

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Ursula Marx on June 8, 2016 in Columbia, Maryland. Thank you very much, Mrs. Marx, for agreeing to meet with us today and to share your story and your experiences. I am going to start our interview at the very beginning with the most basic questions, and everything will unfold from there. So my very first question to you is, can you tell me the date of your birth?

February 5, 1920.

1920.

Correct.

And where were you born?

I was born in Breslau.

Breslau, Germany.

Yes, Breslau, Germany.

OK. And can you tell me what part of Germany that's in?

Yes. It's in East Germany and is now Polish.

And what's the Polish name? Do you know?

[? Berlotsky ?] or something. I do not remember.

You do not know. OK. But it was in this territory that was kind of contested between the two countries.

Yes. It was called the Polish corridor.

OK. And what was your name at birth?

Ursula Guthmann.

Ursula Guthmann.

G-U-T-H-M-A-N-N.

OK. Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had a sister.

Was she older or younger than you?

She's older than I am.

And what is her name?

Her name is Susan, Susanna.

Susanna Guthmann.

Yes.

And her married name if she's married?

Her married name is Rosenberg.

OK. And when was she born?

She was born October 12, 1917.

That's my daughter's birthday.

Oh.

[LAUGHTER]

Not 1917 but the October 12. And tell me a little bit about your parents starting with their names.

My father's name was Martin Guthmann. My mother's name was Elise, E-L-I-S-E, Regina Lowy, L-O-W-Y.

And were your parents originally from Breslau?

My mother was born there. And my father was born in Frankfurt at the older--

So the other Frankfurt, the one that's in the East.

Yes, exactly.

OK. Were their families from Germany, or were they from another country on both sides of your family?

They were all Germans as far as I know.

OK, OK. In Breslau, did you have an extended family that you interacted with from your mother's side, aunts, and uncles, and grandparents, and so on?

I had two grandmothers living there.

OK, so your father and your mother's mothers.

Right.

OK. Did your mother have siblings?

My mother had two sisters. And they lived in Glogau, G-L-O-G-A-U.

Was that far from Breslau?

No, not too far.

OK. And did your father have any relatives living in Breslau?

No, my father's sister lived in Leipzig.

And was that his only sibling?

Yes, at the time.

OK. And how is it that you came to be born in Breslau and not someplace else?

My parents lived in Breslau. My mother was born in Breslau. They got married there, I think.

OK. Do you know anything about how your parents met?

No, I do not. In those days, you didn't ask your parents any questions. And I'm forever sorry that I didn't.

Tell me a little bit about how your father-- I assume it was your father-- supported the family.

Supported the family?

Yes.

My father had a business. And it's called [GERMAN].

And what does [GERMAN] mean?

He bought truckloads of corn and other--

Grain.

Yes, other grains-- and sold them. And he had a company. He had a partner. And that's how he supported us.

So was this a wholesale business?

I don't know if you would call it that.

OK. Who were his customers? Who did he usually sell the grain to? You don't know.

I do not know.

OK. Do you know if it was a large business?

I know we had an office with seven employees. And I do not know anything else.

From your earliest years, do you have any memories or episodes of something-- earliest things that come to your mind of yourself as a little child. Can you share anything with us?

I know a lot of things from an early age on. I think I was it goes back to my age two or three, even.

OK. So what is some memory that you have from being two years?

One of my first memories is that a cousin of mine was born in Breslau. And went to the hospital to see him. And I know he was only two and a half years older than I.

So that's when you were two and a half. And you can place it from there.

Yes. And that's the first memory I have.

And then afterwards?

I remember lots of things. I don't know what you want me to tell.

I know. It's a little bit too open ended. So I'll try to be more specific. Can you tell me a little bit about your home, where you lived, what it looked like.

Yes. All right. We lived in an apartment house. My mother never wanted a house. And we had a very large apartment.

My sister and I shared a bedroom. And then there was another room. And then there was my parents' bedroom. And there were two bathrooms, kitchen, and an entrance hall. And then there was a dining room, and a salon with a piano and stuff, and then another like a library.

It sounds very spacious.

It was.

Was it in an old type of building that was built in the 19th century, the stone buildings that had many floors, that kind of apartment house? Could you describe the outside of it?

It was just a plain brick building.

A brick building.

Yeah. I think it was brick.

Was it relatively new for the time?

I don't know.

OK. Well, you said you had two bathrooms. That meant you had indoor plumbing.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

OK.

There were several floors. In the basement was a washroom. So once a month, a washerwoman came. And they had machines down there, and ironing boards, and things. And they would wash the laundry down there.

For the whole apartment building.

No, for us.

Oh, I see. I see. So, was this basement a communal space that others could use, too?

I think it was.

OK.

And then on the top floor was a place where we could store things. Like, my grandmother would cook vegetables and things and put them in jars. And they were stored up there.

OK. Did you know your neighbors?

Not too many, no.

OK. Was this mostly a Jewish neighborhood or a mixed neighborhood?

I think it was mostly Jewish. I'm not sure.

OK. And you had indoor plumbing. You had electricity in the building?

Yes.

And how did you heat the building?

We had radiators.

Radiators.

Yes.

And coal ovens in the bottom, in the basement-- or you have no idea?

No.

OK. I know. These sound like strange questions. But the purpose behind them is to try to get a sense of--

I understand.

--what was life like?

Yes. Life was wonderful.

Yeah.

We had loving parents. And we had everything we needed. Were they well-to-do?

My parents were what's called middle class. But middle class was you had the maid and the cook.

Well, that's pretty-- for our understanding, most people can't afford those things here. But you could. And did you have a nanny?

Yes, we did. When we grow a little older, we had a part-time nanny. In the beginning probably, I don't know. We had the nanny.

What language did your parents speak at home?

German.

Did they know any other languages?

Not to my knowledge.

OK. So Yiddish was not part of--

I never heard of the word Yiddish.

You never even heard of the word.

No.

Oh, OK.

I didn't know what kosher was.

Ah, OK. So they were assimilated.

Absolutely. My parents were Jewish Germans. And here, I'm an American Jew.

What is the--

The difference is that we were 100% Germans.

Oh. You never saw yourself as not German.

No, never.

That's quite a shock then when it changes.

It was. And my father always said, they didn't mean him. He was in the First World War.

Did he ever talk about the First World War to you?

No. I have a picture of him.

Were your parents storytellers in any way?

No.

Tell me a little bit about their personalities, about your father's personality, your mother's.

Happy people.

Were they?

Very happy people. They were good together.

They liked each other.

They loved each other. And it was very open and visible. And we thrived under that, my sister and I.

Of course. And when you were growing up in the 1920s, what are some of the memories that you'd have from outside the home? You must have started school in the mid '20s.

Yes. We went to private school, my sister and I.

OK.

And that was mostly Jewish. There was a very nice habit in Germany. On your first day of school, you got what is called a [GERMAN].

An [GERMAN]?

Have you ever heard of that?

No.

It's a cone-shaped piece of cardboard. But the outside is decorated maybe with wallpaper or something. And there's candy in there. And that's what you get on your first day of school. It was a very nice habit.

It's a lovely one. It's a lovely one.

And you remember your [GERMAN]?

Oh, yes.

And do you remember your school?

Yes, I do. I was called by the name of the person who owned it, Fraulein [? Vole. ?]

Fraulein [? Vole. ?]

Uh-huh.

And was it large? Was it a girls school, or was it a mixed school?

It was a mixed school. But what's interesting is religious instructions were given to the Jewish students separately from the other students. Now, our rabbi would come in and teach us whatever we needed to know and teach Catholic the children but with another-- with a the priest. And the others with the-- they were separated.

A Protestant pastor.

Yeah.

Do you know whether or not Breslau was a city that was mostly Catholic or mostly Protestant?

I do not know that. But I know they had a Jewish cemetery there.

OK.

Semin--

A seminary.

Yeah, a seminary and a cemetery, too, of course.

OK. And was there a large Jewish community?

Yes, very cultural. They had opera. My mother was singing and playing the piano. And it was a happy community. I had a very happy, very happy childhood.

Did you travel? Did you go on vacations?

Yes, we did.

Tell me a little bit about those.

We went to the mountains, mostly without my father, because he was working. And then he would come up and visit.

The mountains in Germany?

Yes, Riesengebirge.

Ah, so south of Leipzig or Dresden-- or maybe I'm mixing up my gebirge.

No. I don't exactly know where. I'd have to look that up where that was.

OK.

There's a mountain called the Schneekoppe that would have the snow on top. We would walk up, and stop at certain times, and eat a snack, and then go on. And vacations were wonderful.

And it was mostly the three of you and sometimes your father, because he was always busy.

Yeah.

OK. Did your father have an automobile?

No, the business did.

The business did.

Yeah.

OK. And remind me again. He was in partnership with somebody for the business.

Yes.

Who was his partner?

It will probably come to me.

But it wasn't a relative.

No.

OK.

And then when did the depression come, the business failed or went down. So we moved to Berlin when I was 10, nine or 10.

I see. Before we get there-- I want to find out about that-- but we don't have many interviews from Breslau. So I'd like to find out a little bit more about, in your memory, what was the city of your first years, your childhood? What kind of a place was it? What did it look like?

What did you know about it? Did you go to-- I'm asking a whole bunch of questions. But that's the basic point. Can you tell me?

It was a clean, open town with nice parks. And I have a picture of the downtown. And we would go with my mother. We would go shopping.

Did she have her favorite stores to go to?

I don't know. I don't know that. And that's nice stores. And I don't know exactly what you're looking for.

Well, as you said, you had vacations in the mountains. Did you have any kind of excursions that were daily, closer to home in Breslau itself for entertainment?

No.

Did you go to the cinema?

We went to theater a lot.

You went to theater.

Yes.

OK.

And opera-- well, no, not then. Not until we moved to Berlin we went to the opera. That was part of school. In Europe-- all over Europe-- children grow up with all that stuff. You go to museums, and you go to see-- the movies was also but not as much. And you read about it.

Were your parents religious?

We went to temple sometimes, but we weren't very observant. We ate pork. And as I say, I didn't know what kosher was.

OK.

I can't find anything unusual about it.

I know. What is unusual to us-- when a person thinks of their own life, it's their life. What's so special to ask about? But to us, it is.

Of course.

Yeah.

Now, I met somebody recently who was in Breslau after the war. And she said it's completely destroyed.

Is it? Yeah.

Yeah. Of course, they're building it up again.

And today it's part of Poland.

Yes.

OK. Was talk of the wider world-- while you're still in Breslau, whether it would be events in Germany, or events in Europe, or events just generally, was that part of your household? That is, when you would sit down to dinner, would politics be something your parents would discuss between themselves?

No. Actually, when we were little, we didn't eat with our parents.

You didn't?

No.

OK.

We ate in our rooms. And whoever was taking care of us brought us food. Later on, we ate with our parents when we were a little older.

OK. Do you remember moving from Breslau to Berlin?

I did, yes-- not moving itself, because I was staying with my grandmother for two weeks while they moved.

The grandmother in Breslau.

Yeah.

Both my grandmothers were in Breslau at the time.

And where in Berlin did you move to, what part of town?

We moved West Berlin.

OK.

And again, we had a very nice apartment, not quite as big but very nice. And my sister went over to look at-- the German-- Berlin, they will pay your fare and let you come back. I did not want to go, but she went.

Do you remember what part of town your apartment was in?

Yes, Wilmersdorf.

Oh, in Wilmersdorf. Do you remember, also, the street address?

Yes. Westfälische Strasse, zweiundachtzig.

Westfälische Strasse, zweiundachtzig.

Westfälische Strasse, 82.

So that would be-- yeah, Westphalian.

Yeah.

Westphalian Street, 82. And so that's pretty central.

Uh-huh. Well, it was between-- I don't know if you know anything about Berlin.

I lived there.

Oh, you lived here. So you know where--

I lived in Zehlendorf.

--Fehrbelliner Platz is?

Oh, yeah.

It was between Fehrbelliner Platz and another platz.

[LAUGHTER]

I'm sure we'd be able to find it. Oh, OK. So your father-- the business folded, in other words.

Yes. And he got another partner in Berlin and started the same business there.

Really?

Yeah.

OK. And how did that seem to go?

It went fine until the Nazis came.

OK.

So the depression hit. Would this have been 1929 when you moved to Berlin? OK. And so he had a couple of years when he was able to be successful in this--

More than a couple.

How long, would you say?

Probably more like four or five.

OK. And you started to go to school in Berlin.

Yes.

Was that very different from Breslau?

Well, I had just started high school. So no, it wasn't that much different.

Was it also a private school?

No. Well, in Germany at the time, you had to pay for your high school. Otherwise, you went to volksschule.

OK. And what was volksschule? What was that?

The government pays for that.

And was it a different kind of education?

Yes.

And what kind of education--

A lower education.

OK. Was it more like preparing people for trades?

Yes.

All right. And the school you went to would prepare you for--

Going to college.

OK. OK. So you hadn't gone to high school in Breslau, but you did in Berlin.

I started in Breslau, and then I went to Berlin.

I see. OK.

Because I was 10.

Yeah.

I must have been 10. So it must have been 1930.

OK. And do you have any memories of this second school in Berlin?

Yes.

Can you share any of those, what the classroom was like, what the teachers were like?

We had very good teachers.

You did.

Yes, most of them were very good. Now, Germany has different accents, like here in the South.

Sure.

We had a math teacher who was from Bavaria. It took us two weeks to understand what he was saying. But they were good teachers.

Uh-huh.

Now here when you don't pass the grade, you can repeat it. There if you don't pass one thing, you have to repeat the whole thing.

So if you don't pass mathematics, for example, then you have to take history again and English again.

Everything, yeah.

OK.

At least that's the way it was then.

OK. How did you do?

I did pretty good. My sister was always smarter than I.

[LAUGHTER]

Older, smarter.

She was a goody-goody, and I was a pest.

Oh, were you somebody who was mischievous?

Mm-hmm.

What were some of the mischief you would get into?

Oh, I'd just not do what they'd ask me to do. I wanted my way.

Did your mother have help in Berlin as she had had in Breslau?

Yes, yes, not as much but she did.

And describe to me what Westfälische's zweiundachtzig looked like.

It had an elevator, which the one in Breslau did not.

OK.

And it had lovely, big rooms with beautiful floors.

What floor were you on?

I think we were on the fifth. I'm not sure.

So pretty high up.

Yeah. And by the European count or by an American count? You see, European, the ground floor is not counted as the first floor. The first floor is above the ground floor.

Oh. I don't know.

You don't remember.

Maybe it was lower than that. I'm not sure.

OK Did you have balconies?

Yes, we had two balconies, one in the front and one in the back. Now where are we talking about?

Berlin.

Yeah, I think we also had two. I'm pretty sure.

OK.

Did your father have an office for his business in Berlin?

Yes.

And was it close to your home?

No, it wasn't too close. And he worked on Saturday half a day. And on the way home, he would stop at the candy store. And he would come home with a big package. And there was always something special for my sister, and for me, and for the maid.

Aw.

And then the rest of it, my mother put away. And she would dole it out during the week.

That's a sweet thought.

Yeah. My father would come home for lunch. And we were home for lunch, also. And we would run to the door to see who could greet him first.

Oh, that's so kind.

They were just wonderful.

OK. Were you closer to one or to the other?

I was a mama's girl. My mother was very important-- my father, too. But I don't know. No, they were both equally important.

And did they have any particular interests or hobbies?

I don't think my father did, but my mother did music.

OK.

Yeah.

And personality wise.

They were happy people. I don't remember any depressions or any dark part about it. It was just-- my sister and I-- my sister is still alive at 98.

Wow.

I'm 96.

Wow.

[LAUGHTER]

I wouldn't have thought it. I really wouldn't have thought it. Yeah, but when you said 1920, I sort of-- whoa!

[LAUGHTER]

We were just lucky.

Yeah.

We talk about my parents a lot.

Yeah. What are some of the things that come up again and again?

Now my children, especially my older daughter, remembers my father very well. And we still quote him most every day.

Really?

Yeah.

What were some of the things that he would say?

He was just a all-around wonderful, wise person. And they never met my mother. But she was also unique. My mother could tell jokes. And she was fast in everything she did. It was just a happy life.

When you were in school in Berlin, did you feel different from the other kids because you were Jewish?

No. I had friends on both sides. No. Until Hitler came, we were fully accepted. And I mean, I say now accepted. Then I felt just like everybody else.

OK. OK. There was no distinction. There was no difference.

No. No.

Was politics talked about at home?

No. Oh, some of it but not too much.

Did you have a radio?

Yes. The first radio I ever saw, I couldn't figure out who was in there.

[LAUGHTER]

How'd they get there?

[LAUGHTER]

How does that voice come out from there? What sort of things that you remember hearing over the radio?

By that time, it was about Hitler and stuff like that.

OK. So in 1931 and '32, you've only been in Berlin a few years.

Yeah.

You're still in school.

Yes.

And there are elections that are coming up. Was that something that penetrated into your personal world?

After awhile, yes, of course, it did.

How?

It was the radio. And then we did talk about it. And by that time, we were older.

Yeah. When Hitler actually came to power in 1933, did that make itself felt in your father's business, in your experiences in school? Did that make itself felt in your life?

Not in '33-- a little later than that.

Can you tell me about that?

My first awareness of it, is that what you're talking about?

Pardon?

My first awareness of it.

Yes.

I think it was a gradual thing. I don't remember exactly when it started. But of course, we were very much aware of it. They had news films that-- now you see it on television. In those days, you had to go to the movies to see it. And we saw it. That's how we became aware of it.

OK, so you would see news films while you were in the cinema.

Yes. There were special films just with news.

OK. And what are some of the things that would stand out to you?

Everything was so foreign, this physical thing, this marching, and yelling, and this boasting of how good they were and in the sports. And then things were forbidden. And then we couldn't go to the movies. We couldn't sit on park benches.

Have you ever heard in your interviews about the Kulturbund?

Tell me about it.

When we couldn't go to the theater anymore or to the concerts, Jewish theater started to come into existence. And it was called the Kulturbund, culture bond.

I see.

And my parents, of course, were members of it. And my sister and I would go to all these performances. They were all done by Jews.

And were they in different places, the performances?

Yes. They were in theaters.

So they were able to rent out space in different theaters?

I don't know all the background of those things.

No, no, but you--

Yeah.

OK. And did the behavior of your teachers change in school?

By that time, we were out of it. We couldn't go to school anymore.

When did that happen that you couldn't go to school anymore?

I think I was 16.

So that would have been 1936.

Yes.

And what happened with your father's business after 1933?

For several years, he kept it. And then the Nazis just took it.

I see. So--

And when he came to this country, they got wiedergutmachung-- know what that is?

Reparations.

Yes.

OK. But that's a lot later, isn't it?

Yes, of course.

OK. So I still want to get a sense of this life in Berlin in the 1930s. Did you see Brownshirts walking down the street?

Yeah.

Were they near your home?

No.

No. Did you ever feel harassed in school when you were still in school?

No. I was out then.

But when you say I was out, there were still some years after Hitler was in power before you were out.

No, I didn't feel anything in particular.

OK. So your teachers were not cruel.

No.

And the fellow students did not behave differently?

No, that happens later. Some of my friends wouldn't talk to me anymore.

And that was after you had already left school.

[SIGHS]

It's so hard to separate it exactly.

OK. It doesn't matter. In that sense, it doesn't matter. What I'm after is, the incidents where you experienced them not speaking to you anymore, can you tell us more about that.

It was just we didn't stay in the same places. They didn't walk where I walked and wouldn't make any attempt to contact me. As a matter of fact, I was on a business trip with my husband to Germany from here.

And I used a bathroom at a bed and breakfast. There was a magazine rack. And one of the girls that had been my friend and was in school with me had become a very famous actress.

No kidding.

I saw her picture. And so somebody asked me, did you contact her? It had gone through my mind. And then I decided not to do it, because I didn't want to be rejected. I didn't know how she felt.

What year was this that you were in Germany and you saw the picture in the magazine rack? Was this several decades after the war?

Oh, yes.

'70s, '80s?

Probably around that time.

OK. And so you never did contact?

No.

Did the rejection ever come in a very obvious way?

No, it was subtle. But this is part of my upbringing. My parents instilled a spirit in us that, no matter what happens to you, you are still yourself.

You don't lose yourself. You don't lose your value. And that's what kept us going.

Those are very important lessons.

Yes, very.

And so we are so fortunate. Not every child has that.

That's right. That's right. As we grow up, part of our answer to am I worth anything is your mirror to the world and how the world reacts to you.

Yeah.

And at some point in growth, you have to come to a realization that you have value despite how the world reacts to you. And that's something you're saying your parents stressed.

By example, not by lecturing.

OK.

It helped me when I came to this country, which is, of course, much later. And we may come to that.

Yes, yes. So did your level of living change much in 1933 to '36, those first years of Hitler being in power?

It did later on, yes. Because for instance, you couldn't have a maid anymore that was under 45, because that's when they couldn't have children anymore. And they didn't want to work for Jews. So we had a part-time maid over 46.

I see. I see.

And our apartment was smaller by then, because my mother couldn't take care of anything big. And I guess the money wasn't there, either. I don't know.

OK.

Were your parents less-- how was their manner? Did their manner change as time went on? Were they less happy? Where they more worried?

They didn't show it to us. And that came out when we left.

Tell me about that.

Well, it's really a long story.

Please, please.

OK.

Please.

By that time, it was later on. And I did not want to stay in Germany. I could see what was happening.

My father kept saying, you don't have to worry. I had the iron cross. I was in the army. They're not going to do anything to me.

But of course, that changed after Crystal Night.

OK. So you were still in Berlin during Kristallnacht.

Yes, I was. But before that what happened-- no, it happened about that time. I wanted to go. I wanted to leave so badly.

And I was a stamp collector at that time. One Sunday afternoon, I was looking at my stamps. And I found an envelope that my uncle had given me that came from America. And it had an American stamp on it addressed to him. And he gave it to me, because he knew I was collecting stamps.

So he happened to be in our house that Sunday. And I went in there. And I said, who are these people that wrote you from America? And he said, this is my cousin of mine.

And I asked him about the details. It was a couple. They had no children. He was American, and she had come from Germany.

So I said, would you please write to them and see if they would give us an affidavit. And he did write to them. And he did give us an affidavit for my sister and me.

And this is in what year?

It was probably around '38.

OK, before Kristallnacht-- because that's November '38.

I know.

Oh.

I know. And I'm trying to pinpoint it. And I have not been able to give the exact date.

OK.

Well, when the affidavit came, you have a quota number. And it was a very high number. There were a lot of people ahead of us.

So I said to my father, I said, I don't want to stay and wait here and maybe not get out. He had a friend in London. And that friend had an English friend who was a British Quaker.

And he said my father's friend, we've been thinking what we can do for the German Jews. And maybe this is something we can do. Maybe we can take one of them.

And it so happened-- life is so strange that way. It so happened that the head of the American Quaker was visiting that man in London at the time, a Dr. Balderson. And he was on the way to Germany to find out what was happening.

And so the English Quaker said to him, would you investigate the family? And see if we can take one of those girls. And he did.

And I remember when he came to our house, Dr. Balderson.

Dr. Borgerson.

Balderson, B-A-L--

Oh, Balderson.

Yeah, Balderson.

Balderson, mm-hmm.

And he came on a Sunday. And we had already learned English in school. And my mother spoke a little bit. So she made coffee. And we talked.

And later on, he went back. And he told them that our family was fine. So they said they would take one of us.

Did your sister want to go as much as you did?

I guess. I think. Well, we were a pair, anyway. So we wrote to them. And we sent our pictures, both of us.

And as they told us later on, when they saw the picture, they said, we can't take one. We have to take them both. So we got ready to go. And I'd like to tell you the process of what happened.

Please. Please. Somebody came from the government. And everything we took, he marked down. And my parents had to pay the government the worth of that particular article that we took in money.

Even though you owned it.

We owned it.

You owned the article. And yet, if you want--

And yet, they had to pay the amount that article was worth.

Do you remember what it is that you actually took with you?

Yes. We took our clothes, of course. And my sister took a sewing machine. And we took a few little gadgets. We took I think a small rug and some vases, you know, a few little items.

Household items types things?

This is another thing that I would like to talk about-- is how the process was.

Yes, tell me.

About Kristallnacht.

OK, please tell me.

You may have heard this before, but I think it repeats-- most people here, Americans, do not know this. It got worse every year. And people are wondering, how did they know which stores were Jewish? And how could they know which glasses to break?

Mm-hmm.

Well, one year there was a law that all female Jews had to take the name Sara and all male had to take the name--

Israel, no?

I forgot [MUMBLING] for a minute. Anyway, they had take these two names. The following year, there was a law, all Jewish stores had to write their names on the outside of the windows. You see the connection?

So if you had a Jewish store, your Jewish name was on the outside on the window. It was painted on there.

Where were you during Kristallnacht?

My sister and I were home with my father. My mother was in Breslau visiting her mother.

OK.

And of course, we heard what was happening.

What is it that you heard?

We heard that the men were taken and put into prison.

Did anyone come to your apartment?

I'm going to tell you about that. My father went to somebody's house where they had already been and taken the man. So he went there.

I see.

My father was never taken.

And you and your sister remained in your apartment.

Yes.

Did you hear things out on the streets?

No, this was not a commercial street.

I see.

There were no stores around there.

Did you venture out the following day or the days afterwards?

Yes, yes.

What is it that you saw?

We saw the broken glass and the synagogues were ablaze.

You saw the burning.

Yeah.

Were you afraid for your own life at that point?

No. When you're that young, you don't think of it. And we were young young. We were quite-- we were very protected all our lives.

And so Mr. Balderson visited you after Kristallnacht.

I think it was after Kristallnacht, yes. I'm not sure.

And the Quaker couple in London--

Took us in.

--took both of you. And can you tell me about your leave-taking? You said, so first of all, there was the inventory of things.

Can you imagine parents sending their two daughters away? Not a tear, nothing.

Really?

They never showed us anything.

Wow.

But from the minute we left, there was only one thing on our minds, to get them out. That was the only thing we ever wanted.

Did you go by train?

Yeah, my father said flying was too dangerous.

[LAUGHTER]

So we went. We had to cross the channel with a boat. And we were so seasick. And then when we got to the station in England, I remember the first word Dr. Balderson said to us-- not Dr. Balderson, the other one. Who's who?

[LAUGHTER]

Who's who? We lived in London for a few months. And they were building a home in Sussex. And that's where we moved in later.

And that's where we were when war broke out. And so we thought we'd never see them again. But we did.

What was the name of the Quaker family?

Dr. Harding.

Dr. Harding.

Yes. He invented the smokescreen in the First World War. Do you think you have some water?

Excuse me. Yes, we can cut. OK.

We were talking about war breaking out while we were in England.

Yeah, so you were with the Hardings. And he developed something called a smokescreen.

Yes, he did that in the First World War. He was a chemist.

Uh-huh. I see.

And he developed the smokescreen.

Were you able to write letters to your parents and receive letters from them?

Yes.

OK.

And we had secured a position for them to come to England, my mother as a maid and my father is a housekeeper-- oh,

my father, who never knew how to drive, learned how to drive so he could be a chauffeur.

OK. And this was before September '39, before the war breaks out. You had secured these positions for them.

Yes.

OK.

And then, of course, they couldn't come, because war broke out.

Oh my.

And then I'll continue with them once we come to America.

OK. So, what happened then with you and your sister?

Well, the Hardings, who were going to keep us until-- the agreement we had with them was that we would leave when we got affidavit to America.

I see. So that transferred. You were able to leave from--

Oh, yes. We stayed on that list.

OK.

But then war broke out. And they did not bargain to have us there for a long, long time. So they sent me to his sister to be a maid there.

And where did she live?

She lived in northern England in Manchester.

OK.

So I was up there. And then I was a maid. And I don't think I was a very good maid, because I'd never done that stuff before. I did the best I could. And they were very nice to me.

And my sister got a job on the same street where they lived in their new house. Two women lived together. And she was a housekeeper there.

In Sussex.

Yes. So we were separated. And then they applied for us to go to Australia. Because they didn't know what was coming [INAUDIBLE]. They did not bargain to keep us forever.

Did you feel unwelcome?

No. No. But we understood that they wouldn't do that. We were just grateful that they did what they did. And they were wonderful to us.

But then, fortunately, my American visa came through first. So for awhile, I stayed with a relative in London-- our relative, my mother's cousin. And then we came to America.

Then we took a boat in Liverpool. And it was a blackout, because it was war. So our ship collided with a Canadian troop

transport on the first night out.

Oh, my goodness.

And they sounded the alarm during the night. And we had to go on board deck. And my sister and I didn't know if we had to go back to Germany. We were scared.

Why would you have to go back to Germany?

We didn't know. We all we knew is that the boat was damaged. But we did go back to England. They put us up in a hotel there until the next boat.

OK. And about approximately when did you leave for the United States?

We arrived here after a nine-day-- I think was nine days-- voyage. We went over Canada, Halifax. And we arrived in this country on January 3, 1940. So we left there in December.

OK. So the war is about four months in.

Yes.

OK. And to which place did you arrive?

New York.

Right.

And then I lived in New York for 17 years and loved every minute of it.

[LAUGHTER]

I can understand that.

Who met you at the pier?

Of my father's friends, who had already emigrated, took us to his house on Washington Heights on Thayer Street. And we spent three nights there. And then we both started jobs in the same building as maids.

And that's what I mean we know who we were. We did not act like that. We did what we were supposed to do as maids. But we remained the same inside.

Was it hard to do that?

No. It was hard in a way, yes. But we were happy that we were here and that we maybe could do something to get our parents out.

Were you well treated in the places you worked?

I was treated like a maid. My sister was not.

OK. And did you know what was going on with your parents?

Oh, yes.

How?

Occasionally, a letter would come. And we were in touch. We were trying everything to get them out.

What finally happened is-- oh, my father had somehow managed to send us some money-- not much but a few dollars here and there. And we made \$35 a month. \$30 went in the bank. So that's \$60 for two of us. And \$5.00 we kept.

So it was \$35 each per month.

Each, yeah. But she worked for different people.

Each, OK. And you banked half of it.

We banked more than half. We banked \$30 each.

\$30 each, OK.

Yeah.

\$30 each. And you kept \$5.00.

Yeah.

And what was going on with your parents at the time?

All right. They didn't tell us too much, but they were alive. And they were still in their apartment. And we tried everything.

What does that mean, everything?

We tried to get them out to talk to different people and finally ended up buying a visa for Santo Domingo, which they told us was illegal. But we couldn't get anything else. And we were able to pay for it.

Then they had to get there. So they were able to buy a ticket through Russia in a closed train-- they couldn't get out-- and into Yokohama. So that's a long trip.

So from Berlin, they had to go eastwards.

Yes.

And this must have been still before 1941 when the Soviet Union and Germany were allied.

Yes.

OK. Do you know where they went? Were there stops from Berlin?

I do not.

OK.

I do not. But then when they got to Yokohama, they had to take a small boat to go over Panama and Santa Domingo-- stopped up in America on the West Coast there. And when they got to Panama, there was a shipping strike. They couldn't go any further.

And my sister and I-- we went all over to try and get some money to buy a plane ticket and finally got some from a Jewish organization. We send in the money. And they flew to Santo Domingo.

So they flew from Panama to Santo Domingo. And then what happened?

And then they stayed there for a few weeks, a few months. And then they came here.

And there was no difficulty visa wise from them to go from Santo Domingo to--

No, we had bought that entrance.

Oh, I see. So you bought the entrance visa from Santo Domingo to the United States.

No. We had given the money to go from Panama to Santa Domingo.

OK.

How they got the money to come here, I do not know.

OK. But they flew here.

No, they came by boat.

They came by boat. Do you remember the date they arrived?

I don't know the exact date, no. It was in '41.

OK. So you had been in the United States already more than a year.

Yeah. We had accomplished a lot.

Absolutely. Absolutely.

But that was the only thing-- I later changed my job. She remained where she was.

What job did you then change to?

I still was a maid. But I had some terrible experiences there, too. But anyway, want that's not too important. And then when they got here, I quit.

OK. So how did your parents get on their feet? Were they able to take anything out of Germany with them?

My mother, she survived only six months here. Then she died. She picked up something on the way. And her luggage never came until after she had gone.

Oh, I'm so sad.

Yeah.

I'm sorry. It must have been quite a blow.

Yeah, I used to have nightmares until I had a child. And then she was named after her. And then I didn't have any more nightmares.

What a loss.

Yeah.

Were you with her during the time when she was sick?

She was in the hospital. And by that time, I had rented a furnished room when they called me there.

What was her disease?

She had some kind of kidney failure, some blood disease. And that affected the kidneys.

And what did your father then do?

My father remarried. And he was married another 24 years.

Wow.

Yeah. My father never looked back. He never looked back. He never said this was better there, and this was better there. No, he was just--

The first money he made in America is-- he'd never done any physical work before. He shoveled a car out of the snow. That was the first dollar he ever made here.

In his first months here before losing your mother and before remarrying, did he live with you? Did you live with your sister?

No. They were on their own.

They were on their own.

Yeah.

OK. Did you move back in with them?

No, I moved back with my father when my husband went to the service. And at that time, he was not remarried. And we moved in together.

So explain to me. When you first arrive, you live in Washington Heights.

Yes.

And when your parents arrived, you still continue living in Washington Heights.

No.

OK, what happened?

I had two other jobs in between. I moved out first to Forrest Hills-- no to Jamaica. And that didn't work out.

There was a man whose wife was in Florida. And they had two children. And one of them wet the bed. And the other one was stealing money from the newspaper man.

And so I quit that one. And then I had a job on Central Park West with a wonderful family until my parents came.

OK. And so you lived with that family.

Yes.

OK. And when your parents came, where did they live?

I know, the first night, they spent at a hotel. And then they took a furnished room. My father worked.

And he had enough money to be able to pay the furnished room for a little bit.

Well, he bought stuff and sold it. And he managed.

And your mother soon went into the hospital.

Not right away, no. My sister got married in the meantime. And then on the way home-- she got married in Philadelphia and lived there all the time. And on the way home, my mother got sick.

What was the-- do you remember the date of her death?

Oh, yes.

What is it?

December 18, 1941.

She wasn't even here a year.

No. Her last day that she was conscious was December 7. And you know what that date is.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Yeah.

When you say your father never looked back, was that hard for you when he remarried?

It was hard for me. I was stupid.

Why do you you say that?

Because it was good for him. And she was a good person.

Did you come to like her?

Yeah, I liked her.

OK. Where did they live?

They lived in the 80s.

West Side?

On the West Side. I don't know-- 86th or 84th Street. I don't know for sure. And they were happy together.

Aside from the time when you lived with your father, were you always then on your own after that?

Yeah. Well, I got married, too.

What year did you get married?

I got married in '42.

To whom?

Somebody that I already knew in Germany.

And who was that? What was his name?

His name was Klein. His German name was Helmut Klein. And then he became Eddie Klein.

He became Eddie Klein.

Yeah.

OK. And was he from Berlin, as well?

Yes.

All right. So you married quite early.

Yes.

And where did that take you? Where did your married life take you, out of New York, still in New York?

No, I lived in New York until I got married the second time. Then I moved to New Jersey, then to Buffalo, and then to Tennessee, and then here.

OK. Let's go back a little bit, though.

OK. Did your first husband serve in the war?

Yes. He get a medical discharge.

OK. What was his experience serving in the war? Was he a richie boy like your second husband?

No, no, no. He was only in several months, and he became sick. And he had been going to school. He became an accountant afterwards on the GI Bill.

OK.

And he eventually died of that-- he had Hodgkin's disease.

I see.

He got in the army. And he eventually died of it.

How many years were you married?

12.

Did you have children together?

Yes, I had a child.

A daughter, a son?

A daughter. And then with my second husband, I had another daughter.

And when did you marry your second husband? What year was it?

In '59.

In 1959. And his name?

That's Harry Marx.

Harry Marx. And he was also from Germany.

Yes.

What part of Germany was he?

He was from Frankfurt am Main, near there, not-- the name of the town is Frankenberg.

OK. But near there, near Frankfurt am Main.

Yes, it's near-- yes.

OK. Can you briefly describe his story coming to the United States and then joining the military?

He was only 16 when he came here.

Was he older than you, younger than you?

He was two years younger. And the other one was four years older than I.

OK. So he came here in 1938.

Yes. He already had some siblings here.

OK. And was he drafted into the military? Did he join up?

I think he joined. I'm not sure. I wasn't married to him at that time.

Did he ever talk about his experiences of being in--

Some of it, not too much.

Did he describe working in intelligence?

Yes, he did. And he was stationed right near where he came from. So he met some of the people that he knew.

Germans.

Yes. He met somebody that he went to school with. And he found out that a friend had been killed by the Russians. So he was very-- mixed feelings.

Yeah.

He almost got shot once. He had gotten lost. And when he was going back to his American troop, they asked him about a sportsperson. He had never heard of him, because he was new in America. And they only shot him, because he had a German accent.

Oh, my goodness.

[LAUGHTER]

The kinds of adventures people have-- you know?

Yeah.

Unexpected ones. And he happened to then be part of the liberating force of Mauthausen.

The sub-camp of Mauthausen.

Yeah. And Flossenburg I think you mentioned before.

Right.

Did you ever go back to Berlin?

No.

Did you ever go back to Breslau?

No.

Or Germany?

Yes. I didn't want to go. My husband always took me on his business trips. But when he said he was going to Germany, I said, I'm not going. But two weeks before he left, I changed my mind. And I went.

And what was it like for you?

It wasn't easy.

Where were you in Germany?

We were in southern Germany. I had this hate. But I went to a lecture once of somebody who had also been in Germany. And he said he had that hate, and it destroyed him. And so he changed.

And so I changed. Every once in a while, it would come through. But I was a happier person after that.

How do you change this?

I reasoned with myself. People who are alive now were not Nazis. They weren't even born yet. So how could I hate

them?

It worked?

It worked, most of the time. Let me put it that way. And sometimes, it came through.

Yeah.

But I wasn't unreasonable anymore.

When you came to the United States, did you ever still speak German with anybody?

My sister.

Do you still today?

And my older daughter speaks it-- no, not too much. But my in-laws were from Germany, my first in-laws and my second ones, too. And we would speak German when Elaine wasn't supposed to hear what you were saying.

So she went to her grandma, and she said, mom, will you teach me German? And my mother-in-law, who was an angel, she said, I don't know how to teach, but I'll only speak German to you from now on. And she did. And that's how she learned German.

Then when this daughter was getting married, she took her future husband to meet my mother-in-law. And my mother-in-law started speaking English with him. So Elaine said, mom, I thought you always spoke German with me. I didn't know you could speak English. And she said, what do you think, I'm an idiot?

[LAUGHTER]

What a crusty lady-- wonderful.

She was wonderful. She was wonderful.

You mentioned before that, in Germany, you were a Jewish German, and here, you are an American Jew.

Uh-huh.

OK. Was there a certain point where that German part was taken away or you threw it away? Or was it something that was gradual?

No, it was instant.

It was instant.

Yes.

And when was that?

I didn't want to be German anymore as soon as I crossed that border.

When you were in England, in other words, when you crossed the boat or you crossed the border from Germany into another country.

Yeah, I didn't want anything German anymore. By the way, crossing that border wasn't easy.

Tell me about it.

We were on the train going through Holland. And as we came to the border of Germany and Holland, they took us out of the train. And they investigated us. And they talked at us.

And they took pictures-- a little picture of us we had in our pocketbooks. We had a little suitcase, overnight suitcase between us. And they kept asking questions and being nasty.

This is the German side.

Yes.

And of course, the train left. So here we were in a small, little town and no place. We didn't know anybody. There was one family that took in some Jews, but they were already sleeping on the floor. There were so many of them.

So finally, they got us into an old, rickety hotel on the back stairs going up to some room. And there were mice there. It was terrible. Every time my sister was going to go to sleep, I said, there's a mouse!

Was the rest of your luggage on that train that left?

No, they had sent it ahead of us.

I see.

Yeah.

I see. And eventually, you were able to get on another train.

Yes.

So it was harassment.

It was. And we're scared.

Of course. Of course. Did you have relatives who were left behind in Germany?

Yes.

Who was that?

My mother's sister and husband.

Do you what happened to them?

No. Because their children had gone to Israel. And they did not do what we did.

Mm-hmm. Is there anything I haven't asked today that you'd like to add to what we've talked about?

I can't think of it now. I'll probably think of it later.

It always happens that way. It always happens that way.

No, I feel very lucky. I came to a wonderful country. And I feel very blessed and thankful. And I love this country.

[LAUGHTER]

Did your children ask about your experiences?

Not at first, because they knew I didn't want to talk about it. But then--

And was it a long time before you did talk about things?

Yeah, it was quite a while.

When did you start?

It was a gradual process.

I'm asking for the exact date, and time, and year.

[LAUGHTER]

Was it March 3, 1978?

At 4:00 AM.

At 4:00 AM.

[LAUGHTER]

I feel very lucky. I feel very fortunate. And I feel very positive.

Well, we're very grateful that you shared your story with us.

Well, thank you.

Thank you very much. And I will say that this then concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Ursula Marx on June 8, 2016.

And I thank you for listening to me.

Oh, it was an honor. Thank you very much.

Thank you.

OK.