

All right. We have-- hold on one second, waiting on--

I'm going to give a little introduction. And then I'll start with the questions.

OK.

And whenever you're ready, so the whole time you're looking here. Perfect.

Yeah, look at me, always look at me. No glare from the glasses?

I do see glare. There is better when she looks a little lower.

OK. All right.

Yeah, right about there. Perfect.

OK.

And we're rolling, so whenever you're ready.

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Stella Bengel on August 11, 2013-- 2016, excuse me, in Bronx, New York. Thank you very, very much Mrs. Bengel for agreeing to speak with us today. I'm going to start our interview with the most basic questions. And from there, we will together discover your story. So the very first question I have is, can you tell me the date you were born?

January 19, 1927.

January 19, 1927. Where were you born?

In Vienna, Austria.

And what was your name at birth? What was your maiden name?

Stella Bruckenstein.

Stella Bruckenstein.

Yeah.

And now your married name is Bengel?

Yes.

OK. Can you tell me, did you have brothers?

I'm sorry. We do have a little bit of reflection when she looks up. Is that OK? On the glasses?

Can you see me?

Yes.

Is it only off camera?

We're on camera still, should I cut?

Yes. We paused just for a minute, because you took-- we wanted to ask you to take your glasses off so that there wouldn't be a glare. OK.

OK.

So we're going to continue now. I was going to ask you, did you have any brothers and sisters?

No.

You were an only child?

Yes.

OK. Tell me, what was your mother's name and your father's name?

My mother's name was Pola Bruckenstein.

And her maiden name?

Her maiden-- her maiden name, Rancinhofer.

Vancinhofer.

Rancinhofer.

Was she from Vienna?

Vienna.

And your father, what's his name?

Joel Bayer Bruckenstein.

Joel Bayer Bruckenstein.

Yeah.

Was his family also from Vienna?

No, was from Bolechow, Poland, which is now Ukrainian.

Oh, so it was from Eastern Poland.

Yes.

Tell me how-- did you know your father's family at all?

Yes. I took my-- my mother went with me to Poland. I met my grandfather and the whole family there. And I spent about six weeks in Poland.

What are your memories of that visit?

I have a beautiful memory. I learned a lot about religion. They're very religious there. And my father was the third child from eight children.

From eight?

Eight children, yes.

Wow. And how did you speak with one another, what language?

Jewish, German.

OK. So did you speak German at home with your parents or Yiddish?

Most German but sometime Yiddish.

Sometimes Yiddish.

Yeah.

OK. And with your relatives in Eastern Poland, was it mostly in Yiddish?

A mixture between German and Yiddish. And they were all in the fur business.

Were they?

Yeah, the whole family.

So describe, if you can for me, I'd like to get a picture in my mind of what the place looked like.

It was a village.

It was a village.

Small place.

Did it have paved roads? Were the streets paved?

Yes, yes, yes.

Oh, did they have modern amenities, like did they have plumbing?

Not water, no, no, no.

Can you describe the house to me or the place they lived?

Well, it was a kitchen, a bedroom, like a living room, and the store.

Ah, so was the store--

Attached to it.

Attached to it.

Yeah.

Were they in the center of town? Were they in the center of the village?

Yea, yes, near the center.

OK. And was this your grandparents' home?

That was my grandparents' home. And my-- I had an aunt, great-aunt, it was the sister of my grandmother in Poland, which I never knew my grand-- she died. And I got named after her.

Stella, yeah?

Yes.

And she--

OK. And she--

She owned two houses.

Oh, your great-aunt Stella.

And I slept-- Yeah, I slept in one of the houses. There were babies. Two boys, both name was Sigus, Polish name.

Siglush.

Sigus.

Sigus.

Yeah.

OK. May-- how do you spell that?

I guess, S-I-G-U-S, Polish name.

S-C or something, OK.

Yeah.

OK. And did you have other cousins or relatives who were your age?

Well, I had cousin from my mother's side.

Oh, OK. But I'm still in Poland at this point.

You're still in Poland. Yes, I had cousins. Two, the two Sigus.

OK. And how was that place-- of course, Vienna is a city. And this was a village.

Yeah.

But was it a-- was it a place that made an impression on you?

Oh yes, many time I think on it.

Yeah.

It was cozy.

It was cozy.

Yeah.

Was the--

It was like the country. There was a garden behind.

And your grandparents, describe them a little bit to me.

I didn't meet my grandparents, my grandmother in Poland. She died. She was 45 years, I think she died early. And my grandfather married again. And my stepgrandmother was-- the name was Golda.

Golda.

Yeah.

And why is it that your father left there?

Because of the war.

The first World War.

He didn't want to go to the army or something. And he came to Vienna, Austria.

Do you know whether before the first World War his village was in the Austrian part or Poland or the Russian?

It was Austria.

It was Austria.

Yeah.

OK. OK.

Then it changed, after the war. Poland, after the second World War, Ukrainian.

Ukrainian.

Yes. When the Nazis came, was Ukrainian.

OK. Yeah, that makes sense that it would have-- the partitions and the changing of the borders.

Because I went to the Polish consulate once and said, you in the wrong place. It's now Ukrainian. [LAUGHING]

Have you ever been back there?

No.

And about how many family members were-- did you know there when you went to visit? He's one of eight children. So were all the other seven siblings still there?

Well, there was some. My father had single brothers who were not married.

Did all of them stay there?

Yeah.

OK. Nobody had emigrated anywhere else.

Well, there was another brother who immigrated to Germany, Hamburg.

And what happened with him?

He was killed in concentration camp.

I see.

And I had two cousins, Sonya and Fanny. And they were killed.

Also from Hamburg.

Hamburg, yeah.

What was the name of that brother?

Max.

Max. Was he older than your father or younger?

He was older.

He was older.

There were-- there were six brothers and two sisters.

When you say your grandparents, your grandfather, was in the fur trade, did he make up furs for customers?

Now, he made-- started with shtriemels.

Shtriemels.

Shtriemels, what the orthodox people wear, velvet and fur around it.

Ah, I see.

And hats.

OK. So he made smaller items.

He made shtriemels, which he was the only shtriemel maker in the village. They all bought shtriemels by him.

OK.

And but he made hats and caps.

I see. Did he make one for you?

Yeah, he always give me hat.

Did he?

When I was in Vienna, they send it to me.

Well, that's nice.

Yeah.

Was there a particular kind of fur that he used?

No, he sent me a regular felt hat.

OK.

Beige.

You remember even the color.

Yeah, beige hat, I wear.

And tell me, were they very religious, your grandparents?

Orthodox.

They were orthodox.

Orthodox in Poland.

Was that different from your own home in Vienna?

In Vienna, my father was a conservative.

OK. OK. Did you-- did you have more rituals that you participated in in the village that you didn't in Vienna?

You mean certain--

Yeah, certain habits or customs or things like that that you--

Well, I like to be religious. I like the religion.

OK.

I used to go Friday night with my grandfather on the right hand and my cousin in the left hand. And we went to shul. And I was introduced to the head rabbi, that was the chief rabbi. And--

That must have been something for a little girl.

Yeah, look at the grandchild from Vienna came. It was a big thing.

What was your grandfather's first name?

Nathan.

Nathan, OK. What kind of person was he?

Very, very good person.

Yeah.

Yes, very helpful person.

And your grand-- your stepgrandmother, Golda.

Golda, she was very, very nice, a very good cook.

Really, yeah? Did you help her in the kitchen?

Yes, sometimes. But every morning, my grandfather gave me a brush. And I brushed all the hats.

You brushed all the hats.

He gave me a job.

That's important for a child.

Yeah.

Yeah.

See I slept in my great grand-- end house and walked over to my grandfather and did the job.

OK. Now in Vienna, was your father also a furrier?

Yes.

OK. Did he make the same kinds of things as his own father?

Well, he made fur coats, fur hats, muff.

OK. Did you-- did he make one for you?

I always had the fur coat.

That's pretty-- that's something for a little girl.

Yeah, he always made me a--

OK.

--muff with a string.



And did he-- did he get his furs from his own father?

No, he bought it by other people.

OK. OK. And your grandfather, where did he get his furs from, do you know?

I really--

I know. It's a big question, and you were a little girl.

Where he got the furs, I-- I--

OK. It's OK.

I really don't know.

I wondered if they were local, whether they were local places but maybe not. OK. So-- oh, I just had a question on the tip of my tongue. You said the place was cozy.

Yeah, it was small, had no electricity, no plumbing. You had to go out to the bathroom outside.

OK. Well, that's a difference from Vienna.

Very different, no plumbing.

Yeah.

And I don't know. There was a Jewish newspaper, I remember that. But if anything should important happen, there was a big round circle there.

On the newspaper.

And somebody through a horn used to tell the news.

Still.

And all the people used to come out and listen what happened.

Interesting.

It was-- yeah.

Interesting, yeah. Was it a big village?

Not too big.

Was it-- was it only Jewish?

No, there was-- but I never went there. There was a German section for Germans.

In Eastern Poland, a German section.

Yeah.

Were there also Poles living there, Polish Catholics?

Yes. Well, some customer came in, Poles buying hats, a lot of students.

Oh, really.

He made hats for the students with the grades. And I used to put the pins in, first grade, fourth grade, second grade, in the front.

So students would have uniforms and hats then.

Yeah.

Interesting, interesting. And you got to-- you know, you knew because--

He made me put in--

The pin.

--the grade what they're in. And I was only six years old.

Well, that's an important job.

[LAUGHTER]

And but, I mean, it's interesting. Because the picture you paint of your grandfather is a very dear man.

Was very dear, very. He helped everybody. He was very, very nice.

What did he look like? Describe his- how he looked.

Well, he was kind of plump, heavy and had a beard but a short, white beard, and always wears a yarmulke.

Did you visit your grandparents more than once?

Only once.

Only once.

And the funny part was when we came to Bolechow had the only railroad station. There were no cars, only horse and wagon. And finally, I see he comes. And he greet me in German. He spoke very good German. And said, I'm your opa.

[LAUGHTER]

My goodness, the things you remember, you know. But it was the one and only time that you met him.

Yeah.

OK.

There was always a lot of letters going back and forth. You know, my father was always constantly writing letters.

OK. And--

And to Hamburg, too.

And to Hamburg, so most of the children stayed in the village.

In the village.

And Max went to Hamburg. And your father went to Vienna.

Went to Vienna.

OK. What happened to everybody of your grandparent's family? What happened to everyone?

Well, my grandfather died before the Nazis.

Ah.

But the sons, they were-- what happened to them is they didn't put them in the concentration camp. They chased them into the woods and shot them.

Ah, OK.

All-- every-- they were just shot. They had to dig their own grave.

How--

That's what the Ukrainian-- the Ukrainians, they hated the Jewish people, plus the Nazis.

Yeah. They had to dig their own graves.

How did you find out about these things?

How I found out, from books in the bookstores.

I see. I see. So you found out about what happened in the area.

Yeah, they shot them in the woods. It's the country there.

Yeah. Yeah. Well, a lot of people in Eastern--

There was one Chief Rabbi, the head. The Nazi took them and the rabbi said, "Before you shot me, I want to make a prayer," and they shot him.

Horrible. And, these things, you found out only after the war?

After the war, yeah. There was a whole article.

But you never went back there?

No.

Let's go to Vienna now. Let's talk about your mother's side of the family.

Well, my mother's side of the family was just my mother and then uncle, her brother.

What was his name?

Fred.

Fred?

Yeah.

Did you know your grandparents from your mother's side?

Yes. My grandmother was a very, very dear to me. My grandfather was pretty sick, and he died in 1932.

So both grandfathers died before World War II?

Yes.

Both of them were, in some way, spared.

But my grandmother, they took to Theresienstadt.

Ah, OK. What was her name?

Actually, they-- but it-- she and her Jewish name were Hudes, in the birth certificate, Hudes.

Hudes? How do I spell that, just to make sure.

H-U-D-E-S, Hudes.

OK.

Hudes

But she was called-- OK. She was called Adele?

Because, in Austria, you didn't want to give you-- didn't want a Jewish name. So her given name was Adele, but the regular name was Hudes.

OK. How was she referred to at home amongst her family and friends?

She was very, very good.

Yeah?

She always took care of me. She'd-- in the summertime, we rented in the suburbs, an apartment. She always took me in the summertime, and I was there the whole summer with her. My father and my mother visit me in weekend.

Nice!

So I was there in the summertime with her.

Was this outside of Vienna?

Yes.

Where, usually?

Breitenfurt.

Breitenfurt?

Yeah.

What kind of a place is Breitenfurt?

It's the country.

OK. Far from Vienna or not?

It's a couple-- about maybe three, four hours away from Vienna.

OK. OK. Did you always go to the same place?

Yeah, the same people, farmers. I lived on the farm.

How nice.

Yeah. I see how cows were born, how (LAUGHING) pigs are born.

For children, that's very important. It's interesting. It's fun.

The chickens ran around. There was a lot of [INAUDIBLE] where you walk around. I had a very nice childhood.

And these farmers, they weren't Jewish or they were Jewish?

The farmers were not Jewish.

OK.

No.

Did you have--

They rented out for the people.

When you were growing up, did your parents have friends who were not Jewish?

No.

OK.

You couldn't like this. I tell you something, Vienna was a-- it used to be a beautiful place, but the people, before Hitler came in, there were Nazis.

Even then?

Illegal Nazis. They didn't like-- in school, we were called Jew, Jew, Jew. It was just terrible.

Let's talk about that, about when you went to school. You were born in 1927.

Yes.

So when did you start school, at what age? With six. I went to kindergarten first, a private kindergarten.

A state kindergarten or a--

No, a private.

Excuse me, private.

And it's actually makes-- but there were more Jewish children in the kindergarten.

And do you have any memories of that kindergarten?

Yeah, it was very beautiful. My mother used to take me to kindergarten, and we had a lot of fun. And but, when it came to school, the second district and the Ninth District, in the Second District, the most Jewish people lived, with the Orthodox. And, in the Ninth District, more the secular Jewish people lived.

And where did you live?

And we-- it was very uncomfortable going to school.

And this was a state school?

I really didn't like it sometimes.

Yeah. Was this-- did you live in the Second District or the Ninth one?

The Ninth.

You lived in the-- where the more secular?

Yeah, secular.

OK, and your school was located there, too?

Yeah, there were a few schools. And what it was, the majority in the classroom was Catholic. Well, we had-- whole Austria was Catholic. It's a Catholic country.

OK.

And we were only maybe five, six Jewish children in the class. And I remember Hitler came overnight. I'm here. So my mother said, we have to be careful.

You're talking about the late 1930s?

Yeah. One thing I tell you.

Sure.

We went to school. My mother took me. I came into the classroom, and the teacher said, "Jewish children, back of the room!" We-- didn't want us in front.

Yeah.

That's what I mentioned.

Did this kind of treatment, did you have that treatment before Hitler came?

Yes. I remember a Catholic child threw her holy book in the basket.

In the wastepaper basket?

Yeah, and then she blamed me. I did this. You know, my mother had come to school and straighten it out.

And you were just a little girl. And the teacher, did she believe you or did she believe the other girl?

I don't know any.

OK. OK. Was-- let's-- do you have anything else you want to talk about the school experiences?

Well, I wear-- I had a gold chain when I was born. And some-- and the teacher took away my gold chain and said, keep it in the house. So my mother went to school and says, you have to be protected because the very poor children, and they cannot afford a gold chain. Protect the chain.

Ah. OK, so this brings me to another question.

This is before Hitler.

Before Hitler? Was your family well-to-do? Was your family well-off?

Middle class.

Middle class? Did your father have his own business in the furrier? Yeah, fur business, yeah.

The fur business, and was that also part of your home or was that somewhere else?

It was in the same building where I used to live.

OK, describe that building to me. Was it an apartment building?

Apartment building.

Stone?

Yeah.

Made out of stone?

Very, a very, very good stone building.

OK. Would you say it was the kind of building that was built in the 19th century?

Well, I was eight years ago in Vienna, and it was still standing very good.

Really? OK. I'm trying to get a sense, you know, because in middle European cities, sometimes, they're very beautiful old buildings that--

Old building, but it was very good.

OK, and what about the amenities there? Did you have indoor plumbing?

There was somebody living in my apartment.

Oh, you're talking about now, when you went to Vienna. There is somebody living.

Living there. Did they let you in to take a look?

I didn't go. I only went up, but I didn't knock the door.

What floor was your apartment on?

It was the fourth floor.

An elevator?

No elevator.

A walk-up?

Yeah.

Oh my goodness. You have to get a lot of exercise.

Yeah.

OK, and do you remember the address? Liechtenstrasse [SPEAKING GERMAN].

Liechtenstrasse [SPEAKING GERMAN]?

Liechtensteinstrasse. Liechtensteinstrasse?

[SPEAKING GERMAN].

[SPEAKING GERMAN], so that would be Liechtenstein Street 103. Tell me about-- was it modern inside? Did you have plumbing when you were growing up?

Yeah, I had plumbing.

You had water?

Yeah.

And things like that?

Yeah, water, plumbing. Yeah.

Did you have electricity?

Yes.



OK, did you have heating? How did you heat the place?

Coals.

So you had those coal ovens?

Heated by coals.

OK, and what were the rooms like? Tell me about the rooms of the apartment.

Well, they were the same. The kitchen had tiles, almost like here.

So was it a large apartment? Well, I remember one large room, then two small rooms. They're called a cabinet.

OK.

A bedroom, a living room, and a kitchen and a foyer.

And a-- oh, it's fairly large.

Yeah.

Fairly large. And did your parents have, like, nice furniture in there? Did they--

We have very nice furniture.

All right. Did you have a radio?

Had a radio, yes.

OK. Did your father have a car, an automobile?

A motorcycle.

He had a motorcycle? Did he take you on rides?

Yes, he put me in the back when he was going with me.

That must have been fun.

Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

And did you ever visit him in his shop? It was right there in the building.

It was-- yeah, I saw him every day.

OK.

When he came-- you see, the lunch is the big meal-- Yeah.

--over there.

So he'd come home for lunch?

Yeah.

OK.

My grandmother was a good cook (LAUGHS).

So your grandmother lived with you?

Yeah.

Ah, OK. So it was your mother, your father, your grandmother, yourself.

Yeah.

Was there anybody else? Did they have any help in the household?

Well, once in a while, like, we had the cleaning woman come. We had the cleaning woman coming in and a wash woman. And up, upstairs, there was a wash kitchen.

Ah, OK.

And she washed up-- she washed about for two days upstairs. I always brought the lunch up.

Well, that's interesting because we don't know about those types of things. So was that common, that people had--

That, everybody did it.

Everybody had this?

Yeah. And then she took like one or two days for ironing.

That's a big job.

Wash, yeah.

So how was she-- when she was a washwoman, what kind of equipment did she have? She didn't have a washing machine.

With her-- she has board.

OK, so she washed clothes just with a board?

Yeah.

There were no early kind--

And then there was a very hot tub. And she put everything in and then has a stick, and she turned it.

To rinse it out?

Yeah.

To wash or to rinse it out?

To [? yard, ?] like a shovel.

Interesting, but a lot of work.

I watched it. I watched it.

You watched her?

And then she has to hang up the clothes.

It's a lot of work, a lot of manual labor.

Once, I guess, once in a month, once in six weeks, but she cleaned the house, too.

OK. OK. Did your mother help your father in the shop?

Yes, bookkeeping.

Were there other employees there?

Well, he helped him in bookkeeping, and then it went to other-- an accountant came.

OK. Was there anybody else in the shop besides your father and your mother?

Yeah. During the season, which that ends end of September to about February, March, she hired people.

OK.

Because of when you have a fur coat, they need a lining. So he hired for the lining, and then he hired somebody else for the fur.

So what did he-- what was his specialty? What did he know how to do? Was he the main tailor of the coats or-- yeah?

Well, he got the fur, you know, the big pieces.

Piece?

And he put it together.

So he cut them in the right ways?

He cut them. Yeah, he cut them.

Who were his clients? Were they mostly Jewish people?

Jewish, a lot. The whole section, over there, were Jewish stores, and mostly Jewish customers came.

OK. And I must assume that they were well-to-do because who could afford a fur coat? You know, who could afford that?

Yeah.

OK. But you had one and your mother had one?

Yeah.

OK. Could you choose which kind you wanted?

Well, I point with-- this looks good. This looks good.

Tell me a little bit about their personalities, your parents.

They were very easygoing with me.

Were they?

They never said, you cannot do this, you cannot do that. I was free to do. Never spanked me or-- only when something is said wrong. Or my father, he never said anything. I could tell in his-- what you call?

His expression?

Expression, body movement-- whew, ooh-- then I understood. Because the religion says you're not supposed to say bad words.

Did you go to shul with him?

Oh, yes. Yes, many times. Yeah, he explained me the Torah, explained me everything. Twice a week, we had the teacher coming in the afternoon to school from the Jewish community and teach us Hebrew and history, the Torah.

OK, so he was observant?

He was observant, but he wasn't too-- not very Orthodox.

Not Orthodox. Not Orthodox. Did your parents keep a kosher home?

Me? [LAUGHS] Not strictly kosher.

OK.

No.

So was there ham, sometimes?

Ham? Sometime.

[LAUGHTER]

What were the things- I mean, this is a tough question to answer, you know, from the point of view as a little girl, but I'm going to ask it anyway. What were the things that you knew were important to your parents as values? Like, what did they value the most?

You mean when-- what they like to do? Or--

That will be another question. But, in this case, I think more like the things that they thought were important to live by, whether that might be honesty or whether that was truthfulness or things like that. What were their values?

Their values was to give me a good life. And they always took me around in the city, and explain me. Like the first section of Vienna, they explain me the history of Vienna, what was going on, and talked about the emperors and all that explain me.

The history of Austria, yeah.

And a lot, as I started to play piano, and dancing class.

So they wanted to provide as much opportunity for you to get--

Even ice skating.

Nice.

Dancing, they hired somebody who moves show me how to dance. And I went twice a week to Maccabi, a it's gym.

Oh, to gym?

Maccabi.

Maccabi?

Maccabi.

Maccabi, mm-hmm.

Yeah, twice a week. Twice a week, my mother took me. She took me a lot all over Vienna. My father, my mother took me all over Vienna.

That's lovely. That's a lovely attention.

I saw a lot of Vienna and the [NON-ENGLISH]-- all the suburbs.

Your mother's family, had they been from Vienna for generations? Or had they come from somewhere else?

My grandmother came from Poland.

Your mother's mother?

Yeah, in Tarnopol.

Tarnopol?

Yeah, and my grandfather came from Czechoslovakia. Ah, OK.

Wasn't--

Do you know what part of Czechoslovakia he came from? I really don't know the city.

That's OK. That's OK.

I know only it was a very Orthodox city.

OK. Did you travel? Aside from Poland and going in the summertime with your grandmother to the farm, did you ever

take any other kinds of trips? Well, my parents did. They always took-- oh, yeah, cruise on the Danube.

Oh, that must have been nice.

Many times. Many times, I took cruises on the Danube, and I had lunch on the Danube and dinner on the Danube. Yeah.

Lovely. Lovely.

Yeah. And then I went-- they call it the Prater Amusement Park in the Second District.

The Prater, yeah. Even I have heard of the Prater, yeah.

The Prater.

Yeah, it's a very famous place.

How you know?

Because it's so famous. It's an amusement park.

And Schonbrunn.

This, I don't know.

Schonbrunn, the animals show, the zoo.

So they really focused--

I went a lot to Vienna, around.

Tell me a little bit about their personalities. I asked about your grandfather's personality. Tell me about your father's personality.

Well, he was a good businessman. He liked to go places. He would kind-- he religious.

Was he strict?

But not Orthodox.

Yeah.

You had to keep it up.

Was he strict, or was he very soft and gentle?

He was gentle.

OK. What about your mother?

But especially meals, he want quiet.

OK. OK. These things were important to him.

Yeah.

OK.

And after the meal, he was very sociable. His hobbies was the Jewish Community of Vienna. He always went to the Jewish Community of Vienna and had a lot of friends there.

That was one of my questions.

Well, that's was, for me, easy. For the children transport. Everybody knows me.

Ah. It became very important.

It became very important. He know everybody there.

What about your mother? What kind of a personality was she?

Well, she was-- she loved the opera.

Did she take you?

She took me to operetta, where it's a little easier--

Yeah, I mean, a child--

--in the afternoon. And I saw every fairy tale.

Did you?

Yeah, every fairy tale on it.

That must have been nice.

And she took the concerts, too.

How did your parents meet? Do you know?

At a dance.

Really?

Did they tell you the story of how they met?

Yeah, they met at a dance.

Tell me, what kind of a dance was it? How old was your mother? What can you tell me about their meeting?

Well, my mother was always very dressed up, hat, stockings, always. She never-- she always get dressed up, staying by the mirror, and then go out.

So she was elegant?

She was elegant woman.

OK, and--

Big hat, they were like (LAUGHS).

And so was this a Jewish Community dance, as far as you know, where they met? Because they're from different worlds.

No, at the dance, a regular dance.

A regular dance?

Yeah.

OK. Now, some people in Vienna, I wonder how your two sides of the family got along because some people from Viennese families didn't think much of people from Poland, didn't think much-- the Jews of Vienna didn't much like the Jews of Poland. Did you ever sense that?

All I now is my father came during World War I, and he rented a room. He was a bachelor.

OK.

I remember telling him-- telling me he washed his clothes at the Danube canal.

Really? He didn't have a washer woman to help out. Yeah.

He took care of its clothes, spread it out in the grass. When he came back, was no clothes.

That can be a problem.

OK.

He took care of himself.

And did their two families approve of the match?

You mean Polish?

I mean, his-- your mother's family was from Vienna. Your father is from Poland.

Now, wait. My grandmother was from Poland.

Was also Poland? OK. So was there any-- I'm trying to sense of-- did the two sides of the family approve?

They approved.

OK. OK. And, now, this is a little bit more personal, but did your parents get along with each other?

Yes.

OK. So it was a happy couple?

Happy couple, everything happy. They went out New Years. They were--

They went to parties?



They always went out.

OK.

But when it comes to opera, my father didn't go to them.

He didn't like it.

He went to the Jewish theater.

I see.

And to the opera, she had girlfriends.

OK. Now, by the time you're 10 years old, you know, that's 1937 and Hitler has been in power in Germany for about four years.

Yeah.

And did your parents ever talk about the wider world, you know, at home, at the dinner table, of events that were going on politically? Did they ever talk about such things?

Well, sure. We had affidavits, sent affidavits, and tried to the United States. That was my mother, my father, my grandmother, and me. We had affidavits.

How did you get affidavits? We had relative.

You had relatives?

Yeah.

That was one of the reasons I was asking about, you know, who immigrated. Was this from Mother's side?

It was-- let me [INAUDIBLE] one minute. It was from my father's side.

OK, who would that be? Who was this relative?

They lived in a different state, Rhode Island.

Uh huh, would--

Who sent us the affidavits.

Was this an uncle or an aunt?

Far distant relative.

Distant relatives?

Distant, far distant.

OK, and by the time you're 10 years old-- and Austria's still hasn't been annexed-- but did they get those affidavits?

They applied for a visa.

When was this? Do you know?

They applied for a visa after they got the affidavit, but they got a high number. And because my father is born in Poland, the whole family goes under Polish quota, and you have to wait longer.

Ah.

The Viennese quota was lower.

Ah. So did you have a citizenship? Was your citizenship Austrian or Polish?

My father bought the Austrian citizenship. It cost a lot of money, that time. I remember it.

Ah. Now, throughout the '30s, how is his business doing?

In what year? Throughout the decade of the '30s, as you were growing up, how was his--

His business was going all right till 1938. 1938, the economic was in trouble. The economic was in trouble, and Hitler promised work. On that's they-- there were a lot of people were out of work, and that's why they welcome Hitler. I found it out eight years ago.

OK. When was the first time-- OK, let me rephrase this. You mentioned, earlier, that there was discrimination against you in school.

Yeah.

Even before Hitler?

It somehow, it went from generation to generation.

OK. Aside from that little girl throwing in that-- the holy book in the basket and you being blamed, were there other experiences that you had?

Oh, yes, there were. I've-- many times, I'd walk on the street. Jew! Jew! Jew! Now when they hit me, was before already.

It was before, OK. So you felt this already, growing up?

Somehow, I don't know, in my brain, I felt it's hard to grow up here with this problem.

Did your parents ever talk about it with you?

No. But myself, myself, how I'm going to manage this in the future?

You'd have worries?

Myself.

As a little girl, you were already worried?

Worried with religion.

OK. OK.

I felt like something will come, a storm or something.

And how right you were. How right you were.

I was right.

Yeah. At home, did your parents talk about these things?

Yes, because my mother was with me, once, in the park, and they called us Jew. So my mother said, "Look, you Catholic. You go to church. And I'm Jewish. We go to the synagogue. It's a different religion," explained it very nicely.

Were these children who did that?

The children, they ran away.

Yeah. Yeah. Did you ever hear-- did your parents listen to the radio for their news? Did they get their news? There was no town crier in Vienna like there was--

I know. They listened bad news. Actually, if you had a high number, going to the United States, you had to try to find another country where you could wait your number there.

When did your parents start wanting to leave Austria?

Right-- well, right when Hitler came.

OK, so when there was the Anschluss?

So we got the affidavit, but we didn't count with the number.

OK. So right when there was the Anschluss of Austria to Germany, you go to school the next day--

Ooh!

--and the teacher tells you to stand in the behind in the classroom?

Yeah.

Did you--

And that's when they start thinking, out of Austria.

OK. OK. That's a crucial moment. Did you continue going to school?

Yes, we finished. It came in March, and I think, in May, we were separated.

Ah, OK.

But, not every day, we went to school because the Jewish children didn't fit in in Vienna. There was only one school.

There was only one--

So we lose-- we lost education.

I want to go back to something. A little bit earlier, I remember I asked you about your father's sisters and brothers, and you said there was Max, who went to Hamburg. Was there anybody else who left the village in Eastern Poland? What was the name of that village, again? Boro?

Bolechow.

Bolechow. Was there anybody else, of his brothers and sisters, who left there?

No, they're still there.

Including his sister?

Oh, there was-- well, actually, two sisters.

OK.

The one sister-- my father, when visiting Poland, when he came back, he showed my uncle, the brother of my mother. Oh, she's very pretty.

So Fred, your uncle--

So he went to the village, took her, and married her.

From a photograph?

Yeah.

Fred met--

From the photograph.

From a photograph?

Yeah, without knowing her.

OK, did you know your Uncle Fred?

Yes.

OK. What kind of a person was he when you knew him?

Perfectionist.

Really?

[LAUGHTER]

Did you know him in Vienna or only in the United States?

Vienna, the brother of my mother.

OK, in Vienna?

In Vienna.

So even when you were a little girl, you know that he's a perfectionist?

Perfect. Exact. Not like my mother were.

So he was not easygoing?

He was not easygoing.

OK. What was his business? What did-- how did he make a living?

He had a very odd business, mother of pearls.

Oh.

A rope produced, and horns for the shofars, [NON-ENGLISH].

For-- for--

Very [INAUDIBLE]-- and he made a lot of money.

So these were items that were-- it sounds to me like luxury items.

He bought it all and had it manufactured, even necklaces and bracelets and things like that.

OK. So when he went to your father's village and he found your aunt, what happened then?

Well, he was not very religious (LAUGHING). He has to adapt himself for that.

He had to adjust.

He had to adjust when he was there.

Did he?

I guess so.

Did they get married there?

Well, he brought her home and married her.

In Vienna?

In Vienna.

And do you-- did you go to the wedding?

Yeah, and I was the flower girl.

You were the flower girl?

In 1932.

And what was your aunt's name, your father's sister?

Chyka.

Chyka? Chyka. OK, how do we spell that?

Oy. C-H-Y-K-A.

OK. OK, and did they stay in Vienna your aunt and--

She stayed in Vienna. Yeah, got married.

Did they ever leave Vienna, your uncle and aunt?

Yes, they went to United States.

When did they leave Vienna?

In Vienna, about 1939, they left Vienna and went to the United States.

Oh, I see. So they stayed for a long time, still? They didn't leave early.

And, yeah, but, first, he went to the United States. They-- wait a minute. Excuse me. He went to England. first because he had the high number, too. And then my Aunt Chyka went to England and, from England, to the United States.

OK. So they were able to make it out?

Yeah.

But in 1939.

Yeah.

OK. Where were we, now, with your own family, your father and your mother? They had-- when you were in school and had to stand in the back of the classroom is when they said, it's time to leave.

Yeah.

What happened with your father's business after?

The Nazis took it away. The way it is, under Kristallnacht. I went to the Kristallnacht.

Tell me about that.

Ooh, it was one of the worst and worst and worst. My father took me to school, kissed me, but there was something going on in France. Somebody shot-- a Jew shot an German officer.

OK.

And that made the Kristallnacht. That was the punishment.

OK. That was the excuse for Kristal--

That was the excuse.

Oh, right.

In the morning, my father opened his business. Usually, it was he got me to school. There was a big crossing where the Jewish school is. He came back, went to his business, and my mother came this morning to the business, too.

What's the name of it? What did he name his first shop?

I don't know.

You don't know. OK. OK. But it was local? It was in your neighborhood? It was in the same building?

Yes.

Yes, OK, a storefront.

And she was in the store, and two policemen came in. And the family pact was that one policeman was his customer. So my father says, "Why you taking me?"

They were arresting him?

"Why are you taking me?" "Because you're a Jew. " Dad told me, "To pick you up." So good thing my mother was there. They took him.

I was in school, and it was about 12 o'clock when I came out of school. There was a police station nearby. And I looked on the other side, and I see police and Jewish people going to the police station. So I said, oh, my God, there's something going on bad.

Even though you didn't know about your own father yet?

Wait, my mother came towards me, and says they took my father away, but we don't know which police station.

She said, "Come home and have lunch." We come home. We had lunch. A big bang on the door. "You have to leave your apartment." So my mother say, "Where I'm going?" Next door, next neighbor. It was we were somehow related with them, one our apartment, two families. So she said, "You have to give me time to move all my-- everything what I have." "We're going to help you," moving.

OK. We moved there. We sit there, again, a big bang on the other door.

Your furniture, you left? Or--

Left, the way it is, just my belongings. Then, another bang. "We want the key." They took the keys away from the apartment. "We want the key for your business." My mother said, "I can't give it to you." "You don't want to gave it to, you go to the concentration camp," and I start screaming. I went with her downstairs, and-- no. No, my mother gave them the key, first.

Then they didn't know how to open the lock. Because fur is expensive, there was a special lock. So then I went with my mother downstairs and I was screaming, "Don't take her to the concentration camp!" She opened up, and they took the whole merchandise out. And the other stores were all Jews. Everything was on the street, laying.

This was in the middle of the day?

Middle of the day. And my father had a big-- what you call it-- his name, fur business. They took it down, put it on the street, held up a car, and the car went back and forth till it's broken.

Oh my, so the sign from the business which had his name? So Bruckenstein?

Bruckenstein, yeah.

And the car drives over the sign?

Yeah, it says Bruckenstein Fur Business.

[SPEAKING GERMAN]

They smashed it up, by the car.

OK. How would this have been called in German?

What?

How would this have been called in German? Bruckenstein?

Bruckenstein.

Yeah, but in German. The fur, how do you say fur in German?

Pelz.

Pelz

Pelz.

OK, so Pelz Atelier or a Pelz Haus or [SPEAKING GERMAN]?

Pelz.

OK, Bruckenstein Pelz. OK.

So this was--

So you saw all of this?

Well, no, they took the apartment away, the business away, my father away. My mother said, "You know, it's only a three quarter walk to Gestapo." There was a Gestapo in the First District. "Let's see what we can do here. [INAUDIBLE] maybe, there, I get some information there."

We went to the Gestapo, and there was a SS in black uniform standing outside. So my mother asked, "Do you know anything about the men who were taken away? What happened to them?" "We don't know."

Going back, we went-- we stopped in a police station, and we saw trucks. So my mother said, "You know what the trucks are?" To go to the railroad station to Gdansk concentration camp. That's it.

In the morning, we went to the Jewish communities, and there were people standing like crazy. And they went with a loudspeaker out. All the men who were taken yesterday are in Dachau, near Munich, in the concentration camp. And we going to sent them food, they said. And they will write letters.

So we got letters. You know, letters, only so much you can write with lines, thick lines. And my father worried about his business, that my mother should take care, the certain subject. And we got about few letters like this. And this was



November 10, 1938.

That's Kristallnacht.

Kristallnacht.

So, excuse me, that I interrupt, but you said the second day is when you went to the Jewish Community. Where did you spend that night, that first night?

Next neighbor. We were related.

OK, so you--

My grandmother and her brothers lived there.

Ah.

So we--

And did anybody come during the night to this apartment?

Was terrible. I didn't sleep the whole night.

You didn't sleep. Was there action going on in the apartment building? Was there activity going on there?

Nothing. Nothing, it was quiet.

And what about your father's-- they took all the fur away. They took all the inventory--

Yeah.

--during the day. But, at nighttime, did anybody come by and do any damage to the store itself?

No. No.

OK. OK, I just wanted to make sure--

No.

--that we had that covered.

Was locked.

It was locked. All right, so your father-- you continued to live at the neighbor, you know, at your relatives across the hallway?

Yeah. Yeah.

What about your own things? Were you able to go back into your own original apartment?

No. Once there went the key, they never get in.

OK, so you were only able to take some small belongings, then?

Wait, but there-- something got straighten out.

OK.

The name of this apartment was after my grandmother. She owned it.

OK.

In that time, she was with my uncle, by the other family in the 16th District, when it happened, the Kristallnacht. So my mother said, so the law came out, because she's old, she get the apartment back.

Ah. So were you able to go back?

Yeah, I was able to go back because of her age.

And had they taken anything from your apartment?

No.

OK, so it had just been locked and kept that way?

Yeah.

All right, so you were able to go back.

Yeah.

How long did it take?

Yeah.

How long did it take for this to happen?

Well, it took about two weeks.

OK. OK.

She was by her son, that time during the Kristallnacht. But they lost the apartment.

The son did?

So my uncle, the brother of my mother, they all had to move to us.

So Fred? Fred and his wife had to move--

Yeah.

--to your place?

Because they lost it. It was a new apartment.

Ah, OK. And, in the meantime, your father is in Dachau?

Yes, and what happened is in-- it was November. I have birthday January 19. In January 20, we got the new he died.

[INTERVIEWER GASPING]

Oh.

So what happened is we got the urn. And the urn, it's took-- my mother took the urn and put it, made it a-- forgot something. That, at the end of the Kristallnacht, there were men with machine guns in the Jewish cemetery and shooting the graves. Destroyed the graves.

OK.

Now, but when the urn came, we fixed the grave up and put the urn in the grave of my grandfather for my mother's side. We buried it.

I see. I see.

And till this day, I'm in touch with Vienna in the cemetery, still fixing up the grave.

Did you go back and visit it, at some point?

Yeah. The last time, eight years ago.

OK, but originally, when you buried him, were you able to put up a monument?

Yes. It was a beautiful stone. The stone was fixed up. And the grave was fixed up when I was there.

So that's after the war?

Yeah.

After the war, but-- when I was, eight years--

Ago?

--ago, I fixed it up.

But when your father was buried with the urn-- I mean, the urn they--

It was fixed up afterward, but then it was storms, and I fixed it up eight years ago.

Recently? Eight years ago, OK. OK. What a blow. What a shock. Did you ever find out how he died?

I don't know. He had trouble with his ear infect.

Infection?

He had the ear surgery, and somehow it got infected and the heart got bad. I don't know.

OK.

I didn't get much information about that. They didn't. And the way they-- they gave a certificate, the Nazis. And the way they write Jude so-and-so died, very, very bad.

Yeah. What happened next, after that? Your birthday's on the 19th. The 20th, you get this news. And, soon after, you get

the urn.

Nothing. From 1938 till 1940, I went to-- they constantly-- Jews, the schools, I had to travel to school. They call it a rail-- with the streetcar.

Yeah.

And there was a-- it got more and more difficult.

How did your mother feed you?

She, my mother, got a job in a old-age home, in the hospital. She took courses and she was a nurse.

OK. Was this a Jewish old-age home?

Yes.

And were you able to salvage anything from the store or from your apartment? Did your parents have bank accounts? Did-- were they able to get any money so that--

Oh, yes. I get a pension.

You get it now?

Yeah.

I'm talking about then.

Then?

At that time?

No, not at that time.

OK. So all your assets were taken away?

Everything.

OK. I think we should break here.

OK, before the break, we were talking about the tragedies that started to befall your family--

Family.

--about your father, about him being arrested, in Dachau, his death, how you were informed of it. And your mother was then working in an old-age home.

In a hospital.

In a hospital. And that's how she was able to feed the both of you?

Yeah.

OK. How did things develop after that? What went on throughout 1939?

Well, things got worse and worse. They had started transporting the people to concentration camps. And then-- actually, Eleanor Roosevelt make the children transport.

Eleanor Roosevelt was involved in a children's--

In the children transport. So my mother went to the Jewish Community, and I could go anywhere, to England, Sweden, Israel, and, of course, United States. So, because I had, now, relative in United States, I took the United States. I want to go.

So your uncle Fred and your--

Was already here.

When did he come here, again? It was was in '39, but when in '39?

He was in England and waited for his number to go to the United States, so he don't get in the-- so he don't get into the concentration camp.

Got it.

Somehow, he was very lucky. There was a transport for men going to London, and they had their own camp. And then he asked for my aunt and for my cousin to come over. That's his wife, Chyka.

And did they have a child?

Yes, Allen.

Who?

Allen, OK. And so he was able to get them out?

Them out.

OK, but you were still there?

Yes.

And your mother went--

My mother tried to get me to the children transport.

For England?

No, for United States because they moved to the United States from England.

So how did she do that?

So my father was very popular in the Jewish community. Everybody knew him. So I was, right away, on the list, United States. He knew a lot of people there.

OK, and did it matter about your affidavit and having such a high number?

Yeah, it helped.

It helped?

It helped.

OK. And before Kristallnacht, had your father already purchased that Austrian citizenship that you said he bought?

My first-- first, we were citizen of Poland because he was born in Poland. Then, he bought the Austrian citizenship, so it was easier to go out, way before the Nazis.

OK, and did you leave Austria with an Austrian passport?

Yes.

OK.

Wait. Wait a minute. It first not the Austrian [INAUDIBLE], it was the Deutsches Reich, because Hitler took over Austria and made it the Deutsches Reich. There was no more Austria.

Got it.

The passport goes the Deutsches Reich.

Do you still have that passport?

Yeah.

Do you have it with you? Then maybe, at the end, we'll film it. We'll take a look at it, and we'll film it.

And so your mother goes to the Jewish Community. Your father's popular there, you're the--

Everybody knew him there.

Knew him, and--

And he was a big Zionist.

Yeah, and so you were able to be put on the list for children going to the United States.

36 children.

36 children, and you say this was through Mrs. Roosevelt?

That, yeah. First, we [? going ?] to be foster home children.

You're going to be foster children?

Yeah.

And was there anybody else involved in this particular activity to get the children out?

Well, there was-- well, we had a nanny.

OK. Dr. Margaret Feiler, and she was the secretary from the Chief Rabbi.

Of Vienna?

Of Vienna.

Uh huh, I see. We'll come to this. Before, I want to ask a little bit about the procedure. So when you were put on the list, what happened after that?

Well, we had to come many times. They had a psychiatrist there, and they asked all kind of questions.

Do you remember any of them?

To me, well, they said-- actually, I told them I go to my uncle and aunt. And they ask me, what happen you cannot come to your uncle and aunt? Well, I said, then I will go, then I don't want to go to foster home people because I don't know how they are. I rather going to a home there.

Yeah, a real home.

That, because, in a home, everybody get treated the same.

Yeah. Yeah. Those are the kinds of questions?

Yeah.

And was-- did these meetings take place at the Jewish Community Center? All the time, we had to go. There was the big Chief Rabbi.

OK, what about the American embassy? Did you ever have to go to the American--

Yes, that was the end. I had to go to the embassy to see the doctor. Ooh, that. My mother prepared me for it.

Really?

She knew Jewish doctors, but they were not allowed to act anymore. But I still went there, and they said I'm all right.

So the doctors checked you at the US--

Checked me out first, the Jewish doctor.

Ah, OK.

But they were funny, the doctors. They said, don't send a child alone. She's going to be psychologically problems. Right? So my mother said, she not going to be like that.

She had more faith in you.

The doctor said you never-- a child needs a mother. You shouldn't separate. That's the way.

The Jewish doctor said that or the ones at the US embassy? The doctor said. My doctors where always was going.

As a child?

They knew me.

And knew you?

Yeah.

Yeah. Well--

But my mother said, no, she has to get out of here.

And did you want to leave?

Well, I wanted to leave, but I was attached to my mother. But my mother said, I will come to the United States.

OK. So you were-- you had-- you both wanted to stay with your mother and you wanted to go. You--

It was a mixture.

Yeah, well, it's a hard choice. It's a very hard choice.

That was a hard choice.

How old were you?

When I left, I was 13.

You were 13. And did you meet any of the other children?

Oh, yes, I meet-- I still meet somebody.

Really?

Yeah.

You still meet them? But, at that time, did you know any of the other children who were on this transport?

Not before.

Not before.

They all came together, always in a group, and all the fathers were no more around. They all were dead from the Kristallnacht.

OK. So do you remember how you said goodbye to your mother?

Oh, yes.

Tell me about it.

Oh, this, that was the hardest. I had two suitcases, and the superintendent from my building was very, very nice. He took the two suitcases and deposited it first.

Where did he take them?

Deposited in the railroad station.



OK.

Now, there was the rabbi, the Chief Rabbi Murrelstein, Rabbi Murrelstein.

Did you know him?

Oh, yes. He had the secretary, and she was the nanny, Dr. Margaret Feiler. Because all the attorneys in Austria, they call themselves doctor.

Was she an attorney?

An attorney, and she was the secretary of Rabbi Murrelstein.

OK, and Rabbi Murrelstein--

Did you ever heard of Rabbi Murrelstein?

Yeah, but tell me about him. Did you know him personally?

Well, he came and talked. That's all I know.

OK. OK. And was he the Chief Rabbi--

Very strict guy, he was.

OK, so did he talk to the children before you left?

Well, when I came there, he stood like this as he saw me with my mother coming in, and he says, "Children over here. Mothers over here." No goodbye kiss.

Oh. So were you able to do that? Were you able to--

We all, we were-- from 36 children, only nine went because the other ones, they had no entrance, no affidavits. They thought they're going to get affidavits. Some of them, they don't have the entrance of the United States.

Oh. So were you able to give a goodbye hug to your mother?

No.

How sad.

Not allowed. Not allowed on the platform.

And this was on the railway station?

Only the children came who were rejected. and they waved us goodbye.

Oh my. Oh my. So they were--

The ones who were rejected, they have no way to get out. They had no affidavit and they didn't find foster home people.

So it ended up being just nine of you?

Nine.

Nine people, nine children?

Yeah. Seven girls and two boys.

Were you the youngest or the oldest or in between?

In between. The youngest was eight, the one I saw a couple weeks ago, and the oldest were 15, two of them. There was Susanne and Otto, remember, and they were 15. And they took care of us, mostly.

Oh, so do you remember the names of the children?

Well, I know the older one, Susanne and Otto.

Otto?

Otto, yeah.

And then the younger ones, you don't remember their names?

Herta.

Herta?

The one I had-- the one who's here.

Oh, the one you've met recently?

Yeah.

OK.

See, I used to braid her hair.

Did you?

On the trip.

Well, tell me about the trip. You were at the platform. You get on a train. What happens?

And we-- oh, we had to go. It wasn't allowed to tell the parents that we're going to Berlin because Berlin was bombed that time.

Really?

England, the British.

England was bombing Berlin?

Yes.

OK.

So we have to go to Berlin, stay a few days in Berlin because they have to check the paper. So, huh, Dr. Margaret Feiler,

we came to Berlin, and the Jewish Community of Berlin picked us up. They took us to a hostel, and the nanny, they took to a hotel (LAUGHS). Now, I laugh.

We went out from the train and had to go to a shelter because it was bombed, very fast. We had to stay in the shelter until everything was over. Then the Jewish Community took us to a hostel, and the people over there took care of us. They gave us food, and we slept. They gave us a big room to sleep.

And even we were called Galitzianers.

Galitzianer?

The Galitzianers are coming. The German-Jews called us Galitzianers.

Galitzianer, as if you were from Poland.

Yeah.

All-Polish Jews.

They were not nice to the-- they were-- they, older time, they took the homes away. Look, the Galitzianers are coming. We had to share the tables with them. So we had to sleep. In the middle of the night, boo, woo! We got to go in the shelter.

More bombs?

The bombs. Now, the young one heard the-- sleeps with her doll. Now, I took another kid, took them by the hand, and took her to the shelter to sleep.

And Herta was still there?

Over in the hostel, we have to go downstairs. And we put her to sleep, but there was food and to drink. And, when everything was over, we took her back.

How many days were you in Berlin?

About four days. The papers had to be checked, and the Jewish Community took us over. Oh, you should see the city. I was glad I got out.

Well, tell me, what did you remember? What do you remember from having seen the city?

All right, I remember going to officers, checking the papers. That's all.

Ah, OK.

And back to the-- back again.

Was this like German immigration offices?

All German.

All German officials, OK.

Yeah. And when I was there, and they were bombing, I once peeked out, and I saw the bombs coming down. And the nurse said, "Don't do that!" I actually see it coming down.

Wow. How frightening.

Yeah.

How frightening. So where was Margarita Feiler, your nanny?

In the hotel!

The whole time?

Yeah. And we nine, strolling around.

So nobody-- you know, you didn't have any--

They were the people took care of us.

OK. OK. So, tell me, what happened after that?

After that, we went in the train, and we were going to Spain, and this was a beautiful place. And we got injection, was very nice. Wait a minute. Yeah, it was very, very nice. And then we went in the train again, and we went to France, Paris.

So, first, you went--

Occupied Paris.

So Paris was already occupied? Was out-- ooh, we had to go out with the releases and look the SS troopers. Somehow, I saved my birth certificate. I don't know. I put it away. But I think it's still a big J on it. And they went in, looking around, and we went in the train again, and we got some food.

OK, so sometimes you had to stop, like in Paris, and, get out of the train?

Yeah.

And the SS would check you?

Yeah.

And they would-- and then-- OK.

There was--

So--

That's why they were-- we were scared.

Yeah. I forgot to ask you before, do you remember what month you left Vienna?

In around the 23rd of November.

Oh, so this was in 1939? The 23rd of November, something like that?

Wait a minute-- 1940.

OK, 1940, in November?

Yeah.

OK. OK, so this is coming to wintertime. You're going into wintertime.

Yeah. Yeah.

And, from Berlin, you go to Paris? And then you have to get out of the trains, back on?

Well, Spain was very nice. We just got the injection and went right.

Oh, I see. So, first, you go to Spain, and then you go Paris?

Wait, wait, wait, wait. I went, first, to Paris, and then to Spain, sorry.

Yeah. It sounded like that would make more sense.

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, OK. And then when you got to Spain, did you leave the train?

When we left Paris, then we were singing. We're out. We're out of danger.

Were you?

Finish. Finish.

OK, and were you out of danger?

Out of danger.

OK.

Paris was occupied. And, from Spain, we went to Lisbon, and the Jewish Community in Lisbon picked us up. And, again, we went to a boarding house for 10 days, and Frau Doctor went to the hotel.

Did she take care of you at all? Did she take care of you?

We didn't see her for 10 days. Then, Otto and Susanne, the two older ones-- and for the Jewish Community, the man told us we get breakfast money, lunch money-- they took the money. And, evening, we go to the Jewish Community. They have dinners for us. They showed us the way how to go.

We got a German-Portuguese dictionary, just in case. All I know is hello is [NON-ENGLISH].

So the children, you were taking care of each other?

Yes. Sometimes, we used to go to a store. The two older ones buy stuff, and we had lunch in the boarding house.

So all these children-- 10 days, we're on our own, except for dinner. We went to the Jewish Community. And everybody, when we came there, "Where's is Frau Dr. Feiler?" We were alone.

Where was Frau Dr. Feiler?

In the hotel.

Only? So you don't-- so why were you waiting in Lisbon at this--

10 days.

Yeah. What was the reason for that? Did you have to have papers checked?

The ship.

Ah.

The ship.

I see.

The SS Excambion.

SS?

Excambion.

Campion?

Excambion.

Excampion?

Ex, the Ex ships, Ex ships.

OK, what did it look like, this Ex ship?

It was a small ship, and we were sleeping on a mattress in the ballroom.

Was it a passenger ship?

Yeah, but so, because we got children from Paris transport, people were-- there was children from Paris. We spoke German and French.

Aha.

Transport French children.

So were they--

They went alone.

Did they become part of your group?

Yes, in somehow, just on the ship.

OK. And so were they also part of this effort to get the children out?

Yes, from Paris.

Do you remember about how many of them joined you?

Oh, there were a lot, much more than ours.

I see.

We only were nine. Over there were whole groups.

OK, was--

I have a book, here, with all kind of children.

We'll take a look later. We'll take a look later at it.

Yeah.

So where was Frau Feiler, still at the hotel, when you were on the ship?

When I was on the ship, she had a cabin. But we never saw her--

You never saw her?

--on the ship.

So she was supposed to be your nanny, but she was absent so much of the time.

Yeah. I tell you something-- maybe I'm crazy or something-- since because she's an attorney, I'm mad of lawyers.

[LAUGHTER]

You got a bad taste.

I don't want to have nothing to do with lawyers! How can you have nine children and don't take care of?

Yeah. Did you ever-- did she ever interact with you? Did she ever talk to the children?

Just a minute, you want to hear something more?

Yeah, sure.

She goes to the beauty parlor. And we had-- the Jewish Community gave us \$5. OK?

OK.

She comes, she wants our \$5.

From each child?

Yeah, for the beauty. We all gave the last five dollars we had.

Well, that doesn't sound right at all.

That sounds-- so this was on the ship?

On the ship.

On the ship, and she took the money that the Jewish Community gave you to go to the beauty parlor?

Yeah. I don't want lawyers.

Did anybody find out about this?

I don't know.

OK, well, you were children. You were children, and she was--

I had no, I didn't have a penny with me.

Had your mother giving you anything when you left Vienna?

Money? You're not allowed to give money.

OK. Did she give you anything else, too, from home?

Well, a beautiful pocketbook that I carried with me.

Did you have any jewelry with her-- from her?

I had a ring, just a ring.

OK. OK. So there you--

A ring, and she get a chain. I have.

So not only did Frau Feiler not really take care of you--

No!

--she also took things from you?

Yes.

She took that money?

Yes.

OK. Do you remember what she looked like?

Yeah, she was a redhead.

She was a redhead. Was she a good-looking woman?

Yeah, she was a single woman.

OK, was she at least pleasant with the children?



No, not very pleasant. No, couldn't have a conversation with her.

OK.

And the ship, it was going 10 days. You know, it stopped in Bermuda.

It did?

Yeah.

And what was--

I don't know why.

Did you stay on the ship?

Yeah, I stayed on the ship, but the first stop was Bermuda.

And were you-- your food and was taken care of on the ship? So the children were still fed, even though they had no money?

No money.

No money, but people gave you food. I mean, you were able to have breakfast and lunch and dinner?

Yeah. On the ship, yeah.

On the ship. What else do you remember from that ship?

Actually, we were very good together, all the nine. We didn't cry. We talked nice conversation. We got along beautiful, especially Otto and Susanne. They were the leaders.

Yeah, so thank goodness you had that. Thanks god-- yeah.

Yeah. He had the dictionary. We looked-- we went to a movie.

You did?

Yeah, it was Portuguese and German.

OK, so you can understand it?

Yeah.

OK, do you remember the movie?

It wasn't-- nothing too much.

OK. OK, now, who ran the ship? Was it-- under whose flag was the ship?

American.

It was American.

Small.

Had you met Americans before?

If I was on ships?

No. Had you ever met any American people before?

No.

OK. Was this, then, the first time?

The first time.

What kind of impression did they leave with you? You mean when I lived in the United States?

Well, we could-- I was thinking the ship, but if you don't remember, then when you lived in the United States.

Yeah. Well, they're little bit different from the European.

How?

They're little bit self-centered.

Ah, OK. That was your first impression, huh?

Yeah.

How did that show itself, that self-centeredness?

Not some-- when I came to Orthodox people, they were not self-centered. But when I came to regular people, they're a little self-centered.

Does that mean they weren't interested in you or your story or anything?

No. They didn't ask no questions or nothing. The Orthodox, they were more-- how should I say-- they can ask you question, but--

They were more interested.

They were interested.

OK. Now, when you were on the ship--

What I found out, why they're self-centered, is because they worked many hours. Maybe that's what's the problem.

Well, yeah. They could be tired. They could be tired.

Yeah.

So while you're still on the ship, the children that came from France, who looked after them?

I really don't-- that, I cannot tell you if they're come from the for the foster home, or I don't know.

OK. OK, and--

There was groups, very. Boys on one side, girls on one side of a mattress.

Were there any people on the ship who weren't children going on a Kindertransport? Or was this--

Oh, yes! There were grown-ups, sure.

OK. And did you get seasick?

A little bit. It was December.

Yeah, it's pretty cold. It's pretty cold. And do you remember where you arrived in the United States?

In New Jersey.

In New Jersey? What part of New Jersey?

All the Ex ships that were transport came to New Jersey.

OK. Did you have to pass the Statue of Liberty to get to the New Jersey ports?

No.

OK. OK. Do you remember the port, the name of the port in New Jersey? No. No, that I don't remember.

OK, and what was it like when you got off the ship?

Not too good.

Tell me. Tell me, what happened?

My relative supposed to pick me up.

Uncle Fred and Chyka, Aunt Chyka?

Yeah. Yeah.

Did they?

I docked. I had my two suitcases. I see Otto was picked up and Susanne was picked up. All of the sudden, I see a social worker coming towards me, Lottie Markusa.

Lottie Markusa?

Yeah.

OK, Markusa?

Yeah, Markusa, from Berlin. And she speaks German.

Did you know her from Berlin? Never saw her before.

Never saw her. She said, "I wrote a letter to your relative, and I got no answer."

Oh, wow.

And she said, "I have to take you to Amsterdam Avenue in a home."

Oh, and that's the one thing you didn't want.

But I knew my uncle. I knew Uncle Fred, brave, how he-- his character.

OK. One thing, I know. So but the other children, they had relatives or they had already foster home parents. And I said to myself, "I don't want to go to foster home parents. And I don't know how they are."

Yeah.

So they took me to Amsterdam Avenue in a home. And I had a very nice pocketbook. I have the address of my uncle and aunt, and I don't know what, so far. Lottie Markusa came to me. She spoke to me and said, "I have no phone. I have no answer from your relative. They down write. I can't get them."

All those children have to go out of New York. They cannot stay in New York. They have to go different state.

And your uncle and aunt lived in New York?

Yeah, in the Bronx.

OK.

So let's see what's going to be. But I always carried their address. One day, I went to the library and I see a window contractor fixing windows. He looked at-- and I was kind of sad, so he came to me and talked English. I said, no, I cannot talk English. Can you talk German? No. Yiddish? I say I can talk Yiddish, and not perfect, but I can communicate.

So I told them, in Jewish, that I'm looking for my relative. I have the address. He copied the address. I told everything in Jewish. "I will go and talk to them. I have friends, right there, on Sheridan Avenue, across the street."

Guess what happened?

What happened?

The next day, they came. He picked them up. They came. I said, hello, all. And it took a few days till I got them, get there, take me home.

So did your Uncle Fred get those other letters?

He got the letter.

And he just didn't want to pick you up?

He said he couldn't read it. But I had a cousin who knows German. He could give it to the cousin. He didn't answer it.

OK, so when you got to his home, and there was your Aunt Chyka and your cousin Allen, yeah?

Yeah.

How was it?

First of all, she wrote to my mother that I wasn't very friendly when they (LAUGHS) came. I wasn't very friendly to go through this. Now, I'm laughing.

Yeah, I know, but it's that sort of laughter that's through tears. Because you're a child, and they're grown ups.

[INAUDIBLE]

You know? And who wasn't friendly? They should have picked you up.

But, somehow, before I left, he had a partner-- you know, he was in business, my uncle-- and, actually, the partner was not Jewish. And he was an illegal Nazi, but he worked with him, somehow. He came to me to say goodbye and gave me instruction what I should tell my uncle.

Oh, this was in Vienna still?

In Vienna, yeah. He talked to me.

OK.

So I wasn't too happy.

No. How come he didn't answer Markusa, Lottie Markusa.

Yeah.

There was somebody else involved, as a cousin, Jules. Jules, I found it out, said to him, "We cannot afford another coming over who costs money."

But, look what I did, I pushed myself in.

Yeah.

And I always felt like I pushed myself into the family.

Oh, that's a terrible feeling, and you were a 13-year-old girl. Did your mother answer these letters?

You see, my mother wrote a letter the day I went away, and the letter took time because of war. But they got the letter of Markusa.

Yeah. Did your mother receive the letter from your aunt?

Yeah.

And did she respond to it?

Well, they wrote back and forth. But I, all I can tell you, they were very different from my parents. It-- my parents went all the way. I didn't expect they go all the way, but half a way.

Yeah.

They was very fussy, whatever move you made.

So, in some ways, it--

Somehow, I lived 10 years with them.

Oh! So, tell me, what happened with your mother? Did she ever come over?

My mother was in three camps.

So what happened to her after you left?

Gas chamber. All I know is my father was in Dachau, and with a ticket from Shanghai, China, he could have come out. We had no money. Everything was taken. But, somehow, my uncle had money, Fred, because his business still went on with his partner.

The one-- ah, the ones still in Vienna?

Who was not Jewish.

Yeah.

So we tried to get the ticket, to buy a ticket that he gets out of Dachau and go to China alone, just to get out. But he dragged so long, and guess what happened? He died. The next day, the ticket of China came to Dachau to get out.

How bitter. How awful. How awful.

One or two days, the ticket arrived in Dachau. It dragged around, and that was money.

And when you left, it was your mother who stayed. And how long before she was taken? Do you know? Did you ever find out?

Well, I got an-- eight years ago, they made research. She died in 1944 in one of those three concentration camps.

Do you know the names of those camps?

In Auschwitz.

She was in Auschwitz?

She was in Theresienstadt. She was in another one that I don't know. And she-- Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, I have it-- I have a book, here. I have to look it up.

So you didn't know, until eight years ago?

Where she was.

Oh my. Oh my. How do you-- when you were still with your uncle for those 10 years, when did you first realize that you had lost your mother?

Well, it stopped. The letters stopped. And then my uncle got a book from Theresienstadt, and I have it here where they-- that she was moved to Auschwitz, East.

OK. That must have been-- I can't imagine how that must have been for you, not easy years at all. And here you were, with relatives who were supposedly so close, your father's sister--

Yeah, double relationship.

Yeah.

And the one in Poland were like this, togetherness. And I don't understand that my aunt wasn't like this. One did for the other. One helped for the other. They were so close.

But it was my uncle more.

Your mother's brother.

And he-- first of all, you had to be careful. He can hit if we don't-- he smashed my mother's ear, once.

Really?

Yeah. My father wanted to call the police, but my grandmother hold him up. All about fixing up a grave. My mother said, we have to fix it up. He said no. So he gave a bump. And, inside, the nerve was damaged.

Did he ever touch you when you were in New York?

I was very shrewd. I, somehow, I don't see-- I saw him by me, it's-- I you know, with 17, I took working paper. Two months, and I worked in a sweat shop, and I made some money.

OK, so between--

And then, when I was about 18, I worked at all kinds of places. And I got stuck on 48th Street in a watch company for many years before I got married.

So when you arrived at his house on Amsterdam Avenue, when you were still 13 years old, did you go to school soon afterwards.

Yeah. Yeah.

And tell me a little bit about how those first weeks and months were in this American school.

Well, I had-- I walked into the classroom. There were Mr. Rosenberg, I remember. He greet me in German.

Oh.

But he said, "From now on, English." I knew a little bit, but I took up-- I knew I'm going to get out. I took a little bit English. And I got the English-German--

Dictionary?

Dictionary, I was sitting with the dictionary. And I was going to the movie, and I learned. And I took out the easy books, and I was playing with the children on the street.

Did you have any teachers at the new school, the American school, who took a particular interest in you?

No.

Well, when I start really to work, I worked the day, during the day in a watch company. I took a few frankfurters in the streets.

Yeah.

Hamburger, and I went to business school, and I paid it all.

Wow. Wow.

For my money, [INAUDIBLE] Business School. Twice a week I went there, and I took up bookkeeping.

Were these years unhappy for you?

The 10 years, I was-- I make myself happy. I made it in such a way that, in the morning, I go to work. In the evening, I made myself busy. I studied. I go to movie. And the less I was home, the better it was.

OK. Did you have your own room in your uncle's home?

Yeah. Well, in the beginning year, I slept in the living room.

OK, did you move ever? Did the family-- did you move to a bigger place?

From one little one to a little bigger one, they moved.

OK. OK. And your cousin Allen, what was he like?

He was very, very nice to me.

OK, so the boy, at least the son, was somebody who you could have contact with.

Yeah, but he did-- he was very weak.

Ah. Ah.

It made him crazy, too. He was-- Allen, my uncle and aunt had to go to the psychiatrist. They were under care of a psychiatrist because of Allen, because he had a nervous breakdown.

What an unhappy place.

When he was single.

Yeah.

And what-- well, first, I couldn't imagine. You had the nervous breakdown. You had the psychiatrist, but he never got out of it.

Oh. Oh.

He, many times, he said make yourself happy, travel.

Didn't work, huh?

He, I don't-- he, himself, was not mentally-- he didn't have the power. He didn't have the energy, what a man should have. His wife had the-- how to say-- had the pants on.

Yeah. So Allen married? Allen got married?

Allen, he died very young.



Oh.

I think he was 56. He had cancer, brain cancer.

Aye yi. Aye yi. So you stayed with your uncle, in this family, 10 years? And then--

I came in 1940. I got married in 1950.

How did you meet your husband?

On a dance.

On the dance, like your parents met. OK.

There was a special club for the immigrants. They called it the Aufbau.

The Aufbau?

The Aufbau. There was a newspaper, and they had dances.

OK, and was your husband also from Europe?

Yes, from Frankfurt am Main.

Ah, so he was from Germany?

And he was two years in a concentration camp and came out.

Was he much older than you?

Half a year older.

So they--

Half, half a year older.

So they took a boy and put him in a concentration camp?

Well, he was-- I don't know. He was maybe 17, was.

Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness.

With his father, together.

Did you ever go back to Vienna to look for traces of your--

Oh, yes, twice. Once, with my husband, we took one month's vacation in Europe. And eight years ago I was the last time in Vienna. And there, I found out about-- I hear about my mother, her I didn't--

Have you spoken much with your children about all these things?

Oh, yes. Yes, my daughter, my two grandsons.

Let me ask this. How many children do you have?

I have my daughter, two grandsons, and three great-granddaughters.

Oh my.

And they're married. They're mine, too.

OK, so--

They're my granddaughters.

So you have one child, yes, and two grandsons? And then they have daughters?

They're my two granddaughters.

Yeah, quite a family. Quite a family. Is there something that I haven't covered today that you would like to still share with us?

I don't know. I mentioned something in the cafe.

And you forgot a little bit during our break?

Well, I told you about the ticket, what happened.

That's right. That one that was for China, and that--

For it was too late.

And it was too late.

I pushed my mother. We had no money to buy a ticket.

Yeah.

And he had it because his business went on.

What about jewelry from your mother? Did anything ever come to you?

Yes. My uncle gave somebody-- knew somebody who bought it here.

And did that--

From England.

England? OK, so there was jewelry that your mother got out--

Yeah.

--to England, and they brought it here?

Yeah.

And they gave it to you?

Yeah. And she has a lot of--

So your daughter, Paula, has some? OK. And is that the only thing that you have left from your mother?

Yeah.

OK. I'm looking for a bracelet, but I never got it.

Yeah.

A junky bracelet from my mother, but we never got it.

When you got married, did you still go to work or did you work at home taking care of your daughter?

You mean, when I was married?

Yeah.

I was a school aide. All I had to do is go across the street where my daughter went to school.

Ah!

I was very active in the Parents' Association. I was a delegate in the Parents' Association. And, somehow, I got the school aide, so I spent four hours every day. But I should-- I mean, I don't believe just staying home and doing all kind of work. I like to get out. And then I joined the Hadassah, which I'm still the president, even I don't-- I mean, they're not so active anymore, but I'm still-- the money comes in.

I did like a lot of running around. I got honored from Hadassah.

When did you start telling your story publicly?

When my grandson Justin, in the synagogue, said, "My grandmother came from Vienna, Austria. She has a story." And that was the first recall, the first talk.

Time? Yeah?

Yeah.

And about how many years ago was that?

Right before the bar mitzvah.

Well-- 13, when he was 13.

So give me a sense, how old is he now?

36.

OK, so that was-- 36? So--

36.

So it could be that that's about 23 years ago that you started talking.

I start talking.

And, up until then, it had only been within the family? OK.

Remember, I go to synagogue and spoke. The rabbi invited me.

OK. Thank you very much for talking to us today. Thank you very much--

You're welcome.

--for sharing all of this.

Any time.

I have one last question, and that goes back to-- I might have two last questions, but the first one goes back to the boat when you came over. And you said there was this little girl, Herta--

Herta, yeah.

--who slept with her doll. OK, did you ever see Herta again after you arrived in the United States?

Oh, yeah! I saw her a couple of weeks ago. She has friends in the other building, so she come and visit me.

And had you kept up talk-- how did you find one another after so many years?

She found me.

Ah, I see.

How, I don't know.

OK, what about the other children, Susanne and--

I met Melanie. I don't know the second name. Found somehow, and we met once or twice.

OK, but you knew all of these children, these nine children, ended up having different lives in different places. Did you ever keep up with any of them?

Different, the other children went to different states.

Ah.

Remember, I said--

That's right.

--you don't have relative here, they get sent out.

Yeah. I know two died. I know that Susanne and Otto died.

Yeah, well, they were the oldest.

They were the oldest.

They were the oldest.

Yeah, the leaders, that then--

What would you want-- and this is my final question-- what would you want people to take away from listening to your story? What would you like them to think about?

Well, they have two ways. You mean, how other people think about me?

No. I mean--

The story.

You know, what happened to you, what you went through, yes. Well, with-- you mean, you mean Holocaust people or regular people?

I mean, when someone will turn on the computer in the future and our discussion, our talk here today will come up, and they will listen to it.

They would-- so, it's a mixture. One would say it's terrible, and one would say, well, not much about.

Well, I don't know. It sounds like you persevered through a lot.

Right. Like I say, some, for themselves, you understand? And some, it depends on the personality of the people.

That's true. Do you think you have been understood when you have spoken and told and shared your story with other people? Do you think they've understood what you tried to say?

Well, I tell you something. There is a lady here from Germany, a Holocaust lady. I cannot talk to her. She, when I said something, she said everything against me.

So that was a bad experience.

I cannot talk, no conversation.

But when you've gone in public and talked at the synagogue and talked--

They would understand. The one in the synagogue would understand. She never put a foot in the synagogue. You see, some people blame God for that, and they're mad and [INAUDIBLE]. They blame God, Hashem. God did it, and they're mad of God. I found it out.

What about you?

I'm with God. I say God took care of me in the worst of worst. I go every Saturday to the synagogue and thank him. And He said to me, you go on with your life.

I can't think of a better ending. Thank you very much.

They're mad of God.

Yes.

God turned their back on them. That's what they tell me.

Thank you, Stella Bruckenstein Bengel, for sharing your story with us today.

I thank you. You're welcome.

This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Stella Bruckenstein Bengel on August 11, 2016 in the Bronx, New York.