I do know what happened when I was still in Vienna, and I know that there was nothing that he did [INAUDIBLE] because [INAUDIBLE]. And then you to have a shower. That was it. And nevertheless, that rumor had reached already the United States at that time. People, they are convinced already--

[END PLAYBACK]

Is this the end? OK. So this is the end of the clip that we wanted to share with you about Marguerite Feiler, who was the adult lady who accompanied you. And I am assuming this is the first time you hear her voice in decades. Do you recognize anything?

I knew nothing about her until I met Stella Bruckenstein. And she told me all about it. I remember a nice American lady that took good care of us.

On the ship.

No. I didn't know where. I just remembered-- one person I remembered was this wonderful American lady. Well, it couldn't have been her. What I think, it was Margaret Markusi.

Another lady, then.

She was the intake person for the children. She accepted us. And I'm telling you this from Stella's information that she gave me. When we got to New York, Mrs. Feiler, Miss Feiler, gave all of our papers to Mrs.-- I think it's M. Markusi. I'm not sure.

But to another lady.

To another lady, and she was a social worker in this temporary home that we stayed until we were dispersed.

Do you have any remembrance of how long you were in this temporary home?

I did not know anything that I was even in a home. I didn't remember that at all. I only remember going to the foster home with Mrs. Beser, my social worker. But when I read the transcript that I have of her accepting us-- it's about a one and 1/2 page transcript-- seems like she was the nice lady that I remember because she was American.

And is there something that you learned from this tape, this interview-- thinking that, again, this took place over 40 years ago, this interview, in 1974-- is there something that you hear there that's new, that is something you weren't aware of?

She only spoke very shortly about the children. This is what I learned from Stella, that we were chosen, only nine children, and that somehow Rabbi Murrelstein said to the community, we've got to get these children out.

And was Rabbi Murrelstein the head of the Viennese Jewish community?

As far as I know. There was a meeting of the Jewish community. And I'm only telling you this because Stella told me that they have to get the children out if they can.

So he was involved in immigration.

He was involved in that.

I see. I see. When you first heard that we had her voice on tape--

I mean, she is such a-- on the trip, according to Stella. You know, I have to keep mentioning her name. She mentioned Margaret Feiler as such a very uncaring woman who was really not with us very much. It seemed that the children were there by themselves, and that the two 15-year-olds sort of took it upon themselves to take care of us while we were en route.

It's interesting that-- first of all, it's interesting and it's not surprising that people have different memories of a same event, or, as you have said over and over again, in your case, you don't have a memory of it. And that how Margaret Feiler, 35 years after she brings these children over, is remembering in her own mind what are the things that were salient for her as she's telling the Ehrlichs about how she leaves Vienna, how she answers a question that has nothing to do with anything, but it deals with who did you vote for in the last free elections, and why that would be significant.

Was that what they asked people to get a visa?

That's what she is saying, that the social workers--

My mother was not an Austrian citizen. So this would have been a moot point.

Yeah I don't know. But it could be that she was referring to the people who were supposed to accompany children.

Yes, maybe so. Now did she say there was more than one?

It sounded like that, that others were supposed to come with more children, but that they answered in the wrong way and didn't get a visa. This is her supposition, and she is leaving it up to the Ehrlichs to make of it what they will, the people that she's talking to.

Well, I understand it was only her with us. And all this I learned from my interview, my meeting with Stella.

Ca we cut for a second?

So as my colleague Anatole mentioned, we have this interview with Margaret Feiler done in '74 is actually several hours long. And we will make a CD copy of it for you to be able to listen to in quiet and peace at your leisure. And there may be more information on there that you will find of interest and relevance. This is only a nine-minute clip.

But we also thought, you know, we get information from so many sources. And it's not often-- but it's not rare, either-- where they dovetail. And sometimes we'll find something from one person that is very relevant to another person's story. And when we discovered this, we wanted to share it with you.

I'm amazed. I don't remember her voice. I don't remember her, what she looked like or anything.

But her name was familiar to you.

The name was-- well, I learned it from Stella. I learned all this from my meeting with her.

OK. Well, now we're going to go forward. And what I'd like to do is talk a little bit about your first years here in the United States, from the times where you do have some memories and what your experiences were.

So the last we really left your story was when you are with your social worker, Mrs. Beser, you said, in New York, and she brings you to Baltimore.

Yes.

And do you have a first impression of what Baltimore looked like to you? Was it very strange? Was it very different?

I don't have a first impression. I don't.

OK. What about the family you came to? Who were they?

Clara and Joe Beser. Joseph Baer, I'm sorry. Rose Beser was my social worker. Clara and Joseph Baer were my first foster parents.

When I walked into the house, we walked up the steps of this row house. They were just lighting Hanukkah candles. And they asked me if I would like to light them, too. So there were three other children in the family, a baby a very young child, and Beverly, who was-- I was seven. She was five, four or five, probably five. And I helped light the candles and I said the [YIDDISH].

Well, they were so amazed. And their reaction to me was, where have you been all this Time it was very, very wonderful and loving and reassuring to me because--

You were a seven-year-old girl.

I was a seven and 1/2. And I-- nobody except the American lady, not even Mrs. Beser, that I had an emotional reaction to. And after we lit the candles, the kids and I got a Hershey bar. And that was amazing. That coming into their home was just amazing to me. It was it loving, I couldn't believe. And they spoke Yiddish to me.

That was my question, my next question.

They spoke Yiddish to me. So I felt like I was in--

You were in a familiar place.

I felt like I was being understood, and-- well, Mrs. Beser, my social worker, also spoke either German or Yiddish to me, I don't remember which. But coming from the Baers, she was a very rotund, kind of a fat lady, and he was very skinny. And they were just so nice to me.

And the kids, I don't remember the small children. But the five-year-old, Beverly, seemed interested. You know, she just seemed interested. I don't know how much she knew about me or was told. But it was a good first meeting. It was a wonderful first meeting. And--

Go ahead.

I stayed in that home. I was put into second grade in a school not far from there. And when I got into the classroom, the teacher didn't know what to do with me because I spoke Yiddish. And so she decided to put me at the blackboard. And I copied these large letters, that she saw my handwriting, and she wanted me to change the H and the G. So I practiced the H and the G on the blackboard.

And there were one or two other children in the class that spoke Yiddish, and they helped me to understand what to do and what the different bells meant, and when it was recess.

All these things that are strange.

Yes. I didn't really-- it was as if I'd never been in school before, in a school situation before. And I stayed in that school as long as I was with the Baer family.

How long were you with the Baer family?

I was there from the end of December--

1940.

1940 to about the end of July, 1941.

So about a year and a half.

No, only a half of a year.

Oh. Oh, you're right. Only half of a year.

Only about six months, seven months.

So what happened?

The associated-- the organization that took care of me, sent me to summer camp at Camp Louise in Baltimore. And they thought this would be good for me. I remember being very lonely at camp, and I missed the family. I missed the family very, very much, and I really didn't have a good time. And when I came home-- I don't remember how I got back and forth-- but when I came home, Mrs. Baer and Mr. Baer were standing at the door waiting for me.

And when I went into the house, my suitcase was there.

This suitcase that we have here.

This suitcase was all packed up. And they told me that I was going to another foster home. What happened was that Mrs. Baer, unbeknownst to anybody, had another baby. She was pregnant and she was rotund, and nobody knew that she was pregnant, not even her husband or her family. I think she left a note in a milk bottle or something like that, that she went to Sinai Hospital to have a baby. So that was her fourth child.

And the-- Mrs. Beser and the agency did not think it was appropriate for me to stay in this home with the new baby, and that it was too much for Mrs. Baer.

It was quite a loss for you, though.

It was very sudden. Very sudden. And-- thank you. I went to my second foster home, I think that day. I don't know the dates involved.

Did you keep in touch with the Baers afterwards?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And even today, I I'm in touch with--

The children?

The two that are in Baltimore, yes, and their families. And they had a reunion a couple of years ago of the whole family. They've got a very large extended family. And they invited my husband and myself, and I spoke to them. And there was nobody there except for the girl that upstaged me, the baby. The new baby was there, and the oldest daughter, Beverly.

Beverly.

So they asked me to tell the story to the family. And I keep in touch with the two girls. The others are out of town. There were seven children that Mrs. Baer had of her own altogether. And evidently they were-- I was their first foster child. And after I left, I guess after some time, the agency, the associated, used her as an interim home for short periods of time for children that were in families were in trouble or something like that until they were able to place them elsewhere.

So as I understand it, she had about 100 foster children after me through the years, according to the girls. It was that kind of a home, warm, very unusual people.

Did you feel like an orphan?

There? No.

Did you ever feel like an orphan?

Not then.

But you did later. There's one time that I remember. I was waiting for Mrs. Baer outside the school. And somebody said, who are you waiting for? And I said, my mother. And then Mrs. Baer came up, and she said, you're the mother? And I realized that I had sort of told a fib. I didn't want to go into the whole story. And everybody laughed. The women laughed about it. But it was that kind of a thing.

I didn't feel like an orphan at that time. I just felt like--

This is another place, and I'm at home. Maybe I'm putting the wrong words to it.

I felt like-- I said I was part of the family but I wasn't. So it was a little-- it's something I remember. It's something I

remember. Mrs. Baer laughed about it.

It's a compliment.

It was. It was.

What about the next family? Who were they?

The next family lived in a more affluent part of the city. And there were lawns and gardens and single houses. And Mrs. Baer took me over there. And I met my foster mother. She was in the garden pulling weeds or something. And I met her, and then my new foster sister, Beverly-- another Beverly-- came out. And I really felt like for the first time, I looked like a refugee. I still had my high top shoes and the clothes that my mother sent with me. None of that had been replaced. And I had my braids.

And Beverly looked at me as if I was from outer space. She didn't know what to make of me. First of all, she was not very prepared for me.

Another child?

She was not prepared. It must have been a very fast-- I got the impression that it was a very fast exchange. And Beverly was two and 1/2 years older than me, but she didn't look like a 11- or 12-year-old. I was, by that time, eight and 1/2. She must have been about 11 and 1/2. She looked like a woman. She was completely developed, and she looked much older than her years.

And she was not pleased. She was not pleased that somebody was coming into the house, and certainly not me.

Was she a sibling? Was she the only child?

She was an only child, but she had been adopted by the Friedlanders from the Associated Jewish Charities when she was six months old. So I guess that the organization knew about her. And I guess that they thought that it would be a good thing for Beverly to have a sister. I don't know and I never found out what motivated them to step forth.

So the next door neighbor came down, Mrs. Fine, and her daughter Phyllis. And they thought I was adorable. But I didn't get that impression from Beverly. And for the first time, I felt like a stranger. It was a bad time for me, very bad time. Everybody seemed to think I was so cute, but I didn't feel that way at all.

What about your foster parents?

Mary-- shortly after I came into the home, Mary got ill, and she suffered from high blood pressure and headaches. And she was not a well person. Harry, my foster father, had a grocery store. It was a nice-sized grocery store. And Beverly and I helped out in the grocery store.

He was very soft spoken. He would come home and have dinner and go behind his newspaper. And Beverly and I, she had to make room for me in her drawers. We slept in a single bed because the bed hadn't been delivered yet, a second bed hadn't been delivered yet.

So I really, really stepped on her. I really came in-- I can't imagine how she felt. I mean, how could she feel?

Well, in many different ways. She felt the way she felt, and you were who you were. And it was two children.

It was very strange. It seemed like it was so sudden. And there wasn't even a place for me to sleep. We slept together in a single bed and shared a room.

Did that ever change?

We shared a room until we were both married.

So you stayed with this family?

I stayed with this family of 1941 to 1952, when my husband and I were married. And Beverly was married first about a year before.

Oh my goodness. So did Beverly's attitude ever change?

Sure, it changed. I don't think that-- we were so different. We were so different. Yeah. Somehow we had to make peace with each other because we shared a room all those years. Looking back, I can't even envision how we managed, but we did.

Aunt Mary-- I called them Aunt Mary and Uncle Harry-- she took me to get my braids cut because she couldn't handle my long hair. I mean, I looked-- after a while, with new shoes and new clothes-- I looked like anybody, and I did not have an accent. And I spoke perfect English, better than I do now.

And so Beverly and I sort of made a peace. We were never close. But there were lots of times where Mary was very ill and she was hospitalized that we had to take care of the house, and we did. And we had to cooperate, and we did.

And as we got older and Beverly started to date, and we would babysit together, and it got a lot better. And by the time that my husband and I were married, we were good friends for the first time because we were both almost adults at that time, and we had things in common for the first time. We had marriage in common. It was different. It was not like being--

And you had the years in common. You had a shared history.

We had a shared history, and we were both older. And it was different, very different. By the time I left Baltimore to go into the service with my husband, we were very, very good friends. We were girlfriends.

You wouldn't say sisters.

I don't think we've really approached that subject. I don't think we talked about the old days and how we felt about each other. We never did that. We talked about where we were at that time. And of course, Mary was very, very sick by then. And Beverly was diagnosed with lupus. And the lupus came a few years after that. When we came back to Baltimore she developed the lupus.

And we were friends. We were tight. We were we were girlfriends. It was not like it was before. Beverly played the piano by ear, and we would play the piano with our children, with our kids.

What about Uncle Harry?

Uncle Harry was very quiet. I remember him being very quiet throughout the-- he was very soft spoken and very quiet. And we went to the store, to the grocery store on Saturdays together in the morning. And I always wanted him to talk to me, to tell me something about himself or to share something. But he was very to himself. I really think he was fond of me. He just couldn't share. He couldn't share.

I always wanted him-- I needed conversation with him. And I never got that out of him. Even in later years before he died, I never got that out of him.

What about Mary, or was she too distracted?

Mary was very, very-- she was very ill. And it just took over everything.

Was her illness of an emotional kind or physical?

No, it was physical.

It was physical.

She eventually was diagnosed with Parkinson's.

I see.

But she had many problems, and she was a sick woman.

So she was overwhelmed in some ways.

She was overwhelmed with her own problems. And Beverly I, when Mary really, really was sick, Beverly and I sort of-- we cooperated. I think we--

What I'm surprised by is why the agency-- was it the Jewish agency?

Yes.

Why they wouldn't have found another place for you. If the first home, which was so loving and so kind, has another child and they can't handle it, and then the second home, one pillar of the family gets sick, that means that for the best of will, they still are not able to fully integrate a child, and why you weren't moved again. Or do you know anything about-- did you ever think about that?

I met with Mrs. Beser, my social worker, OK probably once a year at her office. And she never asked me.

How you're doing?

She never asked about the home situation. She talked to me about school, and she took my loose leafs and my books to see what I was doing and how I was doing. I did very well in school. She never asked that question. I had a feeling that she knew the situation at home. But maybe there was no place else to put me. Or maybe it was just out of the question to move me again. I don't know. She never asked me how things were at home.

I think she knew that Mary was sick. I didn't have the kind of relationship where I could tell her what I really wanted her to know.

What would you have really wanted her to know?

Maybe it's something that she knew from the other children that she took care of, that I felt very much alone, and that I had trouble being Beverly's sister. It was difficult. Beverly and I were very, very different. She was not good in school. She must have had a learning difficulty of some sort. And my report cards were so much better than hers, it was almost embarrassing to me.

When she was 16, she quit school. And actually, when she quit school, she went to work in a record store. And that's when things changed between her and me. She wasn't in school anymore. She was making a small living for herself. She felt very, very much relieved. And I think our relationship got better at that time, when she quit school and started working at the record store, and she would bring home records of all kinds. And we would play the records and sing together, and play the piano and sing together. And I think things changed there.

With Mrs. Beser, I never felt close enough to share with her, in the earlier years, what was going on. She never asked and I never told.

That's quite a lot for a child to carry all by themselves.

I felt very, very much alone. And whenever I went someplace, whether it was shopping with Mary or anything, Mary seemed to know everybody. And everyone said to me, what a lucky girl you are. And I almost wanted to cry every time I heard that. I knew it was right. I knew they were right.

But I felt so-- I hated that. I hated people telling me how lucky I was. And that was hard for me. I grew up feeling very much alone. I didn't know anybody else who had my history. And I didn't know any other children that came over like I did. So I grew up feeling very much alone.

Well, you know, you had so many losses. And there wasn't anybody to acknowledge that you had those losses.

I just was known as a lucky girl.

Yeah. Yeah.

And I hated to hear that because it made me feel guilty.

Of course, because you're feeling pain.

It made me feel like I wasn't grateful. And when I wrote my little book about my experiences, I wanted to write them down for our kids because I thought maybe I'd forget in the future. And when I wrote it, I called the book Lucky Girl.

Oh gosh.

It's sort of-- I was a lucky girl. But I couldn't take it all in when I was younger. Now I realize what happened to me, and the times and everything.

But you see, here's the tough part. When you realize that your destiny is a happier one than it could have been had you stayed in Vienna, yes, that's true, which doesn't mean that there wasn't suffering because both can exist in the same story. Both can exist in the same life. And real losses. You lost your father. You lost your mother. You lost your childhood.

I lost myself.

Yeah. And that's just as legitimate and just as real as the luck was real, the better fortune was real.

I recognized both things. I was smart enough to recognize that. But I still felt that I wasn't grateful enough. And when I heard that--

It would cut.

Give me a lot of guilt.

Yeah. No, it's fully understandable why and what a burden it was because there wasn't anybody you could share this with from what you're telling me. If there was the first family, maybe in the first family you would have been able to tell them how you were feeling inside yourself.

They wanted to know about all about my school, and there was nothing I could tell them. I told them I just couldn't remember. And same with the Friedlanders. They wanted to know how was the other foster-- actually, they didn't really ask that many questions at the beginning, or any time. But they were wonderful. They just weren't huggers like the Baer family was. They were not the huggers. And maybe it was that they didn't want to show preference because of Beverly. She was the apple of their eye. There's no doubt about that.

But I think they didn't want to show that I was important. I don't know. I don't know.

Did you feel loved?

No, not really. Now there were other people in the family that I felt closer to. One was her sister. One was her sister, younger sister and her husband. And they had children. And I babysat for them. And when I was in that home--

It was better?

It was good anywhere. I just felt-- at home, I just felt like I was an imposter somehow, maybe not an imposter, but someone who is there, doesn't belong there, and-- I don't know. I did not feel I belonged. I was a daughter, but I wasn't a daughter. I was-- I don't know.

When did the letters stop? With which family did the letters from your own mother stop?

They stopped in the Baers.

Did anybody talk much about the war after the war, and after it was more known what had happened to people, to the Jews, what the concentration camps?

Nobody really knew how bad it was. I don't know. I don't know. I got the impression that nobody really knew. Obviously, there were people who knew. No one talked about it. I remember when we came into the war, I remember Roosevelt on the radio. Everybody listened to the radio.

So 1944.

1941, December '41. And I realized that now we were in the war, too. I knew we were in a war over there. And I knew we were in the war, but I had no idea what Pearl Harbor meant. But we were at war. And we helped for the war effort. The neighbors and I collected scrap iron in the grocery store. We collected fat from customers that would bring it in.

And we had air raids. And Harry he was an air raid warden, and I loved going out with him. We would write down the name of people whose lights were on. And he had a whistle, and other people had a whistle in the next block. And I would run back and forth with little messages, and I loved that. I loved being with him. And I felt very important.

But it wasn't until long after the war that people realized and talked about concentration camps and losses.

When did you start trying to find out things about your own mother?

I always had a guilty feeling about not trying to locate my mother, especially when I got older. And I did contact the Red Cross. And they had no information. When Arthur and I were married about a little over a year, he went into the service.

This would have been 1953?

We were married in '52, and he graduated med school in '54. '55 was his internship. It was '56. He was stationed in Montgomery, Alabama. And we had a little apartment that was Harry's that he rented to us for \$35 a month. And I worked for a pediatrician. And was just finishing his internship and going into the service. And he was stationed at Montgomery, Alabama temporarily.

And Beverly was, at that time, living upstairs from Mary. Her husband was in the Navy, and he was away. She had a baby. And when the movers came, I moved out of the apartment and spent a couple of days with Mary and Harry in their home. And all of a sudden, I had these overwhelming feelings that I never tried to contact anybody who might have known my mother. And I felt so badly that I called Mrs. Beser, and I spoke to her.

And it was adults talking to each other instead of children anymore. She said, Herta, you're leaving Baltimore and it's another big move for you. She said, I don't think it's about your mother. I think it's about leaving Baltimore. And she said I had nothing to be sad about what I hadn't researched. And I had a good conversation with her. It was really a good conversation.

Do you think she was right?

I think she was right. It was another phase of my life.

Of leaving someplace.

It was leaving Baltimore and going to a new place. And she was right. But we had a good time in the service. It was good for us. We had our son, Larry in the service. And we came back to Baltimore after two years. Mary was dying. Beverly was very, very ill. And it was not a very happy time for me.

Beverly was still living upstairs from Mary and Harry. And Mary was dying. And very suddenly one day, we were in our apartment. No-- yes, we were in Baltimore. And Beverly's husband called one morning, and he said Beverly died very suddenly. She had a cardiac arrest of some sort very suddenly. And she died before Mary.

Wow.

So we were still in Baltimore. And I felt like I was a daughter. But I didn't feel like a daughter. And I didn't know what to do. Mary was to the stage where she couldn't speak. You couldn't understand her. She was bedridden.

And then we had Karen. We had Karen before Mary died, and I would take Karen over there and put her to sleep in the bed next to Mary. And Mary, I could tell that she liked that. And then when Karen was four months old, Mary died.

What happened to Harry?

Harry was wonderful through this whole thing to Mary. I mean, he did what he could. He wasn't emotional. He was never emotional. Harry, after very few months, remarried a lovely woman. And he had a good life with her for maybe 10 years or more. Had a good life with her, and then he died.

And so they're all gone. Clara and Joe died.

Who are Clara and Joe? Oh, those are the Baers.

Yeah, the first family. And time went on. And in 19-- I think it was '62, I got this call from HIAS. I think '62 was before Mary died-- before Mary died, we got this call from HIAS, from this cousin. And we went to London after a while to meet her. We had the three kids. No, we had two boys at that time. Karen hadn't been born yet. Mary was still alive.

And so I learned a lot about my family, but not about my coming here. All she knew was that she came on the Kindertransport. And my mother contacted her to give this stuff to me someday.

And someday came.

And someday came. And she threw that shaggy dog story with the woman from Detroit or wherever she was that remembered the newspaper article. So she suggested that Adela contact HIAS, and she did. That was before Mary died, and we had Karen. We had Karen. Karen was four months old when Mary died.

Did your children ask you about your own childhood when they were growing up?

I think they knew that I was a foster child. But I don't remember when they were young. I don't remember when they

were quite young.

Did you talk much about any of this to your kids?

I told them some. And the boys knew who Mary and Harry were because they were old enough. They were six and eight when Karen was born. So they knew about Mary and Harry. And they knew where they lived. They knew them.

Did you ever speak with anybody about the hard parts, about being a lucky girl?

I don't think so. I think that Aunt Dorothy and Uncle [PERSONAL NAME], and maybe the rest of Mary's family that she was close to, I think they realized that I felt different. They all liked me. It seemed like-- I just had this feeling when I was in the home that I was a foster child. I just don't know why I never felt a part of them, really. It wasn't that they didn't make me feel at home. It was a feeling. I think it was my own feeling.

Well, for whatever reason, it was there. It was real. And it was a burden. It was a sorrow that you were carrying.

It was. And I think I didn't have very much self-esteem growing up. When I met my husband and we got married, started to thrive a little bit. I did thrive. And I went through a very low time. We went to Philadelphia for his residency. And when we came back, that was right before Mary died. Beverly had died. I was an only child.

And I think I went through a very bad time. And I got help. And I think it helped a little bit. But it made a mark.

I don't want to deepen those memories now. I know they've caused--

I've had a very good life since then. I mean, Art and I-- we have wonderful kids, and we have seven grandchildren. Three children, seven grandchildren. And we've had a good life. We've had a good life. I am lucky. I am lucky.

I believe you. I believe you.

I'm very, very lucky, believe me. Whenever someone calls me a survivor, I have to-- because I don't feel like a survivor. I was rescued. I'm a refugee. I always thought of myself as a refugee. But Leo Bretholz, who was a real survivor, he jumped off of a train to Auschwitz. And he became a good friend in the last few years. I told him that I don't feel like a survivor, and he said, you absolutely are because you had papers. You were not a refugee. You had papers when you came to this country, and the government did not take you in as a refugee.

Yet the feeling of not belonging to anybody, it makes sense. And it is the price. It was a cost that was paid.

I just had no one to share it with.

But I'm very glad that you've shared it with us today.

I can't believe I'm here. I feel like it happened to somebody else. I feel like it's somebody else's story that I'm telling. It's sort of unbelievable how things came about. And then I met these women who told me about the trip over here. And it just made a full circle for me. All the holes were filled, as much as they can be.

Are there any that are left, any gaps of things you'd want to know that you don't know that you don't know if you'll ever be able to find out, but that you'd want to?

My relationship with my mother, I think. I don't have that feeling of-- I think I probably just put it away, just forgot it. I think maybe it was self-protection.

Well, it is a huge loss. When I look at the dress and I look at the doll, and I think of what she packed, that is somebody who was packing something with love because somebody who doesn't think of what a child needs would not pack a doll. They would pack something more practical. And she packed the practical, but she also realized she had a little girl

who needed a toy. And that was a loss. You never had a chance to feel it, but you lost it.

That's about the only thing I would love to recapture, my relationship with my mother.

Thank you very much, Herta.

Thank you for asking me. Thank you.

I appreciate it. I see the cost, and I appreciate that you have gone through it to share this with us.

I feel like I'm not a survivor like other people are a survivor.

Yes, you are.

No, no. My experience, I was sheltered from a lot of the horrible stuff that those kids that we left behind. I think of them a lot. They never had a life. They never had children. And when I feel guilty about people telling me how lucky I am, I feel guilty about that, too. I can't help it. I'm sure everybody would feel the same way with my background. But there's so many people that must have been involved in bringing us over. I'll never know.

It's what you said before. it's not that you're not grateful. But the whole situation was such that no matter how good and how much effort was made, there are certain things that were beyond anybody's power. They could not cover the things that you lost. They should not cover the grief, the sorrow, the people that-- they could only do only a certain amount, which they did. But they could not take away all of the things that were causing the pain. It was beyond--

They wanted me to be happy. And I thought that I never-- looking back, I think I never really grieved. and it was all inside all this time and still is.

Thank you.

It was wonderful to meet you. Thank you.

Is there anything else you'd like to say as a final word?

I'm thrilled that I met these two women. And I learned a lot from them. And I think I was very lucky to find them.

Well, with that, I'm going to say that the formal part of our interview, the formal part of the interview with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum with Herta Griffel Baitch on May 10, 2016 is over. But we'll still talk a little bit about some of the artifacts that you brought today. So we'll pan to now these items, and I'll ask a few questions when the camera's adjusted. Thank you.

Tell me when you're ready, OK? OK, you're rolling? OK.

So explain to me first of all, what is the suitcase?

Well, the suitcase-- my suitcase when I came to this country. I don't know how I was able to carry.

It's big.

It's big. And I think I probably-- maybe the older kids helped the younger kids with it. I don't know how I handled it. My mother packed a lot of things for me. And I think of all the things, this dress is in the best condition.

It's beautiful.

And I have a picture of her, my mother and I, and I had this dress on. So it's very meaningful to me because it's my

connection with her.

And it's her work on it, too.

And it's her work, and it's her embroidery. And the dirt-- it's getting stained.

A little yellowed from the age. Did she actually saw the dress?

Oh, yeah. She did the smocking and everything. And she did embroidery on some of my other things, too, nightgowns and things that I brought here. And the doll I don't remember. But she might have packed it for me to have. Stella said that she did not remember this doll. She said I had a rag doll with me of some sort.

Oh, really?

Yeah. She said that she did not remember this doll. She doesn't think this was the doll I had. She said I was always holding this doll that she remembers me. So I might have had another doll. Maybe this was for the future.

OK. But your mother did put it in the suitcase.

Yes. This was in the suitcase. And my mother made this dress, and the slip and the pants.

That come with it.

That come with it. And she did all this.

|. She did all of the embellishment.

The embellishments. She made the dress. She made the dress and the slip and the panties.

What other items had she included that you remember?

I had prayer books, prayer books that my teachers and other people gave to me when I left. They signed them.

And more clothes?

More clothes. I think I had a paint set that somehow got lost. I also had a little photograph album that got lost along the way. There was a lot in it. And the song book that she wrote the songs in.

That you used to sing with your father?

Yes. And she wrote in the song book the Ten Commandments so that I shouldn't forget them. So--

Important things.

I remember when I came here, I said a morning prayer every morning. And when I did it at the Friedlanders, Beverly thought I was really-- she didn't know what to make of me. She just didn't know what to make of me.

Well, we're very grateful that you have shared this with the museum and that you are donating these very precious and personal artifacts to us so that we can further tell the story.

Thank you.

Thank you. OK. That's it.