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Sound levels OK?

Yeah.

OK.

And anytime, Ina.

OK. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Ginger Lane on September 28, 2016, in Chicago, Illinois. Thank you very much for agreeing to speak with us today to share some of your story and some of your experiences. I'm going to start with the very beginning, most basic questions. And we'll build from there, OK?

OK.

So can you tell me, what was the date of your birth?

November 27, 1939.

And what was your name at birth?

Bela, B-E-L-A, Bela Weber, W-E-B-E-R.

That's very different from Ginger Lane.

Very, very different, yes.

And where were you born?

In Berlin, Germany, two months after Germany invaded Poland.

That's right.

So it was a very fraught time and actually living through a remarkable period in world history, not one I would want to repeat.

[LAUGHTER]

But it's there.

So tell me, do you have any earliest memories that are-- even if they're episodic or a little vague, but do you have some about your first years?

Well, yes, I do have some memories. They're very-- because I was so young during the war years, some of them are vague, some of them may be mixed in with things that I was told later, or once I came here, things that I had read about or heard about. But some of my earliest memories are sleeping in a crib and seeing a picture over my bed, sleeping on a diagonal wall. And there was either a picture or a cross hanging over my bed and wondering why would that image be there. Now--

And would the picture have been of anybody you knew?

It may have been of my parents. I don't really know. But I know that there was something up on the wall over the crib. Now, what I learned was that I was in the bedroom where my parents slept. And my sisters and brother-- I have five sisters and one brother-- were in the other room. But I was so small that I was in a crib in their bedroom.

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Were you the youngest of the family?

Yes, I'm the youngest of seven.

So I'd like now to talk a little bit about your family. Tell me, who were your brothers and sisters? And could you name them for me?

Sure. Well, starting from the eldest, my brother Alfons is 12 years older than I.

And he's the only boy?

He's the only boy in the family, yes. Actually, I think I was supposed to be a boy because, well, because the name Bela is really a man's name. But I guess they got what they got. Then my sister, Senta, so my brother Alfons was born in 1927 in Dortmund, Germany, as well as my sister Zenta, who was-- she was born in 1929.

And then my family, my parents and brother and sister, moved to Berlin. And the next in line was Ruth. And she was born, I think, in 1930, and then Gertrude, born in 1932 in Berlin, and then RenÃ©e. Let me make sure I got this right. There's so many of us.

Alfons, Senta, Ruth, Gertrude was born in 1932. And then RenÃ©e was born in 1935. She's a girl, RenÃ©e, the only other redhead. And then my sister Judy was born in 1937.

And you?

And then I was born in 1939.

OK, what were your parents' names?

Alexander and Lina or Elona.

OK, so Lina, Elona, was your mom?

Mm-hmm.

And what was her maiden name?

Her name was Banda, so on their marriage certificate, I think it says Lina Banda. And she was from Hungary.

Do you know what part?

Rakospalota, I don't know, I think it's probably the western side of Hungary. My father, who was born in-- came from Paderborn in Westphalia, had gone-- his family, I think, were umbrella makers. And he had traveled to Hungary to sell umbrellas.

And he met-- it was a little bit like meeting Rachel at the well. I think he simply saw her and struck up a friendship. And they got-- he then-- he was born a Catholic, converted to Judaism because my mother was the daughter of a cantor.

Wow.

So they were Orthodox Jews. He converted to Judaism in order to be able to marry her.

And do you know anything about her side of the family?

Her side of the family?

Mm-hmm, yeah.

Other than the fact that she was the daughter of a cantor, I don't think I do.

Do you know if she had brothers and sisters?

I don't recall. There may have been. But I certainly never met them.

And on your father's side of the family, do you know if he had brothers and sisters?

Yes, I don't recall now how many, but I know that he was the oldest, the eldest of at least one, maybe two or three, brothers and sisters. And when he and my mother traveled back to Germany, they went to his family. And at which point, the family sort of disowned him because he had married outside of Catholicism. And so there was a total break in the family.

Was the same true on your mother's side?

I'm sorry?

Was the same thing true for your mother's side?

I don't believe so because he had converted to Judaism.

I see. I See

And he practiced Judaism really up until the time that we left Germany after the war.

In those--

Excuse me, even though in 1940, he was sort of forced to renounce his conversion and once again become Catholic. But I don't think-- from things that I've read that my brother has written because I would have no personal knowledge, I think he continued to, if not outwardly practice Judaism, still believe in the Jewish faith.

OK, do you have memories of your mother and father as a little girl, personal memories?

I have several images that come to mind. One, actually, is an image of when my mother was taken. And how perfectly accurate this is, I don't know. And I've written about this. I was-- this would be 1943, so I was three years old.

And the image that I have is my mother and I were home by ourselves. And there was a knock at the door. And it was two men dressed in black who came to the door and began to question her. And I was sort of hiding behind another door. And then they made her go with them.

And so I ran up, and sat on the windowsill, and looked down. And I saw her being put into a black car. It was a very frightening image and experience because it was the Gestapo coming to take her away.

Were you alone in the house with her?

I thought I was. I think I was. Whether I truly was or not, I don't know. But, I mean, whether that's factual, I don't know. But that's my memory.

The other image that I have, in our apartment, is always not understanding why I would see people coming into our building and out of our building, going into a room or an apartment, next door to our apartment, and then never seeing

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them again. Or they would leave, and then another man, woman, and child, family would come the next day. And trying to understand why, as a 3-year-old, I would constantly see strangers coming and going, well, it was because she was helping people get out of Berlin. So she was part of the underground in getting people, probably both Roma and Jewish people, helping them escape.

The image that I have of my father was that he was red, red hair and with a red beard, possibly, or maybe just red hair, and having a radio playing. And he would be tinkering with electrical things, with the radio, maybe building, taking it apart. And I later learned that he was an electrician, so playing with radios and things, and that there would be music playing on the radio. So in my very earliest memories, those are the memories that I have. After a couple of years, after my mother was taken--

Did she come back?

Pardon me?

Did she come back?

No.

Ever?

Well, what I know was that we were all arrested. And we were incarcerated in the Jewish hospital. But it was for about a month. We were all taken in March or April of 1943.

And you would have been three and a half.

Right, and I think we lived there for a couple of weeks or a month.

Do you have any memories of this?

I don't have memories of that, no. This is what I've learned. But I don't have memories of that. The memory that I have is that from Berlin, at some point, we moved to a farm or a fruit orchard about 60 kilometers east of Berlin.

East of Berlin.

East of Berlin, so towards the Russian zone, and always playing by myself in a field, digging up potatoes. Why, why potatoes? Maybe that's all there was in the field, but being by myself.

Nobody around you, no brothers or sisters?

They were there, but I'm just trying to recall memories, and digging up potatoes because I was always hungry.

So you remember being hungry.

Yeah, cold and hungry, and always being alone, and then asking, always saying to my sister, Gertrude, I'm so alone, or why am I always alone? So I know that there was another family living in hiding with us or at least on the same property. And maybe there were children. But I have no recollection of being with other children. And maybe we did play together. I mean, here, I was three or four years old or four to five years old, and only thinking of myself as being alone.

So I want to step back a little bit. The conclusion we can come to is that you had a mother for three and a half years maybe of your life. And then she disappears.

Gone, just out of my life, but I still had all my sisters and my brother. And my sister Gertrude, I think, sort of filled the

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place of my mother. So I felt very close to her. And to this day, I mean, she is a very motherly, nurturing kind of person. And so my bond with my siblings is primarily to her and to my brother Alfons.

I see, the two, the two of them.

The two of them, the others are a little more peripheral in how they affected me because they were-- my brother was sort of the stand-in for my father, perhaps, older and in charge. And I would look up to him. My sister Gertrude was more of that--

Maternal person.

--supportive, mothering role. Another image that I have from that time was we lived on this fruit orchard or farm for about a year and a half. That would be 1944, and coming back to Berlin, coming back to Berlin at, perhaps, the beginning or maybe the end of 1945.

Beginning of 40--

No, no, the beginning of 1945, ahead of the Russians' army, who were coming, marching into Berlin, so we had to leave where we were to get away from them coming back into Berlin. And then I have very strong recollections of being on the street with my father, watching soldiers coming down the street, and being very frightened because they were menacing looking, dressed in black, just sort of like the two men that I had seen when my mother was taken, and wearing boots, and being loud and aggressive. And so there was a lot of fear.

And it was wintertime. If you went back, it was wintertime in the beginning of '45. Did you go back to the same apartment that you had left from or a different one?

We went back to the same building. I don't know if we went back to the same apartment because I think, at some point, our apartment was-- the building was bombed out. So we may have moved into the building-- into an apartment next door. But there were a lot of air raids. So either we would go to the bunker at the Alexanderplatz, the underground train station, which was probably only a block or two from our apartment, or we would go down into the bunker in the basement of our building, a shelter, and wait out the air raids.

So the sounds of bombs falling and noises and planes overhead, again, were, for a young-- for me, sounds were very confusing and disturbing. And maybe one of the reasons that I would ask my sister, why am I so alone or I'm always alone, was because my mother was no longer there. My father was still in our life, but not my mother.

That was a question of mine. When you went to the orchard--

When we what?

When you went to the orchard, did you see your father? Was he around in the same place?

He and my brother stayed in Berlin during the week. And they would come out on the weekends because he'd have found work. And so they were able to work. He was an electrician. And my brother, I think, helped him with electrical work in the city.

But then they would drive out with the man who owned the fruit orchard on the weekends. So we did have time together. But I don't-- those kind of memories are too vague for me to really be able to recollect.

OK, and do you know why you ended up in that fruit orchard, why you were there?

Oh, yeah.

Why?

We're in hiding because we were Jews. And we knew, I knew, I felt that the world was against us, that there were people that didn't want us around. And in order to be safe, we had to get out of Berlin. And we had to live in hiding to not-- to try not to be Jewish, not to be identified as Jews. Otherwise, we would not have survived.

So the impression left on me was, at a very young age, to be deceptive, to not admit what I was and who I was. That extended from that time until we had to declare ourselves as orphans to be able to get from Germany to America because had we said that we had a father living, we would not have been able to get on the first ship out to come to the United States, so having to lie.

And then once I was here, not wanting to admit or wanting to assimilate because now the-- then the war was over. And all my classmates and people that I knew here would make fun of my German accent, the fact that I couldn't speak English, the fact that I was German. And everybody in the United States was against Germany because of what Germany had done in the war, so denying what my actual heritage was.

So in one sense--

So the idea of deception and lying was almost second nature.

It was also reinforced over and over.

I beg your pardon?

It was reinforced over and over, first, because you're Jewish, and second, because you're German.

Yeah.

Do you have a--

And then to be a German Jew was the worst [CHUCKLES] because, yeah, number one, you're German. And part of the German culture is to be very proud that you're German. But to be Jewish, no matter what I was, we were not accepted.

You're in the wrong-- yeah, yeah. Do you have any sense of your mother's influence in your life before she disappeared? Should I say that louder?

I don't think so. Well, I shouldn't-- the influence that I recall-- I mean, she was a kind person. But I think I was probably more influenced by Gertrude and maybe by my sister Ruth who would take me on excursions with her. And they were closer to my age. So I don't know that I felt influenced by my mother.

Well, it's interesting, and it's also very heartbreaking because both of your older sisters were children themselves.

Oh, yeah.

Even Ruth, the oldest, was no more than--

She was 15 or 16, yeah.

Yeah, I mean, at the end of the war, but in the beginning, she's in her early teens. She's like 12, 13, or something like that.

Right.

What about your father? Did you feel his presence? Did he have an influence on your life, early life?

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An influence in the sense that, yes, as I mentioned earlier, being on the street with him, and I have this image of standing sort of between his legs with my arms wrapped around his legs, and looking kind of furtively down the street, watching these people. And whether they were trucks and tanks or just soldiers marching, I don't know, but being in his embrace, so being protected by him, very much so. But at that point, my mother was gone for a year and a half.

Yeah, this is the end of the war when Germany capitulates?

Yeah, I mean, it was very frightening to see them, but then to at least know that my father would protect me.

Do you remember leaving Berlin?

I remember being very confused, sort of like we were always going somewhere. We were going from Berlin out to the fruit orchard. We were going from our apartment to the bunker in the Alexanderplatz. We were from our apartment, down below into the shelter in our building, where I think we actually lived for a few days, or a week, or so because we had no apartment to go back to.

And then going from Berlin on the train from one place to another, and when I say from one place to another, we were going from DP camp to DP camp. So this sense of not belonging, of that sort of being homeless because we were constantly in flux and traveling, was both very, very confusing, and yet I was still with my sisters and brother, so that was reassuring, but sort of not understanding why. If things were explained to me, I don't remember them, any explanations.

But I think I always had the sense of why, or what's going on, not knowing, and being confused. And some of those feelings of-- and they were feelings of insecurity-- may have played into why, when I came to the States, and came to the Jewish Children's Bureau in Chicago, who was our sponsor, and then having to go one foster home to another foster home, and then finally, eventually landing with a family who were a stable family who wanted to adopt me, I embraced that.

You needed the stability.

I needed the stability. And I needed to know that there were people who were going to take care of me from then on and provide warmth and love and discipline, which I didn't want.

Who does?

Yeah, who does? And food, and a lot of food, so all the good things that-- and toys and a yard, not a yard, but a park to play in, so all the things that children want.

Do you remember anything of your trip over from Germany to the United States?

A few things, but before talking about that, there's another image that comes to mind in Berlin. And that is I was too young to go to school, although I may have been in nursery school for a short time, but this image of being on the street, standing in line, and either getting a cup or-- either tin cups or tin ladles of soup.

And maybe it wasn't really outside, maybe we were in the school building, and that's how we got some lunch or something. I don't remember exactly. But that's just that one fleeting image.

Of having some food.

Mm-hmm, again, of food, which, of course, is another way of being nurtured.

And saying that you must have been hungry to remember that image.

Yeah, and then you asked about being on the ship. I do, I have memories, actually, of going to the galley, to the kitchen.

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And I mean, I was young. I was relative-- I was the youngest. So probably, the crew were nice, and so asking or being given oranges and fruit or drinks, and then rushing back to our cabin, and handing them over.

Tell me, how old were you? How old were you when you left Germany?

It would have been six.

You were six. You were six.

And I think I was probably the type of child who would ingratiate herself and knew how-- I knew how to get people to like me or give me things, like food.

Well, the doctors say or psychologists say that babies have a way of charming their parents, just absolute, they need to for survival.

Oh, yeah.

Absolutely need to, and it's not conscious. It's just there.

It's just there, yeah. And of course, it continued once I got with my adoptive parents. I really knew how to charm my dad.

Did you?

And my mom turned out to be the disciplinarian.

Well, tell me about-- well, when you came to the United States, what happened then, before you get to your adopted parents?

Well, the first thing I remember is being wakened very early in the morning and saying, get dressed, we have to go up on deck, and not knowing why. But when we went up there, the first thing that we saw, that I saw, was the Statue of Liberty, which was a pretty--

Did you know-- yeah.

I'm not sure what I knew except there was this very tall lady standing in the middle of the water, but that it was wonderful. And everyone was cheering, and applauding, and screaming. And I thought the whole ship was going to capsize because we were all on one side of the ship. So it began to [? list. ?] But that was a very happy time.

And then getting off the ship into this enormous warehouse or holding area on the dock and sort of being sectioned off into almost-- I would almost describe it as a cattle pen, where you have fences separating groups. But it was people. I mean, we weren't treated as cattle. We were treated nicely.

And having pictures taken, and I just sort of recoiled. I didn't want-- people were constantly taking pictures of us, of the seven of us. And then moving from there, at some point, to a building in the Bronx in New York, and living there for a month, and going out one day-- I don't know, I think we lived here for a month in quarantine. And going out one day, all of us lining up and going to a shoe store to get-- to be given shoes. Who was in charge of us? Certainly, adults that were with the HIAS or the Jewish Federation.

And why was your father not with you? Why was your father not with you?

I didn't know why. I have learned, of course, that-- oh, I know why. Because the only way we could get here, as I had mentioned earlier, was to declare ourselves as orphaned, orphans, that both parents had died. And this was the way we were going to be able to get out of Germany because in Germany, there were shortages of everything. Buildings were

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bombed out. There was rubble all over. There was no food available. So getting to America was going to be the thing you strived for. And we would not have been able to get out if we had waited for our father to join us.

Had anyone giving you an explanation as to why your father wasn't there? Because that's clearly an adult explanation. What would you tell a child as to why papi isn't there?

He'll be coming. He'll follow. We're just going ahead now. He'll come in a week or 10 days. Another image comes to mind, before-- even before leaving Berlin, and that is going with my sister Ruth to some building.

Now, we were in the Russian sector, going into a building. And unbeknownst to me, she was meeting-- we were there to meet with, I guess, representatives of the army, the US army, to see if we could get papers so that we could begin the process of becoming DPs, refugees, and, eventually, emigrating.

So she went from one zone to the other.

Pardon me?

She went from one zone to the other. She went from the Russian zone to the American.

So we went from the Russian zone into the American or the British zone. But I believe we met with American personnel. And it was the first time that I saw a very tall man who wasn't my color and being afraid, but then going up to him, licking my finger, and running my finger down his cheek, thinking it was chocolate.

And he picked me up, and he laughed. And then we became friendly. And I wasn't afraid of him anymore. So that was my first recollection of seeing a black person, and that he was friendly. It was not someone to be afraid of.

And so we're back in the Bronx. And you're with your siblings. And you get some shoes. What happened after that?

At some point, we got on a train. Oh, on the ship, I was always throwing up, even with these wonderful oranges that the crew were giving me, always seasick. To this day, I get seasick. Anyway, after getting the shoes, at some point, we were put on a train. And we wound up in Chicago.

And getting off the train and going to a building downtown, which was the Jewish Children's Bureau of the Jewish Federation, I was plopped up on a table, or a desk, or something. And again, we were lined up, given ice cream and a doll, and posing for more pictures, and then getting into a taxi cab. And one by one, we were each dropped off at a foster home.

A different foster home.

Different foster home, and it was the first time after all these years of being together. My brother would walk each of us up to a foster home, I think, either my brother or my brother and the social worker who was with us. And I, again, I didn't understand why, but told that you were going to be with these people who would take care of you.

Well, the first foster home I was in, I liked the man. But I didn't like the woman. And my sister Ruth came to see me. And I told her that she beat me, that the woman took away my doll and whatever toys there were. And she would beat me in the bathtub.

And so my sister immediately contacted the caseworker, got me out of there, at which point, I went to live with my sister RenÃ©e, who was in a foster home. And her foster parents were Ruth and Ben Carlton. And they were very nice people.

And then at some-- I don't think I lived with her that long. But we did go to the same school. We went to Shakespeare Elementary School for a very short time, maybe just a couple of weeks that I was there. And then there were two people.

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Somehow-- and this gets confusing-- I was back at the Jewish Children's Bureau or somewhere where these two people came and talked to me. And I was-- and perhaps the caseworker asked if I would like to go and be with them, and spend the night, or see how things worked out. And I liked those people. And they became my adoptive parents.

What were their names?

Rosalind and Joshua Spiegel, they were not interested in being foster parents. They wanted to be adoptive parents. My father, Joshua Spiegel was a neurosurgeon. He had operated on Mary Lawrence, who was the director of the Jewish Children's Bureau. And at some point, he had said to her, we are interested in adopting a child.

And so when we came through the JCB, she thought, perhaps, I would be a good candidate. I was still young. I was only six and a half at the time. So I lived with them for a while.

And when they asked me if I wanted to be adopted, I didn't know. I didn't know any better. And I said, oh, yeah, these are nice people. OK, I would like that.

Did they know that you had a living father?

I beg your pardon?

Did they know you had a living father?

I told them no. But of course, they knew. All of this-- I mean, for a long time, I lived thinking that nobody knew that our father was living. But the JCB knew, everybody knew.

How do you know they knew?

In papers that I've seen since then, so they were complicit in a good way. They wanted us to have good lives. And at that time-- this was 1946-- the rules for adoption and the best thinking of social workers and psychologists was that no contact was to be maintained with families of origin because it would be too difficult--

[CLATTER]

Ah--

Can we cut?

Anytime, Ina.

So you were talking about the kind of thinking that was going on at the time, the about--

The thinking about adoption and foster care, and the thinking at that time was, number one, documents were not public. Everything that was done was hidden away, which kind of played into my earlier mentioning of deception. And rather than overt deception, it's hiding, keeping things private, not talking about things, and keeping things hidden away from view.

So once I moved in with the Spiegels, I actually saw my sisters and brother, probably more my sisters, several of them, quite a bit. But my mother, of course, not of course, my mother Rosalind Spiegel was in consultation both with the social workers at the Jewish Children's Bureau and with a psychiatrist who recommended that contact with my siblings be discontinued because I was too confused. When my sisters would come over, there was always talk about don't forget mama, don't forget papa. We're all together. Don't forget them.

So of course, I would want to be with them. Then when I was with these foster people, soon to become my adoptive parents, it was difficult to relate to them. And I think I would lash out at them or act out, especially towards my mother,

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my foster mother Rosalind. And she was then advised to stop contact.

Now, when I say contact, maybe they came, what, two or three times. And then it was decided that-- I mean, I was too young to really make a choice. But it was decided that it would be in my best interest to identify with this new family, so that they could become my family, so that I would be given the opportunity to have a stable home life and not be torn between my loyalty to my German siblings and my loyalty to my new American family.

I did not have access to my papers, my German papers, until I was an adult. So this would be 1958, 1960. And even then when I called the Jewish Children's Bureau to say, I want to see my case file, they gave me a very hard time. This is not public. I said, I'm not public, this is my case file. And I had to argue with them before they finally released the files.

And what did you learn in those files?

What did I learn? I learned that my father had remarried. My German father had remarried. I learned that the Jewish Children's Bureau knew that my father was living. I don't think I learned too much more than that. But I knew, I learned that the JCB knew that I didn't have to be hiding the fact that I had a father living in Germany all these years. I didn't have to continue the deception.

Oh, that must have been a burden. That must have burdened.

It was a terrible burden. It was a burden because-- and the burden continued for many years because I felt this tremendous loyalty towards my American parents. But I also had this desire to know about my German family. I knew that they all lived in Chicago.

What I didn't know was not only did they know where I lived, they knew what I was doing, where I went to school. They would sort of keep tabs on me in a good way. They wanted to make sure everything was OK.

I remember-- I went to the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. I remember-- I was now in high school. I remember going down the street with my classmates. We were going from one building a couple of blocks away to another building, turning around, and seeing some young women following us.

And I had no idea why. Well, it was two of my sisters. We all lived on the South Side of Chicago, not too far away from each other. They saw me on the street and were following me.

I mean, there's nothing bad about that, except that I was with this new family. I hadn't seen them now in seven or eight years. And I didn't-- and I wasn't sure-- I wasn't positive of who they were.

Were you ever told by your adoptive parents that you could not have contact with your siblings?

It was implied. You have a new family. You have to learn-- you have to learn a new language. You are now an American. You're not German. It was a very exciting time for me to be-- to get-- I was a naturalized citizen.

In 1951. I became a US citizen. That's a big time. But the implication was pretty clear, oh, that it would be better for me to sort of make my allegiance to this family.

So in other words, they put it, and the way you are explaining it is, with the best of intentions, but the way they put it, it's either us or them. And it should be us.

Yes, now, I wasn't given the option, you can go back to them, and then it won't be us. It wasn't that. It was you're here. You're our daughter. We love you. We'll take care of you. This is the way it should be. And because of the acting out that I had been doing-- I'm not exactly sure what acting out I was doing, except I was probably--

You were being a kid.

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--disobeying or disrespectful, particularly to my mother. I adored my father. I adored him because he, of course, was a pushover, gave me everything, would take me to the park. We'd go kite flying.

He would take me to Michael Reese Hospital on Sunday mornings, where he made rounds of his patients while I was in the telephone operators' room with all the operators. And so I was like this little darling. And they would play with me, et cetera.

But because of all this confusion, my mother took me to a psychiatrist. So I was in therapy. And I hated that therapy. And the psychiatrist, her name was Emmy Sylvester, who I believe had emigrated from Germany as well.

She might have had a few issues.

What?

She might have had a few issues.

She might have had a few issues. She would, of course, try to get me to talk about my feelings, et cetera, et cetera. And I just wanted to play with whatever it was. I was either-- I wasn't much into playing with dolls but building things and other kinds of toys. So I really never wanted to talk to her but was forced to do so.

The other thing that my adoptive parents gave me that was sort of a lifesaver with me was dance lessons, which I would never have had the opportunity to do. I came from a very poor family into, now, a very well-to-do family. And I was given every advantage. I went to-- I started out at a public grammar school, but then after a few years, went to a private high school and one of the very best universities, not only-- in the country, recognized around the world.

There was never a question of whether there would be enough food. I was, however, very malnourished. I think we all were-- with rotten teeth and no health care to speak of. And my parents, the Spiegels, would ply me with food.

Well, I would sit at the table. And I was a tiny little girl, not so tiny anymore. But then I was tiny-- fill my mouth with food, and excuse myself to go to the bathroom. And finally, and then I'd come back, and I'd eat more food, excuse myself again. I was flushing it down the toilet.

And it was discovered because either my mother or father went into the bathroom after I came back at some point and saw that I was flushing food down the toilet. And the actual question would be, why didn't you just stop eating? Well, it was pretty early ingrained upon me that I should be grateful for whatever I was given.

I think I learned that in the first foster home that I was in. Be thankful, and be grateful, be quiet, and don't cause trouble. So I was sort of this little goody two shoes who acted out secretly and in a secretive way. I never remember once-- when a child is angry, what does a child do to her or his parents?

You yell at them.

You what? You're mad at them.

You're mad at them.

Not I, I could never be mad at my parents. So I did it in an underhanded way, more subterfuge, because I couldn't say, I don't like what you're doing, or I'm angry at you. I could never be that open because I had to be grateful because they took me in, and they adopted me, and they gave me this wonderful life. So there was always this confusion of can I be who I am? Can I be myself?

Did you come to an answer?

Because I have to be grateful.

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Did you ever come to an answer as to whether you could be?

I didn't hear you.

Did you ever come to an answer as to whether you were allowed to be yourself?

Not for many years, not for many years, it was very hard. And when I say many years, I mean, after I had children of my own, after I was married and had children. I remember, in my new family, we adopted-- my parents adopted two more children.

So I had a brother, Jonathan, who was nine and a half years younger than I. And he was from the US, but he had been abandoned. And then my sister Petra, who was 12 years younger than I, who had been-- she was Italian and lived in an Italian orphanage because her parents could not take care of her. And I've lost my train of thought.

You were saying that--

Oh, I just remembered. My brother Jonathan once said-- he was probably five, or six, or maybe a little bit older. I was in the room. And he said to my mother, I hate you.

Now, if he was 5 or 6, I was about 15. And I said to my mother, how could you let him say that? How could you possibly let him say that to you? And she looked at me. And she said, he's angry.

Of course he hates me at the moment because I didn't give him candy, or whatever it was. It's perfectly natural. And I didn't think that was right. He was adopted. He should be grateful because that's what I had been told.

What a burden, what a burden, you know?

It was. It is what-- and it is what kept me, because of these dual loyalties, it is what kept me from reconnecting with my sisters and brother. There was one time when I was still in high school, probably a junior or senior. My parents-- we, as a family, went out for dinners usually on Thursday night, or something. And we went to his favorite Chinese restaurant.

And we left the restaurant to walk home. And I saw four people just walking down the street. And I remember looking at this man, just staring at him as we walked past each other. And he was staring at me. It was my father from Germany and his new family.

I didn't know it quite at the time, except that I kept staring at him, wondering who he was and why I felt this connection to him. But he had given up his rights to me that, in order for me to be adopted, the Jewish Children's Bureau-- I think it was the Bureau-- had placed an ad in the paper at the time, in 1946 or '47, saying that unless you claim rights to this child, she will be placed for adoption. So he gave up his rights to me, which meant no contact. You cannot have contact with her. That was the law in 1946. That was just--

Did you ever see him again?

I never saw him again, no. He came here in 1956, 1956. So about that time, about that time-- and I did not know that he was here. But about that time, I was studying dance downtown.

And after class, I came downstairs. It was downtown, came downstairs to go and take the train to go home. And there was this young woman on the street who came up to me. And I sort of looked at her. And I said, I'm not allowed to talk to you.

It was my sister, Ruth. I couldn't remember her name. She had gone up to my dance studio, talked with the dance director, told her who she was. The dance director immediately had her go into another room, called my father, and said, there's a young woman here who says she's Ginger's sister. Who is she?

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My parents had never told the dance director my background. He then apparently contacted the Jewish Children's Bureau, who contacted my sister and said, if you ever go near Ginger, Bela, again, you'll be sent back. There was this fear hanging over all of us that if you don't behave, you're going to be sent back.

Oh, how sad.

So there were these conflicting feelings. I believe when I was about 18 or 19, my mother said to me, if you ever want to know about your family, just ask me, or let me know. Or if you want to contact them, I will arrange it. And at that time, I said, I have my new family. It's OK, I can't have loyalties to both.

When I was engaged to be married, I was 20, I was contacted, I got a letter, I guess, about German reparations. And so I met with someone, and signed the papers, and turned over what money I got. And this was for the death of my mother.

So the German government made reparations. I got a check for $39. And I immediately signed it over to the Jewish Children's Bureau. I wanted no part of it. But basically, that was the only contact that I had with my family, my German family.

A month or two before I got married, at that time, 1960, you had to get a health certificate. So I went to my pediatrician. Everyone did. Before you could get a marriage license, you had to make sure that you did not have venereal disease or other health issues. And so I went to my pediatrician, got whatever document I needed.

And two women came up to me and said, are you Ginger? I said yes. Well, can we talk to you for a minute? We went into-- down the hall. And it was my sister RenÃ©e and my sister-- I think, I don't know why, but I'm saying Gertrude. But it might not have been.

Anyway, we went down the hall. And they said, we saw in the newspaper that you're getting married. And we just wanted to wish you all the best. And I immediate recognized RenÃ©e because she had red hair. And I said-- but I was kind of embarrassed because I had not contacted them or made any effort to contact them to tell them I was getting married.

Now, you know, I was 19 or 20 years old at the time. So I was not a child any longer. But they did say, we just wanted-- we hope you're OK and that you're happy, et cetera, et cetera. And they were married. They had children of their own.

And a few years later, I got a phone call from one of my sisters, Judy, who said, I'm moving to Lawrence, Kansas. And before-- and I don't know that I'll ever be back. I'd like to see you. So I said sure, so she came. I, at this point, had a child. She came to my apartment.

And I opened-- I never forget this. I opened the door. And for the first time in my memory, I looked at someone who looked just like me, which was very interesting in that I looked at my child or my children, they didn't look like me.

I didn't look like my adoptive mother. I didn't look like my sister or brother. So here was somebody from my past who looked like me.

What a price.

And still I maintained-- and I remember talking with my husband. Should I reconnect with my family? And he advised against it. He said, you're going to open up a can of worms. You've got this family.

And I have relatives in Canada, I mean, and new cousins here. So it was hard. I didn't realize how difficult it was on my sisters and brother.

They were kind of hovering like-- they were hovering like guardian angels.

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They were hovering angels. And yet they couldn't acknowledge themselves. Two of them once came into the apartment building where I lived with my parents. And they almost rang the doorbell. And then they ran away instead. So it was-- yeah, they sort of kept an eye on me in--

Which is a lovely, wonderful thing.

It's fabulous, fabulous. And many years later-- oh, oh, and every once in-- about every five years, once I was an adult, I had contact with them through-- I'd get a letter, or a card, or something. It turns out that my sister RenÃ©e went to the same high school that my husband went to. They both went to Hyde Park on the South Side. I don't know that they knew. I don't think they knew each other.

But there was always something. I received some letters. Some were nice, some were not so nice because I did question, should I contact them? What should I-- and it was sort of, you've just got too much going on in your life.

You've got your own family. You've got your children. You've got your adoptive brother and sister. You've got your parents. How many things can you handle?

I became disabled in 1984. And shortly thereafter, I don't know what possessed me. But shortly thereafter, I called and made a lunch date with Mary Lawrence, the director of the Jewish Children's Bureau. We had lunch downtown.

And she, too, had sort of kept tabs on me because she orchestrated the adoptions of my brother and sister as well as me. And she said, well, tell me what's going on in your life. And how's your German family?

And I said, mm, well, I don't have contact with them. Well, why not, or when are you going to call them? And I said, well. Anyway, and so we got on to other subjects. So after thinking about that for maybe six months, I picked up the phone.

I'd had a New Year's card from my sister Gertrude that I'd had for 10 years or so. I saw a phone number on the back of the envelope. And I said, OK, and I made a phone call. So I had a phone number, which meant that I had made a phone call 10 years before, probably, and there was no answer.

So this time would be about a year or two after my accident. I saw that card, picked up the phone, and made a phone call and at about lunchtime. I remember this very clearly. And somebody answered the phone and said hello. And I said, [INAUDIBLE]?

And she said, she just [GASPS]. And the first words out of her mouth were, why now? And I said-- this is my sister Gertrude. And I said to her, well, I tried to call you 10 years ago, but there was no answer.

[LAUGHTER]

And she said, do you mean if I hadn't picked up the phone now, it would be another 10 years? And I said, yeah. So I mean, she was in such shock, immediately called my brother, who called me. And he drove to Chicago, I think, two days later. I had not seen him now since 1946.

So this is like 40 years.

40 years.

He and I--

Oh, my gosh.

--created a bond that was really quite deep and profound. And unfortunately, he just passed away two weeks ago. So sort of what the whole family saga turns into was that they would say that, after wandering in the desert for 40 years, I

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came back. And we had a family reunion after-- a 40th reunion. And then 10 years later, at my home, we had a 50th anniversary party of coming to America, so that would be 1996.

Wow.

And so we've maintained a very good--

Are they part of your life now?

Yes.

Are they part of your life now?

Yes, again, the two most important people, Gertrude and Alfons have been more a part of my life than the others just because they're just a closer bond. You know, you're not going to be equal with every member of your family. But Alf, I would travel to DC to see him. He would come here. He would have meetings and--

Were your adoptive parents still alive when you reconnected?

Yes, yes, they were. And one time, he was in town. And there was a party at my aunt and uncle's house, my American aunt and uncle's. And I said, can Alfons come with me. Well, of course.

So he met my parents. And he asked my father, Joshua Spiegel, if he could talk with him privately. They went down to the basement. And afterwards, I asked my father, I said, what did Alfons say to you?

And he said, he thanked me. He thanked me for giving you a life, for providing you with a home, and opportunities, and establishing a family. And I mean, here was my brother, who had his own family, who was such a mensch as to go up to my father and thank him for being my father.

Wow.

Yeah, that perhaps gives you a tiny insight into the kind of man that my brother was, a man who was a brilliant physicist, had a deep sense of history, who was very German, loved music and literature, had almost gone to the University of Chicago because he was offered a scholarship, but because of his interest in science and math decided to go to the Illinois Institute of Technology and become a physicist. He and I would have long talks. And he was so sorry in his later years that he didn't take up the offer of going to University of Chicago and learning many, much more of the humanities.

But he is a man who married outside his Jewish faith, fell in love, raised a family, did not really practice his Judaism for many years. The children were raised Catholic. But I believe felt a disconnect with his wife and children because of not only the religious differences but the cultural differences.

Of all of us, I mean, I'm very Americanized. Gertrude is pretty much Americanized. Alfons never was. He was 18 when he came here, so remained very German.

European, very European.

Very European, very European, and yet tremendous loyalty and love for his family, he lived in Gaithersburg, Maryland. He got his degree here in Chicago, moved to Toronto for his postdoctoral work, then moved with his family to New York for a number of years, and then to DC to work for the government, the National Institute of-- National Bureau of Standards, now called NIST, for many years, did a lot of research into physics and Raman spectroscopy in particular, but in a different way had many of the same conflicts that I had.

Really? Really?

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As I'm thinking about it now, my conflicts were not over religion, but over two different worlds, the German world and an American world, a German family and an American family. His conflicts were more over a German heritage.

Jewish German heritage or German heritage?

You know, I mean, German Jews consider themselves German. So it's not-- there's a combination of a German heritage and a German Jewish heritage. It's a little hard to explain unless you're there.

So I mean, his eldest son, he named Karl, K-A-R-L, who, in his adulthood, became and is a Lutheran minister. The family moved away from Catholicism and became Episcopalian. But then Karl became a Lutheran minister.

So there are these conflicts of dual loyalties. I mean, Alfons is fluent in German, knew a lot of German songs, steeped himself in the poetry of Goethe and Rilke and Schubert, and felt that there was nothing better than a German education because it was the Germans who really implemented a higher education, very proud of that, and yet was denied a good part of his own education because he was Jewish.

So these conflicts and the conflict in his own marriage-- and sadly, we would talk-- I mean, he did not practice any religion of any kind for many years. And about 10 years ago-- and I would talk to him about that. I mean, I don't consider myself a religious Jew, but more of a cultural Jew. But I would-- certainly, I went to religious school and became confirmed because girls were not bat mitzvah when I was growing up. My children have been raised in a Jewish home.

But it wasn't until 10 years ago that Alfons returned to his Jewish roots and began to go to the synagogue, and not only began to go to synagogue, but really immersed himself and steeped himself in Jewish tradition. And we've recently had some bad family feelings because he--

Can we cut for a second?

Wow, [INAUDIBLE]. Anytime.

When I hear you speak about Alfons and about Gertrude and reconnecting to your family of origin, did you ever feel anger at your adoptive parents for the fact that they cut them off?

You know, that's an interesting question. I, actually, there was a time when I felt anger towards my birth father because he gave up his rights to me. And I said to myself, how could he do this? He disowned me. And then I would have to talk to myself and say, he did this for my benefit. Number one, he did not think he was ever going to get to the United States.

Is that the case?

That is the case. I believe that is the case. Now, he signed those rights away in 1946 so that I could be adopted, or maybe it was '47. At which point, I'm not sure exactly when, but he remarried. He had a stepdaughter. And together, he and his wife had a son. That's my half-brother Harry.

Have you met him?

Oh, yes, yes, Harry, and my stepsister is Gitta, Brigitta, so Gitta. And she and I are about six months apart in age, yes. And they're lovely people. So I have met them a number of times.

When I had, at my home, the 50th anniversary party, of course, they were included, Harry and his wife, and Gitta and her husband. And I've met Gitta and her husband's children. So initially, I felt anger towards my father Alexander. But then I would say, no, he did this because he wanted you, Ginger, to have a life.

Now, did your siblings-- did you ever talk about this with your siblings? And did they ever fill in any information?

They had a lot of anger towards my adoptive parents, absolutely. I would try to explain-- in fact, I think I still have letters that we exchanged where I was explaining to them why my parents did what they did. They didn't do it because out of dislike of them.

They did it because they felt this would be in my best interest. And they were advised to do it by professionals. So they thought that this would be in my best interest. But there was a lot of anger, yes, and perhaps some resentment. But I think we're beyond that.

Yeah, that was going to be my next question.

--and past that.

Has it been put to rest?

Yes, oh, yes, it's definitely been put to rest. So everything is fine. I think maybe sometimes I have felt some ambivalence toward my adoptive parents not anger. But I'm not a person who feels a lot of anger or admits to a lot of anger. It's a little-- it goes a little more underground with me.

And I never felt unhappy or questioned why they did what they did as I didn't think that there were ulterior motives. I knew that what they did was out of concern for me. I did discuss, after my sister Judy had come to see me before she moved to Lawrence, and told me the stories of sitting around the table with the family that, number one, my father and his new family had come to the States, which I had not known, and that when they would occasionally get together, they would say how nice it was, how wonderful it was that all the family were together except for mama and Bela. Well, that did a guilt trip on me that was pretty profound.

I do remember talking to my father, and kind of feeling him out, and asking him if he thought I should contact my German father. And he said-- because I wanted to find-- when I say I was feeling him out, I wanted to know or get a feeling of whether he would feel that I didn't care for him or if it would hurt him if I contacted my German father. And he said to me-- he's a very wise man-- he said, probably, no, he said, if you contact him, you should do it with the knowledge that you will continue a relationship with him. Don't do it out of curiosity and then never see him again. That would be cruel.

That's very kind.

It would not be right for you to do that. If you make a connection with him, you need to follow through on that connection with your father and with your siblings. He said, my advice to you would be to not do it because you'll be opening up a can of worms.

You have your own family. You have your husband. You have one or two-- I don't remember how many children I had at that point. You have this whole Western, Americanized family. It's a lot for you to take on.

I read into that, that he would be hurt. So I never did, until after I became disabled and decided I needed to look at my life.

And Mary Lawrence gave you permission.

What?

Mary Lawrence gave you permission.

Mary Lawrence not only gave me permission, she encouraged and almost chided me.

Said, why haven't you? Yeah.

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Why haven't you? What's the matter with you? And yes, and that made me examine myself a little bit more and say, stand up, and do what's right. You need to connect with them.

But in terms of my American father, my mother had already given me permission. But I needed to hear something from my father because my German mother was gone. So she would not be threatened.

I was concerned that my father would be threatened. So we each bring so much to any conversation, a lot of internal feelings that aren't expressed. Once he met my brother, not once, but when he met my brother, I think he was overwhelmed by my brother's generosity and by their connecting with each other.

Now, my German father died in 1970, 1969 or 1970. I did have a lot of guilt feelings about never seeing him again. I mean, I didn't know at the time that he had died. But later, I had some guilt feelings. But I think I dealt with them or overcame some of them by reconnecting, in particular, with Alfons and having this warm, loving relationship with him, a highly intelligent, highly sensitive man, who had a lot of warmth and a lot of love to share.

Clearly, clearly, that he would have still felt this almost primal responsibility for his youngest sister, even when he hadn't-- when he had been torn away from her, to still have that feeling and to be thankful for what other people did for you.

Yes, and I mean, he never chided me for, why haven't you kept contact with us? He embraced me wholeheartedly and as though I was the long lost--

Sheep?

--sibling in the family. And he was able-- we were able to open up to one another very nicely.

As a side note, none of your other siblings had this kind of situation. In all of the other places they were fostered or adopted, the contact to one another was not a--

They never lost contact with each other, no. It was because they weren't adopted. It was only the process of adoption, I think, that kept us from each other.

And a lot of that might have been my doing as well because I wanted this new family, which turned out to get bigger and bigger, and cousins here, and cousins in Cleveland, and cousins in Canada. My American father was Canadian originally. So we all do what's in our own best interest--

Hopefully.

--at the time, yes. Now, my sister Judy was offered adoption. And she said no. So maybe her ties were-- she was older than I. But maybe her ties were stronger than mine. Maybe I was a little more selfish or a little more thinking of what's going to work, what's going to work for me.

You're a little girl.

It doesn't matter.

Yeah, yeah, and you're a little girl.

What?

You were a little girl.

I was a little--

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When you were asked, do you want to maybe stay here--

Well, she was a little girl too, but she was a little bit older. But it doesn't matter. We have good relationships now. And certainly, there's an interesting thing, I think, as a very tiny girl, I probably was a little bit afraid of my German father. I mean, he was big and tall. I don't think-- I don't know how big and tall he was, but you're--

Yeah, you were always looking up.

You feel like you're looking up to God there. And so I was a little bit afraid of him. And yet I mentioned that he protected me. I was never afraid of Alfons. He was not-- to me, he was never an intimidating figure.

I think, to some of my other siblings, he was a little bit. Very bright, very, in some ways, he could be authoritarian . And so when I came back into the picture, it was sort of this big love fest, rather than maybe seeing all of the realities that are out there. But I mean, we all had strong feelings for him. But they were different.

The siblings never held it against you that you-- your other siblings never held it against you? Or did they-- was there any resentment why you had not gotten in contact?

They never held it against me. Well, I think there was some resentment. I was given opportunities they were not given. I stepped away from the family. Whether by choice or not, the result was I did step away.

I mean, I was away from the family. Certainly, once I was an adult, once I was 20 or 25, I could have reconnected with them, and I didn't. I did not reconnect with them until I was in my 40s. Why not?

So yes, I think there have been some feelings of, why didn't you? But again, at this point, that's in the past. We've dealt with it. I've explained my positions. They've explained their positions. And we don't--

How do your children look at this?

Well, the first thing they said when I told them that I had reconnected, and I told-- and they said, well, how many-- I mean, over the years, they knew something. But my youngest daughter, who is herself now, I think, 45 or so, so when this happened 30 some odd years ago, and I told, and she said, well, how many are there? And I told her how many cousins there were. And she said, you mean I have 23 instant first cousins? And I said, yeah, (LAUGHS) 23.

Wow, wow.

Right, they've each handled it in their own way.

And tell me-- I think we're coming close to the end of our interview. What would you say to others? What would you say to others about this destiny that your family has had?

What would I say?

To other people, to people like me who are strangers, your destiny clearly is born from the circumstances of World War II, this impartial horrible thing, and in particular, the Holocaust. What would you say to people about this destiny? What would you want them to understand?

I think I would want-- I can speak both from a specific and a more global perspective. In the larger sense, I would want people to know and to understand that we're all a common humanity, that unfortunately there is some evil that exists in the world, but that most people want what's best not only for themselves but for others. I would want people to offer, to feel and to offer compassion for those that are not like them.

I have never been able to understand why the Holocaust had to happen. But I would never blame the next generations

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that came after the perpetrators of that unspeakable evil and horror. I do not blame them.

I think the experiences that we all go through in our own way, while the Holocaust is a very unique story, there are other genocides that happen in this world. And there are millions of other survivors of those genocides. And we try our best to get through life. And that's all, that's really all we can do, so besides trying to get through life and offer compassion to others, offer not only compassion, but acceptance, and love, and understanding, and to not turn away from others.

I am sorry that I did not find my German family sooner than I did. But I am thankful and grateful that not only did I find them or reach out to them-- I always knew where they were. And they always knew where I was-- but that they embraced me and accepted me.

And in general, besides that horrible, horrible time that, yes, I experienced directly, but I was so young that it didn't affect me the way it affected my older siblings, that I've been given opportunities and have had a life that's to be envied. It has been and continues to be a wonderful life. I don't think I can really say more than that.

I think that's a wonderful note, a wonderful note for us to come to the end of our interview.

Yeah, I also think it's important that we keep the memories alive, that we never forget. And I am profoundly grateful to Elie Wiesel as being an instrumental figure in establishing the Holocaust Museum because there are still Holocaust deniers out there throughout the world. And one of the problems with denying the Holocaust is that that will also mean denying other atrocities that occur. And we can't let that happen.

So for the museum to be a repository of artifacts and documents and being a place where we can learn about history and about the unspeakable horrors and the unbelievable kindnesses of not only those who-- the people that adopted me, but the people in Germany who, knowing that we were Germans trying to hide, did not turn us in. They protected us. They found food for us. They gave us a place to hide. So there are good people in the world, no matter their culture, no matter their teaching, no matter their upbringing.

Thank you. Thank you, Ginger.

Thank you.

And I will say, this then concludes the United States Holocaust-- this then concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Ginger Lane on September 28, 2016, in Chicago, Illinois. Thanks again.

Thank you.

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