

OK. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Gertrude Leiser on February 26, 2017 in Boca Raton, Florida. Thank you very much Mrs. Leiser for agreeing to speak with us today, for agreeing to share your story, and let us know of how the war and the Holocaust impacted your life.

You're very welcome.

I'm going to start our interview with the most basic questions. And from there, we'll paint a picture with your words to be able to tell your story. So the very first question I have is; can you tell me what was the date of your birth?

January 3, 1930.

January 3, 1930.

Correct.

And what was your name at birth?

What was my what?

What was your name when you were born?

Gertrude Krause.

Gertrude Krause.

Krause.

And where were you born?

Vienna, Austria.

OK. Do you have brothers and sisters?

I have a sister who's still alive. And I had a brother who died.

Can you tell me their names?

My brother was the older one. His name was Leo Krause.

Leo Krause?

Correct. And my sister's name is Edith Krause.

Edith Krause. About what year was Leo born?

He must have been born around 1922. I'm not sure. OK, he was born in 1921-- I heard in the background. Yeah. OK.

OK.

And your sister was born when?

My sister is four years older than I am. So she must have been born 1925.

1925. All right. And tell me your parents' names.

My mother's name was Pearl.

OK. And her maiden name?

Shifter was her maiden name. Is that what you want?

Yeah. OK.

And my father's name was Max Krause.

Can you tell me; was your family an old Viennese family for generations or had they come from somewhere else?

My parents came from Poland.

Do you know what part of Poland?

Stanislau, as far as I know.

Stanislau. Did you still have relatives in that part of the world in Stanislau?

I think they were all killed.

That's during the war. But when you were born, were there still relatives of the family that lived in Stanislau?

Yes, there was an uncle that lived in Austria.

OK.

A cousin; a son of his that I remember. Other than that, I don't remember any other relatives in Austria.

And in Poland?

I never met them. I never went to Poland. I was the youngest of the three and I never get to go there.

OK. That was one of my questions. So thank you. You answered that. So your parents were not born in Vienna themselves. They were from somewhere else.

Correct.

OK. What language did you speak at home?

German.

OK.

Or Jewish.

So both? You spoke Yiddish and German?

Well, I understood the Jewish. I didn't speak Jewish. But when my parents mentioned certain words and spoke certain words, I understood.

OK.

But I spoke German to them.

OK, OK. And how did your father support your family and your mother?

My father was a traveling salesman.

OK.

But I think before I was born-- at some time in our lifetime in Austria, I think he had two stores.

Mm-hmm.

I really don't remember because I don't think I was born yet when he had that business. But he was a traveling salesman.

OK, can we cut for a minute? All right. So your father, you say, was a traveling salesman and you think he had two stores when he was in Vienna?

Correct.

Do you know what he was selling when he was on the road?

I think it was basically paper goods. I'm not sure. No, stationary I would call it.

OK. From his own business or from somebody else's?

I think he worked for somebody else as a salesman.

OK. And your mom? Was she--

My mom was a homemaker.

All right. What about your parents' education? Did your father finish high school, or college, or something?

I couldn't answer that.

All right.

I'm not sure.

Same with your mom?

I know my mother did not finish high school, well, school in Poland.

When they spoke with one another, your parents, would they speak in Yiddish or in German?

German.

In German, OK. Would you say they were assimilated Jews or not? Assimilated in the sense of, because they spoke German, did they want to assimilate into Austrian society?

I would say yes.

OK. Were they very religious?

Yes, to a point. My mother was kosher.

OK.

And we celebrated all the Jewish holidays. And, in fact, on Saturday, we didn't put on the lights. So my mother was religious.

OK. So you observed?

Yes.

OK. Can you tell me what your earliest memories would be?

My earliest memories would be; when we went on vacation, my father used to rent a convertible limousine, which is a lot of fun for us.

Of course.

I can remember going to school, which, of course, was interrupted when Hitler came in.

OK, we'll talk about that.

I remember our apartment.

Oh, I want to talk about that. OK.

Basically, yes, I do remember some of it.

All right.

I remember the old-fashioned way we had to take a bath.

Tell me about that.

We had a bath tub, I think, under the table.

In the kitchen?

In the kitchen that my mother used to take out. And she had to heat the water.

OK.

And we used to take a bath in the kitchen.

That is old-fashioned, isn't it?

I don't remember taking a bath, but that's what I remember that that's how it worked.

And-- OK, so let me ask some of the questions I usually ask about the surroundings. We have to cut. OK. So I'd like to learn a little bit about your apartment, where you lived, or your house, your circumstances.

Well, we lived in an apartment house.

OK.

I think it was on the second or third floor. I'm not sure.

OK.

We had a tremendous bedroom.

How many rooms? How many rooms did you have?

I would call it three rooms; a bedroom, a dining room, and a kitchen.

OK. And for five people?

For five people. We all slept in-- no, four of us slept in the bedroom. My brother slept in the dining room.

A-ha. So your sister and yourself were in the same bedroom as your parents and your brother separately.

Right.

OK. And what part of Vienna was the apartment in?

It was close to the Danube, as far as I remember.

Was it city center or was it sort of a residential area? Do you remember the address?

[SPEAKING GERMAN]

[SPEAKING GERMAN] So like Denmark. [SPEAKING GERMAN]

Daniskas is the street. And the six is the number of the building.

OK. Thank you. And was it a building that was built, let's say, in the 19th century, like so many apartment buildings were in old European cities?

I would think so.

Out of stone?

I think so.

OK. And did it have indoor plumbing?

Indoor what?

Plumbing.

No. I don't believe so because the bathroom was on the outside of the hallway. And like I said before, the water had to be heated.

Where did you get the water from?

I don't know.

OK.

I don't know maybe my mother had a sink in the house. I don't remember. She must have had something to get the water.

OK. And did you have electricity?

Yes.

OK. And how was the house heated?

How was the what?

House heated. What kind of heat did you have? How did you get heat?

We had a tremendous stove in the bedroom made out of tile.

Oh, one of those tile stoves so it probably had coal. Is that right? It was heated by coal?

And in the kitchen, we had a regular, old-fashioned stove. A black stove.

Did your family have a radio?

I believe we had a radio. Yes.

And what about a telephone?

Telephone?

Yeah.

No.

OK.

Would you say that your parents were well-to-do?

No, but we were comfortable. We weren't lacking anything. My mother was a wonderful homemaker. We always had good cooking, good meals.

Did she have help? Or did she do this all by herself?

Yes, she did have help. I think I had a nanny.

OK.

I don't know about my sister, because she was the older one. But I do know I had a nanny.

Do you remember her name?

I think her name was Rosa.

Was she Jewish?

Or Rose or something like that.

Was she a Jewish girl or was she a Gentile girl?

Did you ask me if she was Jewish?

Yeah.

No. I believe she was Catholic because she used to take me to church.

Did she?

When I was little. Yeah.

Do you have any impressions or memories of going to church with her?

No, because I was an infant. I was told by my sister that she used to put on a white coat on me, some kind of like an angel, and she used to take me to church with her.

Well, she had to take care of you. And she probably wanted to go to church. And this is a way of combining the two.

I imagine so.

Yeah. Well, did you live in a Jewish neighborhood?

I think it was a mixed neighborhood.

OK. Do you remember, Vienna, I understand, was divided into different areas called bezirk. Do you remember which bezirk--

Yeah, the 20th.

The 20th. OK. What did your street look like? Did it have apartment building after apartment building?

Yes. It was apartment buildings across the street. There was, I remember, there was a grocery store across the street. And it was basically apartment houses.

OK. And your-- did your father have an automobile?

No.

OK, so when you went on vacations in that limousine--

He used to rent. Yeah.

He used to. Where would you go on vacation?

What is it? Saurbrunn.

Saurbrunn?

Yeah.

OK. I'm not familiar with that area.

And we had a neighbor downstairs that used to take us to her house in the country that was called Forglow.

How do you spell that? Forglow?

That's how I remember it. And we went to a different place, I don't remember, which was mountains. I don't remember the name. My sister would probably know the name of that.

We'll ask her. We'll ask her.

But we did go on vacation every summer as long as things were good.

Well, that speaks to a comfortable lifestyle.

Yeah, yeah. We were comfortable.

And tell me a little bit about your parents personalities. What was your mother like? Was she an outgoing person? Was she a shy person?

No. My mother was friendly. She was sociable. And I think she was very caring as far as her family was concerned.

OK.

My father, of course, was the breadwinner. He was an excellent father. He was a giving father. And I feel that I had gotten a lot of love from my parents. Being the youngest one, of course, I was babied and overprotected.

And who did the overprotecting?

Who did the overprotecting? I think my brother did a lot of overprotecting.

Leo?

Leo. And my sister took care of me when we had to leave Austria. So, I guess, everybody in my family.

OK, you were truly the baby of the family.

Correct. I was very lucky.

OK. But about personality, I want to go back there. Your own father, was he also an outgoing kind of person?

Yes, yes. He was very liked by outsiders. Yeah. I would say yes.

OK. And as far as observant, they were observant of traditions.

Correct.

Did you tell me you kept a kosher home? Your mother kept a kosher home, or not always?

Yes, my mother kept a kosher home.

OK. Did you play with some of the neighborhood kids as you were growing up?

It's very funny that you ask that because we had a neighbor who had a little girl. I think she was a year or two younger

than myself. And that was my friend right next door. Her name was Susie.

Susie? OK. And was she your best friend?

Was she my best friend? I guess so. Yeah.

OK. Did you play with her more often than, let's say, with some kids at school?

Oh, no. Kids from school? Well, I really, I think I only went up to the third grade if I'm not mistaken. I really didn't have a chance to make friends in school because of what occurred with the Hitler situation. And the Nazis; the kids became Nazis. And it wasn't that easy to make friends in school.

We'll come to those parts.

OK.

Right now; what do you remember about school before all of those changes happened?

The what?

What do you remember about school before all those changes?

I really don't remember much. I know that when all this occurred with Hitler, I had to change schools. I had to go to a Jewish school.

OK. Let's step back a little bit. Was your school a public school-- the first one that you went to?

Yeah.

And what year, or let's say, how old were you when you started school?

I guess, six-years-old.

OK, so like in 1936 or 1937; something like that.

Well, I left Austria in 1939. So, yeah, between those couple of years.

OK and before the changes happened, do you remember some of your teachers?

Oh yes, I do remember a teacher.

OK.

She was very strict.

Do you remember her name?

I hated her. And, for some reason or other, when kids didn't behave, they used to hit you, you know, on the hands.

They had that habit.

So she was one of those unpleasant teachers.

OK.

You know.

You had a strict teacher you said.

It's very pleasant to do this with you.

Thank you.

So are we rolling? OK. So tell me about that teacher; the strict one. Was she sort of like the homeroom teacher at school? Do you remember her name?

I think she was a math teacher.

OK.

And her name was something with a D. I'm not a hundred percent.

OK.

But she was an old hag.

And in those-- did you walk to school or?

Yes, I walked.

Do you remember the name of the school?

No.

OK. And you were a little girl in the 30s. How much of what was going on in the outside world did you kind of understand? How much was shared with you of all these political things?

Are you talking about when the Nazis took over?

Before.

Before?

Yeah. Did that impact your life at all?

Well, like I said, we had a nice home. We went on vacations.

Did you ever feel like there was anti-Semitism? Did you ever feel like anyone picked on you because you were Jewish?

Yes.

Even beforehand?

I'm sorry?

Even before all those changes?

Yeah, I would think so.

OK. Can you remember any of those incidents?

Well, are we going into the Holocaust now? I remember the Kristallnacht.

OK.

My mother was standing-- do you want me to speak about that?

Well. Thank you for asking the question. If that's not the very first things that happened, then let's wait for a minute.

Well, it was difficult to walk in the street because if there were Nazi's little kids walking around with the swastika, they would try to grab you or, hit you, or anything that would hurt you.

OK. Did you walk on the streets by yourself? Or did someone accompany you?

The only way I walked through the street by myself was when I went to school. But apparently, I don't remember, the school was not that far because I remember my mother used to look out the window and I used to wave to her. That I remember.

OK. And did anyone explain to you at home what was going on; either your older sister, or brother, or your parents? I didn't need an explanation because I was going through it myself.

Again, my father was in danger.

Did he lose his job?

I'm sorry?

Did he lose his job?

Did he lose his job? I don't know. I don't think so.

OK.

My brother was in danger. He was 16 years old. We were afraid that he would be taken into concentration camp. And they were also not considerate of women. So there was a lot of anxiety. Yes, I could feel it. And it was scary. I was, you know, I was, what, seven, eight-years-old when all this started.

Do you remember how life changed when there was the Anschluss; when Germany annexed Austria? Do you remember how it looked outside, how it was in the streets?

No. Honestly speaking; no.

OK. That's all right. That's perfectly fine. Were there marches by supporters of the Nazis in the streets?

I would think so.

But none in your street, none in your neighborhood?

There probably were, but I--

You didn't remember. I didn't personally--

See It.

Right.

OK. What about neighbors?

We had Nazis for neighbors.

You did?

Which my sister told me very recently. And my parents; they wanted my parents' apartment. So my parents had to move, give up the apartment, and; I don't know whether it was them or someone else that came in; and picked out all the things that they wanted that were in the apartment. So, you know, all of a sudden your belongings were not yours anymore.

Yeah. Yeah. Were you witness to this? Did you see them do this?

Was I witness to this? No, because my sister and I were in France already when this happened.

Ah, I see. OK.

But they were definitely Nazis.

OK.

We had neighbors downstairs right below us who were Nazis. But they were very friendly with us. They protected my father and my brother when they had to. And when I was a little girl, I used to be downstairs playing. And they had a [SPEAKING GERMAN] Do you speak German?

A little bit, yes.

A [SPEAKING GERMAN]

Well, that sounds like a very naughty word.

It was like a little figurine. And I remember playing with it. They used to let me play with it.

[SPEAKING GERMAN]

And every Christmas, they never celebrated without us.

Really?

Christmas night, we used to go downstairs. They had a piano. We used to sing, and they used to light the Christmas tree with us.

Well, that's nice.

Yeah. It was very nice. They were crazy about my father.

What was their name?

One of them was Frieda.

OK.

And the one that was in love with my father was Hertha.

Hertha.

And their last name was Eisenhower.

Eisenhower?

Oh, and there was a son; Otto.

Otto?

Right.

And you say, and yet they were Nazis themselves?

They were Nazis, but they couldn't be better people to us than our own family.

Were there other Jewish families in your building?

Well, of course my girl friend's parents were Jewish.

Rosa's parents?

Susie's parents.

Oh, Susie's parents.

Other than that, I really don't know. I'm sure it was a mixed building.

OK. That's interesting that on one, you know, you had neighbors on the one side who wanted your parents' apartment--

Correct.

--and other neighbors; they belong to the same party. They're also that, but they're friendly.

Yeah, they were very protective over us.

OK.

How did life change in your home, inside your home when--

Well, I think my mother was very scared. I know that she used to be at the window a lot; looking to see what was going on. And I know I used to be right next to her holding on to her because I was afraid.

Yeah.

I don't remember whether my father lost his job or what happened. But, basically, there was fear--

Did his manner change? Was he also more worried, or nervous, or did his behavior change is what I'm asking.

Were they what?

Did your father's behavior change with all of the political changes?

Well, I don't know if he changed towards us, but I'm sure that there was anxiety.

But did you see that, that anxiety?

Somewhat. Not that bad, but yeah.

Well, I mean, I don't want to push you towards that, but it's interesting; one of the reasons I ask about this is that younger children; parents usually try to protect them-- so not to show these things.

Oh, definitely.

So I'm wondering just how much they kept it from you.

Well, by protecting us, they sent us away.

Tell me how that happened.

Well, my father as far as my sister told me my father found out that they had children's transport to England.

Kindertransport?

Kindertransports, correct. And, apparently, the one to England was filled up so he couldn't sign us up. But he did find a children's transport to France.

OK.

And he asked my sister if she wanted to go.

OK.

And my sister was smart enough to say yes; that she wanted to go. So my father, of course, did what he had to do. And he told her too that we were both going and to take care of me. And that's how I left Austria at the age of nine.

OK. And this was after Kristallnacht, or before?

After what?

Kristallnacht. Kristallnacht; was this-- did you leave before Kristallnacht or after?

I think it was before.

OK. So do you remember when you left, like what month it might have been?

I think it was March.

OK. '39?

March '39. Correct.

OK.

I remember being taken to the train by my parents. I remember saying goodbye to them--

OK.

--not knowing whether I'd ever see them again. But I was lucky to have my sister because she did take good care of me.

Why was your brother not going along with you?

My brother was sent to America. My father had a sister-in-law here; his brother's wife; who was very comfortable financially. So they sent papers. And he came down to-- I mean, they sent papers and he was able to leave Austria in time. He was 16. And he stayed with them in America.

Did he leave before you and your sister did?

Yes.

OK.

Yes.

So this sounds like your parents made a really concerted effort to get all the kids out.

Right. And apparently they were successful.

Yeah. Your school; I want to step back. Before we talk about your journey out of Austria, you said that when the Nazis took over and Austria was annexed that you had to change schools. What was the new school like? Was that also a public school?

I don't remember.

You don't remember.

All I know is that I think it was strictly for the Jewish children. But I don't remember what the school was like because I wasn't there long enough.

OK. OK. And let's go back to the train station. You remember saying goodbye to your parents at the train station?

Yes.

You remember-- you were a child. So it's understandable that you would worry, you know, do you see them again. Everybody would worry, whether they're a child or not.

Right.

What happened after that? When the train pulls out, where did it go?

Where did I go?

Where did you go with your sister?

Well, the train took us to Paris to a hospital that was named after a Baron Rothschild.

Were you the only ones on that train going to that hospital?

I don't know.

Were there more children?

I don't know how the other children got there.

OK.

But that's where we ended up when we first left Austria.

OK.

And we stayed there about a week.

OK.

And then Baron Rothschild donated a castle for, I think, about 100 children. And that's where we went from the hospital.

OK, so this would have been in March '39--

This is in my-- right. March '39; correct.

And you end up in this castle that becomes a hospital.

Well, it became a home for all the children that were there that were able to get out.

And were most of these children from Vienna, or most of these children from Austria?

I think they were from Vienna, they were from Berlin, Germany. It was a mixture.

And can you paint a picture of what that castle looked like?

It was beautiful.

Yeah?

It's a real castle. They had the kitchen downstairs like an entrance from the outside. It was beautiful and comfortable. And my sister told me; there were 27 showers in the basement.

Oh, my goodness.

Which I don't remember. She just told me recently.

And did it-- was it like two stories, three stories? Did it have ballrooms and staircases?

I think it had about two or three stories. It had a big dining room. It must have had a playroom or something. It had a tremendous amount of ground.

OK. Where did you sleep?

I'm sorry?

Where did you sleep; the children?

I slept with younger children more my age. My sister, being older, I guess, she had a room with children her age.

Were there many children to one room?

I don't know how many were in my room because I was the youngest one. There was one little girl younger than I. And I was next to her so I don't know.

OK. Well, I wonder whether it was like a dormitory style, or you more or less had two or three kids per bedroom. I'm trying to get a sense of how--

I don't think my sister had more than two than herself and someone else. I'm not sure.

OK. OK. What kind of activities?

Activities; we had to get up in the morning and exercise.

OK.

I think we had to dig ditches. I forgot what they call it when the planes come over and they bomb, you jump into it.

Right.

So we were doing that. We had school in the castle.

OK.

I learned French, which was very nice.

Yeah?

Which I forgot when I came to America. It was a normal situation. And then, of course, we looked forward to the mail from my parents.

Well, that was one of my questions.

And there was relaxation on the grounds which were beautiful.

Did you ever see Baron Rothschild?

I'm sorry?

Did you ever see Baron Rothschild?

Ah, yes we visited them in New York when we came to America. They once invited us, so few of us were there.

But they weren't at the castle?

No, I never met them at the castle.

All right. And who were the people who were taking care of you?

I guess people that were willing to do that or people that wanted to leave Austria.

But were they sponsored by any organization that you knew of or--

I think so.

OK, OK. Do you remember the place where this castle was located; what part of France, and what the name of the, let's say, the most--

The castle was called Leggett.

Leggett?

Correct. And I don't know what part of Paris it was in, but it was in Paris.

It was in Paris?

Yeah.

OK. So it wasn't out in the countryside?

No, I don't know.

OK.

I really don't know. When you speak to my sister, maybe she'll tell you.

OK. Did you ever venture outside of the castle grounds?

I don't think so. I don't remember going out of the castle.

OK.

I don't think they wanted us out of the castle.

OK.

Because when the Germans came in, they didn't want us to speak German, strictly French.

So you were there for how long in this place?

I think we were in the castle about a year, a year and a half. And you were there when Germany occupied France?

Yes.

What was that like? Did they come to the castle?

Well, yeah, there was a lot of tension, a lot of anxiety. And we were told not to speak German.

And did they come-- did the soldiers come to the castle?

No.

Did any official kind of person visit the castle that you remember?

No.

And how did your lives change after the German occupation, the Nazi occupation in France?

How did it change? We had to leave the castle.

Mm-hmm.

We had to escape to the mountains without clothing. We had to leave everything in the castle.

So this was very, very fast. Was this a very fast evacuation?

I really can't answer that.

That's OK.

But I know we had to leave the castle and leave all our belongings.

OK.

And, of course, there was a winter in the mountains. And we didn't have warm clothing.

Where did you live in the mountains?

I don't know. I think they took us to a hotel.

OK.

I understand we showered once a month, which I just found out. I didn't know that either. We had no warm clothing which I have to give my sister credit for. She took care of me to make sure that I was kept warm and that I didn't get frostbite. I really don't remember very much, but I do remember the sirens going off when German planes came around. We had to run into the basement.

So this was probably in the free part of France, the part that wasn't occupied by Germany yet? You don't know.

I guess not.

You don't know. OK. Now, tell me; the letters that you got from your parents, did you get much correspondence two or three times, or did it come a lot? Did they write to you a lot?

You talking about mail?

Mail.

We got mail from my parents. They described America to us because, in the interim, while we were in France, they were able to come to this country.

So they were able to get out?

They were able to get out, right.

Oh. I see.

I think about a year after we were gone.

So in 1940--

They were allowed to get out.

That's pretty late.

They got out in 1940.

OK. But they experienced Kristallnacht?

Yes.

OK. So what you know about Kristallnacht for your family, they are things that you learned from them?

Yes.

OK. Let's step back and talk about that a little bit. What did they tell you about how their lives progressed after you and your sister left?

Well, they had to leave the apartment.

OK.

They had to find a place to live. So I think they lived with another family.

OK.

And now I do remember; my father lost his job because he worked in the kitchen, I guess, helping out, distributing food, or whatever it was that had to be done. Basically, that's all I know.

And how is it that they were able to leave Austria for the United States?

Well, again, my father had his sister in this country who was able to send him papers. And they were lucky enough to get a-- I don't know what they call it-- a visa or permission to leave Austria. So they left, like I said, I think it was January, 1940.

OK. And this sister; what was her name?

My sister?

No, your aunt. Your father's sister.

Mini.

Mini. And her last name? You don't know?

She must have been either a Krause or a Patridge.

OK. And where did they live?

My aunt lived on the East Side of New York.

So that's where your parents went? To the East Side of New York?

No, my parents went to Brooklyn. My father had another sister who had a bakery in Brooklyn. And when they came to this country, she had sold her bakery. And my parents stayed in the apartment that they had lived in.

OK. So it turned out that both your parents and your older brother were in the United States, but you and your sister were still in France. And they must have been very worried about that situation.

Oh, I imagine so, yes. We used to get letters from them.

OK.

And my father used to write me what they're going to call me in this country. And, of course, we were looking forward to, you know.

So from that mountain, how did things develop? How long did you stay there?

I think we must have been there about a year, a year and a half.

That's quite a while. Yeah. And were all the children who had been in the castle with you in that hotel?

Of course. Yeah.

All right. And the same people who had minded you there in the castle, the same ones at the hotel?

Right.

All right. And how did you how did you leave? And when did you leave?

We left in 1941, June 1941.

OK.

I guess my parents were able to get papers for us. We came on a little cargo boat.

Really?

From Lisbon. We went from Paris to Marseilles to Portugal to Lisbon.

And how did you-- this whole trek. Do you--

There were only about, I think, 10 or 15 children that left at the same time. And one of the people that were in charge of us took care of us.

OK. They escorted you all the way to Lisbon?

That's with the boat. That's where we waited for the boat.

OK.

And we slept on the boat right next to the motor, whatever you call it.

The engine.

But we were happy to be on there. And the good side; the captain liked me, so he used to feed me pastries because I looked like a sick. I was undernourished.

OK.

And it took us, I think, about 10 days or two weeks to get here.

The cargo boat; what did it look like? This cargo boat? Do you know what kind of cargo it was carrying?

You'd have to ask my sister. I don't know what they brought over.

All right. Were you the only passengers, the 10 children?

I think so. I think we're the only passengers.

OK. All right. And do you remember arriving in the United States?

Yes.

Can you tell me about that?

I remember-- I don't know where we docked. If we docked in Hoboken or-- I really don't remember. But I do remember looking down from the boat and I saw my mother. And I couldn't speak German to her because I forgot my German. And she didn't understand French.

Oh, my goodness! Oh, my goodness!

That I remember!

How unusual, you know? You wouldn't think that, but yeah.

Yeah.

And do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

No, I don't remember that.

OK.

Maybe it was there. I really don't remember.

OK, but you do remember meeting your mother again.

Yes.

And then you had to find a common language.

I remember what she wore. It's very odd, but I don't remember seeing the Statue of Liberty.

What did your mother wear? What did your mother wear?

She wore a Navy blue dress with red polka dots. And I think she wore a Navy blue hat.

OK.

Was your father with her?

I would think so.

OK. But you don't remember that?

No.

OK. What are your first impressions of the United States?

Well, I'm going to tell you a funny thing. We lived in the neighborhood where there was, I guess, a commercial or an apartment for rent. And it said to let; being T-O dash L-E-T, which means to rent.

Yeah, right.

Not knowing the language, I thought it was a toilet.

All it missed was one letter!

That's the impression of the language. But I was very good. I learned it very fast. And I forgot my French very fast.

OK. So did you then stay in Brooklyn?

Yeah, we lived in Brooklyn for a while. I was put in a lower grade.

OK.

Because I didn't know the language that well. I had to skip my way up to my grade and I was still a year behind.

OK.

My parents sent me to Hebrew school. And I had one-- the public school was across the street. And of course, I went to high school and whatever.

Where in Brooklyn did you live?

It was called Brownsville. Belmont Avenue; 115 Belmont Avenue.

OK.

And after a number of years, my father was doing well enough. We bought a house in East Flatbush. I don't know if you're familiar with the neighborhood, but we moved to East Flatbush.

Well, I've lived in Brooklyn too, but I don't know East Flatbush as a neighborhood. I lived in another part of Brooklyn. What I wanted to ask is this; did he work at that bakery where his sister--

No, no.

What did he do when--

No. My father had gotten a job working with burlap bags because he used to come home with his skin, you know, torn up from the threads or whatever he was working with. And my mother worked very hard in the coat factory.

In a coat factory?

Yeah.

So she worked in the garment trade?

I don't think it was a German place.

Garment.

Oh, garment place. Yeah. I'm sorry.

Yeah. And was this also in Flatbush? I mean, not in Flatbush but in Brooklyn?

That was the first place where we lived.

OK.

Yeah.

And then you moved to East Flatbush you say?

Right. My father bought a house.

OK.

The one family house and we lived there.

And did you go to high school in East Flatbush?

No. I went to-- I started high school in the area that we lived in originally.

OK.

And when we moved to East Flatbush, I had a year left. So I traveled from East Flatbush to the high school where I graduated from.

Were both neighborhoods mixed, or were they Jewish, or how were they?

Well, when we came to this country; that neighborhood was mixed. It was mixed with already-- black people lived across the street. It was very commercial. There were groceries and a butcher. And it wasn't anything to brag about, but it was nice. There was a movie around the corner. And there was a nice street going a little further down with a lot of stores.

OK.

And, of course, East Flatbush was nice.

And was it hard for any member of the family to adjust to the United States?

Not that I know of.

OK.

We were happy to be together.

Were there any family members like extended family members, aunts and uncles, who didn't make it out of Europe?

A lot of them, yeah. My mother's family. My father's-- my father's family some of it were in this country. But my mother's family, they all got killed.

Are they from Poland too? OK.

Yeah.

How did she learn about that?

Well, there was a nephew of hers that, of course, lost his parents. Then there was a nephew that they brought over to this country. My parents brought them over. He was in a some kind of a lost people or a--

Displaced person's camp?

Yeah.

After the war?

Right. So they were able to find him. And they brought him to this country.

OK.

That was my mother's family.

Did you ever go back to Vienna?

No, I would have liked to. But I didn't.

OK.

And after you graduated high school, did you continue living with your parents?

Yeah.

For how long?

Till I got married.

And how did you meet your husband?

That is a long story. I met my husband through his friend.

OK.

His friend went out with my girlfriend Susie.

The same one--

From Austria.

She also came over?

Well, she went to China. There was a ghetto. And when they came to this country, she and her mother, they called my mother because my mother was friendly with her as a neighbor. And she went out. My husband's friend brought them to my house. Now, she made a blind date for me, Susie. And he was not my type. But we went to New York City to pick up my husband, who I didn't know at the time, and it was love instantly.

Really?

Yes. We found out we had the same background.

Also from Vienna?

Right. He came on the same boat as my parents. It's a very nice long story.

How lovely.

Yes.

How lovely.

Yes. It is.

OK. And how many children do you have?

Two.

OK. And who are they? Tell me their names.

I have my daughter who's going to be 57 or 58. I'm not sure. And my son, of course, who is 54.

And their names?

My daughter's name is Sherry.

OK.

My son's name is Bennett.

And as they were growing up, did they ask you much about your life before the war, about Vienna.

My daughter is very much interested in what happened in the Holocaust and her grandparents.

OK.

I don't know about my son; how much interest he has in it.

OK. Well, he's the one who made today happen, you know? He put this together. So I think he does.

Oh, I'm sure that he's interested in our background. But my daughter, really, went into it. And she tried to get information. And she's pretty good with that.

Well, a lot of people didn't speak about what they went through after the war. And some people did. And that's one of the reasons I asked this question.

Well, my husband is a good speaker. So he speaks about it.

All right.

I am more to myself. I don't like to speak about it. I'd like to forget it. Not that I really was tortured that badly, but it wasn't a good experience. It wasn't a good bringing up for me.

What are the parts that are the hardest for you to remember?

Leaving my parents, Kristallnacht when I was scared because I saw my mother; the way she looked and acted that day.

Except that you weren't there. You said you weren't there.

Oh, for Kristallnacht. Yeah, we were there.

Oh, you were there?

For sure. Sure. We lived in Austria.

Oh, I was under the impression you weren't there.

Yeah, that happened in 1938 I think it happened.

Yes.

And we left 1939.

That's right.

So we didn't talk about Kristallnacht at all. I mean, we talked that it happened, but I was under the impression you were gone. So that's my mistake.

That's OK.

Do you remember how it impacted your family, where you were, and so on?

Yes.

Tell me about that.

Well, we, like I said, my mother was at the window all day.

OK.

I don't think she put the lights on at night. She saw the SS collecting men. And I don't know whether there was children or women. She was watching from the window. We were waiting for them to come to our building. And luckily enough, they came-- I think we were one of the last families that they came to to take what they wanted. And we were lucky because they didn't take my father.

Was he in the apartment with you?

I didn't think he was, but my sister said he was in the apartment. And he let them go through the whole place, not that he had any choice. And they took money. They took what they felt they liked. And, like I said, we thank God that they didn't take him into concentration camp or my mother to clean the streets.

Yeah.

So it was a very, very day that cannot be forgotten.

Yeah.

And my sister wrote a beautiful story on that.

OK.

Tell me, did the neighbors downstairs, the good ones; the ones who invited you for Christmas, did they help in--

Yes, I think that my brother and my father were downstairs most of the day.

OK. OK.

If I remember correctly. But I guess, in the evening, when they did come to our house, he was in the apartment.

OK. I think that we've pretty much covered all the territory. Is there anything that you would like to add to what we've spoken about today?

There's a lot to add, but I think that-- No, I think it's fine. I appreciated your questions. They were very nice questions and you made it very easy for me to answer.

Thank you very much.

Thank you.

OK. So I'll say, with that, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Gertrude Leiser on February 26, 2017, in Boca Raton, Florida. Thank you very much.