This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Nora London on April 28-- 29, excuse me, 2017, in Manhattan, New York City. Thank you very, very much for agreeing to speak with us today and to share some of your experiences before the war, during the war, and after the war.

I'm going to start our interview with the most basic questions. And from there, we'll build your story. So the very first question is, can you tell me the date of your birth?

January 8, 1924.

January 8, 1924. And where were you born?

I was born in Berlin, Germany.

And what was your name at birth? Was--

Nora Shapiro.

Nora Shapiro, OK. Can you tell me your father and your mother's names?

My father's name was Jacob Shapiro, and my mother's name was Janna "Jan" Shapiro.

And her maiden name?

Jan, her maiden name was Schiller.

Schiller, S-C-H-I-L-L--

And double-L-E-R.

--E-R, OK. Were both of your parents from Berlin?

No.

Or were they from other places?

They were born in Odessa, Russia.

Your parents were from Odessa, both of them?

Both of them.

How did they end up in Berlin?

Because my father went to Germany first as a-- when he was a very young man to study engineering because Russian Jews were not allowed to go to university under the czars.

So about when did he arrive in Berlin? Do you know?

I don't really know, but it must've been maybe 1905 or 1910.

OK.

He was successful, and he returned to Odessa to get a wife.

And was--

And she complained always because she was forced to marry him.

So it was arranged marriage.

It was an arranged marriage of-- at the time--

[PHONE RINGING]

Let's cut. So you were saying that your parents both were from Odessa, that your mother was also from there. Your father came back to find a wife, found her, and she was not happy about that.

No, she didn't want to leave.

OK.

And she had to go to Berlin with him. She knew German, but she didn't know anybody, and she was 18 years old.

Oh, she was young. She was so young.

And so she told me at-- when she was my age that she was very angry to leave--

What was--

--and very unhappy because she didn't know anybody in Berlin.

Yeah, it is huge. It is a huge change for--

And I know the date because it was 1911.

She came to Berlin in 1911, OK. So did she or he ever tell you about the families they left behind in Odessa?

Yes, a little bit, she did.

Tell me abou--

He didn't. I mean, he was part of a family of eight children. And apparently, his mother died at the end of having the eighth child. And his father came to Germany as well. And he was still alive when I was born, but I was only two years old when he died. So I didn't really know him, but I've seen pictures of him. He was a nice gentleman.

What about the other children?

They were in business. I think he had a wine business-- wine, liquor. And then my mother's parents were apparently also well-off. And she had just one younger brother. And she said her mother was very tough with her. She told me she didn't like her mother when she was 19, that she forced her to leave. You know?

Yeah.

And they had a sort of a warehouse business also. And she did tell me that they were living in a very comfortable apartment in Odessa and that from their window they watched pogroms. But she said their concierge, I guess their housekeeper, said-- told them to stay home and not go out certain dates when there were pogroms. So she knew.

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Yeah, it was unsettled times. And it was Russia where--

It was before the war. It was under the--

Czar.

--czars. On the other hand, I think they had a very good life.

Do you know what happened to her family after the revolution, after the Bolshevik Revolution?

Yeah, I know about her parents, my grandparents. They left Russia. It must've been 1920-- and went to Warsaw. And they caught this Spanish flu.

[GASPS]

There was a-- yeah.

And they went with my uncle. I mean her younger brother. And the two of them died within a week in Warsaw.

Oh, my goodness.

And she went to Warsaw, and they just watched, basically, their funeral. He survived.

OK.

And he was quite young. He was very young, and he went with her to Berlin.

What was his name?

[INAUDIBLE] Simon Begagon.

Simon Begagon?

Yeah, Aronson.

Aronson.

He had a double name. But he used the first name of it for the rest of his life.

Simon Begagon--

Begagon, yeah.

--Aronson. And so what was your mother's maiden name? I think I asked, but I forgot.

Schiller.

Schiller. So how is it that her brother has a different name than she did?

Don't ask. I don't know. I didn't really know. Her maiden name probably was Begagon. On the other hand, I found out about the Schiller because, apparently, he was Austrian. That I found out because, unfortunately, my-- her aunt, who later lived in Paris, died in Auschwitz. And that could be part of the story later.

Yes.

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And the Germans kept very good--

Records.

--records.

And in her-- my daughter looked at all the record. It says that her name was Betty [? Kliatschko ?] Schiller, born Schiller. So if she was-- oh, but if she was born Schiller, I think that was my mother's mother who was born Schiller. But their name was Begagon-Aronson.

OK. So--

It's kind of complicated.

OK, and let's spell Begagon just so that people wouldn't--

B-E-G-A-G-O-N.

OK.

It sounds bizarre, and I have tried to find the origin of the name. And nobody seems to be able to find out.

So her aunt in Paris was actually-- yes, it was her mother's sister--

Yeah.

--who was in Paris.

So she was born Schiller.

Schiller, OK.

So I think it's her mother who was born Schiller.

Born Schiller.

And she was born Beg-- Aronson, Begagon-Aronson. Actually, it says so.

OK.

Sorry.

That's OK. It's OK. What about your father's side of the family? Was it more than just his father who came to Berlin? Were there other siblings as well?

Yes, many of his brother and his sister. He had four brothers and three sisters.

Wow.

Two of the sisters remained in Russia and were lawyers, and married, and lived in Moscow. And when I was in Russia later on, I could never find them, unfortunately.

Right. Later on, you mean after the war?

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Yes.

OK, when you already were here in the United States.

And I came-- I went to Russia with my husband, and I tried to find them because everybody else had died.

Yeah.

But there is a-- they had children. I mean, they exist, but I don't know their name.

Well, it happened an awful lot with families when there was-- this is a part of the world when the borders were closed so often, and there wasn't an opportunity to keep in touch. I take it that there were no letters from those sisters.

He, my father, did know their name because they married.

Yes, of course.

But I didn't ask, unfortunately. I didn't know.

Yeah.

But anyway, he had four brothers with whom he spent-- he was living with them and also helping them because he was the successful one. And one of his brothers lived eventually in London. That was his older brother, Leo. And then he had a brother, a younger brother, who was Sasha, who lived in the South of France after the war-- lived.

And then he had a brother called Arnold who was his second brother. And he [AUDIO OUT] France. He married a French woman and who was a Huguenot Presbyterian. And thanks to her, he survived the war because he-- they lived in a little village where she was born in the South of France near the Swiss border, and nobody--

Nobody--

--knew who he was.

--was. OK.

And it was his children who were my first cousins.

Mhm. Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had one sister.

Older or younger?

Older, who was seven years older, six [? and nine, ?] and died recently three years ago.

What was her name?

Gabrielle, Gabby.

Gabrielle.

And she was married twice.

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OK. So she was born in 1917?

Well, she was born 1918, actually.

1918.

Yeah.

1918.

She was a little over six years I mean.

So your mother had children very young, actually. You know?

Well, she had my sister in '18, which not so-- yeah.

Oh, maybe not. Yeah.

And then, six years-- it took another six years for me to be born. She was 30, I know, by the time I was born. That's what she said, I know.

OK, OK. Do you have memories of Berlin?

Of Berlin?

Yes.

Yeah, I have members of the house where we lived, which was a big--

Tell me about it.

It was a big house, which is mentioned in my father's story, and there was a big terrace where I was going-- I had a car that he gave me, you know, child car. And we had a dog, of course. We had a dachshund, and he had a German shepherd. And I had a nanny that I adored.

What was her name?

[? Diti. ?]

[? Diti? ?]

Fraulein Vernor.

Fraulein Vernor.

But I called her [? Diti. ?]

OK.

And I stayed in touch with her after the war because she went afterwards. She went with us to France.

Oh, she followed you to France, OK.

My mother took her along when she went to France when I was five.

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OK.

So I have my memories. I do remember the garden. I remember that we would have tea with the other children. The nannies had tea, and I had strawberries. And I remember the dogs. And--

Well, do you know what part of Berlin you lived in?

Yes. It was called Ruhrstrasse. I think it's called Charlottenburg now.

Oh, Charlottenburg, yeah.

In Ruhrstrasse 12 and I have been back to Berlin, and I visited. The house is still standing--

Is it?

--which is unusual. But during the war, it was transformed in a brewery.

Really?

So it survived the war, and it is now transformed into apartments. It was a huge house.

So it's Ruhrstrasse. So R-O--

Ruhrstrasse, R-U-H-R.

Oh, Ruhr-- Ruhrstrasse. [BOTH TALKING]

[INAUDIBLE]

[INAUDIBLE]

[INAUDIBLE]

It exists.

Isn't that interesting?

It's unusual that it was not bombed out.

Was it a single-family home when you lived there?

Of course it was. But not for normal people because my father was very successful automobile maker.

Tell me about that. Tell me how it came that he's an immigrant to Berlin. He studies engineering. How does his career develop?

There's a big article in a magazine that I was just reading talking about him. He was one of the first people who built cars. The firm that he created-- he created a garage. He created a place where they were building cars, 1912, 1914. A car that he built, it was called Schebera.

Schebera.

That is name of the firm.

OK.

A car that he built in this firm is in existence now. That was built in 1919. And it was in London recently.

Oh, my goodness.

And I'm supposed to see it soon. But it has been remodeled, redone 50 times, I think. But you can still see-- I've seen a picture of it.

And it's still runs?

Apparently. Nobody uses it.

Of course, but still.

Somebody bought it--

Uh-huh.

I don't know if this bit belongs in this story--

That's OK.

--for a million and a half two years ago.

Oh, my goodness. Well, I mean, it is part of history. When you think--

It is.

When you think--

It's amazing.

Yeah.

Now, he was accused, and then he started-- he opened a firm called Daimler.

I think I've heard of that.

Daimler became Daimler-Benz eventually. He was a millionaire. But the Nazis persecuted him.

OK.

Because-- and I read in a book-- there's a book out now and where it says that my father, also other people who were Jews were in control of the automobile business when Hitler came to power. And in this article, it says that Hitler liked Benz very much because it was just Benz for a while. And then it became Mercedes-Benz because the man who took over, his daughter was called Mercedes. That is why it's called now Mercedes-Benz.

But it was Daimler-Benz at one time?

Yes.

So the progression is from Daimler, and then Daimler-Benz, and then Mercedes-Benz. OK.

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And in this article, it says, for instance, that he started first with Austin small cars and he also started arranging taxis in Germany. They were the first taxi. But as it turned out, he also was to some extent a speculator. And it was a time when the Nazis came to power. He also bought the Sportpalast, which like it's the--

Stadium.

Yes.

It's a huge stadium.

Yeah. And as it happened, he went to-- I was skating with Sonja Henie.

I was going to say-- I was going to ask. You were skating there when Sonja Henie?

Because I was six years old. But when I came back-- or five years old. I knew how to skate. And since he owned the Sportpalast--

Sportpalast.

She was then the greatest skater--

The star, yes, yes.

--and star. And he told us that she probably had told her, you have to go with my daughter. So I do remember. I mean, she was very young too, you know. And that was before she went to Hollywood.

Now, tell me whether I'm wrong or not. Was it the Sportpalast that had-- that hosted the Olympics in 1936? Or was that another stadium?

No, no, no, no. But Hitler used to speak there. Now, I think that many-- my father and my mother became German citizens.

OK.

And in order to become German citizens at that time, you probably know, you had to convert because-- and she told me that she was very upset later on. They both converted to Protestantism. But, of course, they didn't believe it in that.

Yeah.

But in order to get a German pass--

Passport.

But they had to. So--

Because they were immigrants.

Well, they were immigrants, yes, actually. And they probably had it in Russian, something.

Yeah.

I don't know.

Yeah.

And so that was in before the war.

Before World War II.

World War I.

They already had to convert before World War I.

Well, in order to become a German citizen--

German citizen.

--he had to, and so she had to too. By the time she left-- she left Germany in '29. I was five years old.

OK.

Because she didn't like Ger-- after she-- fortunately, there was no Nazi yet.

That's right.

She didn't like Germany. I assume that she already had a boyfriend in Paris. She liked Paris. She liked the-- you know, she could afford to buy very good clothes. And she just took me and eventually my sister, and we moved to Paris.

So do you have memories of your parents being together?

They fought all the time. I do have memories that they were yelling at each other. But I must tell you. Some people must have been very impressed by this or hurt by this. I don't know. This happened over me.

Yeah.

It didn't really affect me. I think maybe that's why I'm still alive today. I was a very happy child. And, well, OK, it's annoying. Now we're going to Paris. But I think my mother was very wise because she took the nanny with.

I was going to say is that probably you had somebody to shield you a little bit more--

Yeah.

--who was more part of your daily life.

Yeah, I didn't-- my mother was very social. And this nanny was fantastic. She stayed with me until I was 10.

But for your sister, your sis--

My sister was more-- because she was already a teenager, and she stayed in Berlin. She didn't want to leave. But later on, when she was 15, she came to France. And she went to school in France and then had a very good life in France and married a Frenchman. And strangely, in her later life, she wouldn't speak German anymore.

At home, what was the language that your parents spoke with one another?

Russian.

Russian. OK. And with you and your sister?

French.

Really?

My father spoke German with me.

OK.

Because he never really got to speak French very well. But my mother spoke only French.

How interesting though. You have three languages right off the bat--

Yeah, yeah.

--that are in your milieu as a child.

Yeah, we spoke the three languages all the time, you know, mixed.

Yeah, yeah.

Which is not very good. As a result, I never spoke anything well. [LAUGHS]

Yes and no. Yes and no. I understand what you're saying because my family was similar. And my grandmother would start a sentence in one language, have the middle in another, and end it with the third. But it does attune your ear to new languages.

Yeah.

And you understand the sense of a new language, a different language, much easier.

Yeah, that is true. You can learn another language in no ti-- no problem. Yeah, it's true.

Tell me a little bit about what you remember of your father's personality. Let's start with how he looked and what kind of a figure he cut.

[SIGHS]

My father as a young man, which I don't remember, apparently, he was very good looking. And late afterwards, since he was-- the Germans really, the Nazis, after the Sportpalast really where after him. They had a theory, which I started to say, that they were going to get rid of all the Jewish automobile makers. And there's a whole book about it, which I happened to read. So they caught him for something, I think not paying something. He was put in prison in Berlin.

What year?

'24-- what-- third-- I was 11, so it was '35, I guess.

So the Nazis were already in power.

Oh, yeah. They were after him, totally. So he was maybe, to a point, a speculator. But on the other hand, he really hadn't done anything major. And they put him in prison for not paying something, and I don't really know exactly.

But he was able-- which I found out much later, of course. He was able to pay his way out for 25,000 mark at the time. And they let him out on caution that he would stay in Berlin. And he mentioned that to me in [? German. ?] But he

managed to leave with a car at night with his wife, his new one, and whom I knew-- she was very nice-- and went to Paris and escaped.

I see.

And they tried to have him ex--

Extradited.

--extradited. But he had a very good lawyer in Paris, who was very famous. I can't think of the name-- Moro Giafferi. He was very famous, and he won this, and they could not do it. And he lived in Paris afterwards.

So he left Germany in '36, '35?

'35.

In '35. So how long did he stay--

And right after that he was taken in pri-- he spent three months in prison.

In prison, OK.

So I

think-- you ask me how he looked. Well, I think that all of this had--

An effect.

--effect on him. He became quite heavy. He had diabetes. And but I will show you. There's a picture of him. But I look a lot like him. I was a fair, blonde one. Everybody else in the family is dark. He had blue eyes. But all his brothers looked like him. They all looked-- and the Germans portrayed him as der Jude Shapiro. And all his name, everything, was eradicated from in Germany.

Really?

And the man who came to interview me-- as I said, I'm old-- two years ago came from this magazine about automobiles because they could not find a single picture of him in Germany--

Oh, my goodness.

--to this day. And I said to him-- well, he said to me, well, how did he look? You asked me. He was blond with blue eyes and a tiny nose. The German has an expression for a small nose, [GERMAN].

[GERMAN]?

Which is when you have a very small nose. So he and his brother, they all looked very Russian, you know?

OK.

I don't know how. I think a picture of my grandfather, he also was fair. So how could-- they really made out of him the typical Jew.

And so what you said earlier, they would call him der Jude Shapiro?

Yeah. So--

In all the newspapers.

So there were newspaper stories about him?

Yes.

Uh-huh.

At the time.

At the time.

From the Nazis.

And was this because of his arrest? Or because of the--

They were after him, and they were after him that he had done this, and he had done that, and that he had-- he was the head of Benz. I mean, I don't know all the details because, unfortunately, I was very young. But when he was put in prison, my mother and my uncle, who were living in France, heard of it, knew about it. I think his wife told them.

Would you visit him after your parents divorced?

Yes.

Did you go and visit him from Paris?

Yes.

How often?

I went-- I remember that I was eight years old when I visited him the last time. Maybe I didn't visit before. I didn't remember. But I remember that he was no longer living in that big house.

OK.

And he was living-- and he owned several hotels, and I lived with him in the hotel.

Do you remember the name? Do you remember where it was?

KurfÃ¼rstendamm.

KurfÃ¼rstendamm, OK.

I do remember that.

OK. And who's--

And I went swimming. He took me to a swimming place too, which was extraordinary, which left a biggest impression on me at that time.

Of course. For a child, that's the way it is.

Yeah.

And was he remarried by then?

Yes. He remarried immediately after he got-- he was divorced.

OK, what was the name of his second wife?

Eda.

Eda.

Denbo.

Denbo, OK.

And she had two sisters, [? Rhia ?] Denbo and Lisa Denbo.

Was she from Germany?

No, she was Russian.

She was also Russian. Russian Jewish?

Well--

You don't know.

It's a good question. I think probably, but they said they were not.

OK, OK.

Well, because they called themself Denbo [PERSONAL NAME] which was an assumed. That's what my mother said.

Well--

But they were all good friends eventually.

You know, in those days, sometimes it was very prudent to not have the last name that you had in another country, particularly if it's Russia, and it's after the revolution, and so on. And now you have danger in Germany. You never-- sometimes it's just more prudent.

Well, a lot of people changed there name here.

Yes, that's right.

My first husband.

What had his name been, your first husband?

When I married him, and his name was Garvin, which my children from him had. But the original name was [? Grambert. ?]

[? Grambert, ?] uh-huh, OK.

In French.

Yeah, well, that's true. You come to the United States, and either the Ellis Island officials had changed your name or you changed your name.

Well, after the war, Jews thought that it was better to change your name. You don't want to be a Jew.

Did you feel that?

No, not really. I think I was a little bit-- I didn't think too much. [LAUGHS]

But I did feel-- I mean, this is jumping.

Sure. That's OK. We can jump a bit.

I did feel-- and my mother. I came with my mother and my uncle-- that we were very upset because, at that time, there were many hotels where you couldn't go. There were many places where Jews couldn't go. If you went to Florida, you couldn't go anywhere. I mean, it was very difficult. And that was not so in France.

Yeah, yeah. When your father started having problems with the new Nazi government, was he-- was his business or businesses, were they confiscated? Or was he able to salvage something from them?

No, everything was gone. They took our house. We had a house. But my father, fortunately for him, had put lots of money into Holland banks, Amsterdam. So they said, when he left, he had no money. He had plenty of money.

OK.

And he had a very nice apartment in Paris. And he started a business in France, again a car business. And I remember that very well.

Oh.

But then came the war. So I mean, he had it.

Well, he sounds like he had a talent for-- and he was a talented man.

We was. I think, in some ways, he was a genius. You know?

Yeah.

He was a very-- he had ideas all the time. In this article which I reread just recently, he really created the automobile business in Germany. Because by the-- what he-- he created BMW. He created that. And his idea was to put together the different automobile companies and do something like here you have--

GM, like?

General Motors, yes. But he--

Of course.

--didn't succeed. And so he had-- that was really his thing. That's the only thing he was interested to, actually.

So now, what kind of a personality did he have?

He was very jolly. His wife called him "solnechka," which means "sunshine" in Russian. He was always sort of in a good mood and so. And they finally did him in, you know? He committed suicide at the end.

Oh.

And when he was already in America. I mean, that's another story. So they wanted to prevent him. He wanted to go through Spain, and he was almost arrested again because the Spaniards were for Hitler. So I think it finally--

It got to him.

--wore him out.

And every suicide is a tragedy. But when you hear of somebody who had a sunny disposition, somebody who is naturally someone who was a happy person--

Yes.

--and that he gets worn down to such a point that that is the only way out that he sees.

Yeah, and we didn't know. We didn't realize. Because at that time, my mother was very good friends with his wife-- and my uncle. Everybody was here all of a sudden. He came later than we did. But we didn't realize. I was just 18, so I didn't understand.

So that means that he did this during the war, while the war was still going on.

Yeah.

OK, OK.

So I mean, you know--

Do you remember him in that way too?

Oh, I remember him very well because I used to see him all the time. I was going to college at that time when he was here. But I remember him in Paris. I used to have lunch with him every Sunday.

OK.

And he was so jolly. He was having a very good business, and they had a very nice apartment near the Ã‰toile in a very good neighborhood.

Was he an engaged father?

Not very. In the sense that he wanted me to have good marks in school, and he always asked. I think he was very disappointed that I was not a boy. When I was born, my mother said he was disgusted because I was a girl.

Ah.

And but after, and when it was in France, he was a very good father. He loved me dearly. He took me to very good restaurants on Sundays, I remember-- a Russian restaurant, of course. He was very Russian, actually.

And let's cut for a second. That's an in-- OK, you think he was very Russian, you were saying.

Very Russian, and all the brothers were they, except the one who was married to the French woman. He became very French.

Uh-huh.

You know, it's hard to explain.

Well--

But his behavior, the way-- what he was eating. He was eating only Russian food.

In some ways, it's very natural.

And they were speaking all Russian. But with me, he spoke German.

Did he have contacts with other Russian emigres? Because there were many in Paris in those days.

Yes. When I think back of, he wasn't very social. He didn't-- but he had some friends. But my mother basically saw only Russian people too. The Russian community, as you say, was very big in Paris. All her friends, which I knew eventually, they were all Russian.

She actually [FRENCH], I mean met a few French people. My sister and I, we met only French people. My best friend, actually-- her mother was a friend of my mother's-- was also Russian. But all the people that I saw were French. My sister married a Frenchman.

Mhm, you said. What about your grandfather, your father's father? What happened to him? Did he--

He was old. I think I have a picture of him in the house where we-- which we had at the seashore.

Uh-huh.

And in Germany.

In Germany. Oh, you had a house at the seashore?

Well, that was one of the houses that my father had and they took away.

What place was this?

In a place called Heringsdorf.

Heringsdorf.

Which is still in existence as a very nice resort. It's about two hours from Berlin.

So north on the Baltic Sea?

Yes.

OK. And did he die before the war, your grandfather?

Yes.

Did he die before--

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Well, no. World War II, yes.

Yes, OK.

He died-- I think I was about two years old when he died.

Ah, so he died in the '20s, OK.

Yeah, yeah.

And you mentioned two sisters who stay in-- two aunts of yours who stay in the Soviet Union. And so there's one other sister.

There was one other sister [INAUDIBLE]. She was married to a man who worked with my father in the car business. And I know that her name was Amelie, her first name. I don't know or remember her last name.

OK.

And after the Hitler, she went to Argentina. I never saw her again. But and I remember her vaguely in Germany. She was sort of a heavyset, dark, actually, woman. And I think that my mother hated her. Anyway, they don't-- didn't get along very well. I think that my father stayed in touch with her for quite a long time, but I don't know. You know, a lot of people from Germany went to Argentina.

Yes, yes. And so there are no real-- aside from the two aunts, there are no other family members left in Russia, left in the Soviet Union.

No. And--

That I know.

That you know of, yes, of course.

Wait a minute. But my mother had an uncle who stayed in Odessa. Actually, that's wrong. And he had a chance to come to France. She told me. I don't know. And he didn't want to. He was a scientist, and he didn't want to leave. And I don't know what happened to him. The aunts in Russia were married and had children.

OK.

I don't know.

Yeah, yeah.

So at some point then, when you're around 11 years old, your father comes to Paris. You are already established there with your mother. Does she have a new love in her life? Does she have--

Yeah, she lived with another man. I thought she was married to him because she lived-- they lived like man and wife. We had a house in which I grew up, really, and where I went to school-- from where I went to school.

Tell me about the neighborhood that you lived in.

It was called La Muette, in Paris. It was in the 16th arrondissement. And it was very nice. There was a street called Avenue [INAUDIBLE] right near, and it was near the Bois de Boulogne. And I could go by bicycle. I could go. I mean, I had a very nice childhood, I must say. It was a very happy childhood.

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Do you have any particular memories of school and the school years?

Yes, very well. Yeah, I went to a private school called Ecole Sainte Clotilde. I was the only Jew in my class.

Did that make a difference?

Actually not.

OK.

I was treated like everybody else.

Was it a religious school?

No. It was called Sainte Clotilde, but it was not.

OK.

And all the teachers were like-- you know. And it was nice. I had two very close girlfriends. We would walk. In those days, school was in the morning, and then you went back for lunch home, and then you went back in the afternoon again. And you had a free day, which was Jeudi, Thursday--

Oh, really?

--afternoon. And in the winter, we went ice skating.

That sounds lovely.

It was. It was a very nice life. I must say, I was a very fortunate child. I had a good life. I had parents who were well-off. And my mother, apparently, had a very good divorce and could have a house with domestic, with--

Mhm, with help.

--servants. And so we had a very comfortable, pleasant life.

Were they religious, either of your parents?

No.

And do you think this was from Russia? That is, had your grandparents been religious, or is this a break in the generations?

It's a very good question. I think that my father's father was religious. I didn't know. But somebody there was a rabbi. I don't know--

OK.

--how close, but I'm sure somebody. I think in my mother's family, no.

And was anybody particularly political?

No, no. I don't think so.

OK. So it sounds like you were quite assimilated as [BOTH TALKING]

Well, I think, in a way, when I think back, yes and no because they didn't assimilate with the French. They were all speaking Russian all the time.

Russian, yes, yes.

And they only saw Russian people. But the people that they saw were not always Jewish Russian.

Of course. Of course.

My mother was very friendly with the Chaliapin family. He was a great singer.

Yeah.

They were all Orthodox. We went to Russian Easter party. She would make a cake. I don't know, this-- she didn't know how to cook, by the way. But she did make a certain syrniki, which was a Russian cake. So it's more Russian than Jewish. I mean, mind you, we knew very well, and we never said anything. If anybody that would ask me, I would say I was Jewish.

Yeah.

And as I grew older, I became very conscious. I had a boyfriend when I was 15. He was Jewish. And then I became very conscious of this. Something wasn't really quite OK. You know?

It wasn't the same.

No.

It wasn't the same. Being a Russian exile from, let's say, the tsar's Russia, white Russians who were living in Paris have a different history. As you say, they're Orthodox. They're different rituals. They're different traditions. There's a lot that's similar, but it's not the same. It's not the same.

Yeah. And one time it really came to my mind that-- in the afternoon, you had like-- you do your homework in school, and the other children would learn the Catechism.

The Catechism, of course.

And I knew the Catechism. I could recite it even today. But I got aware that-- not for me.

OK.

I don't believe in that stuff. I got to be very strongly not believing in that stuff.

OK.

And during the-- when the war came, I couldn't go to that school anymore. It closed. And I went to a school which was held by sisters.

Oh, OK, nuns.

[Non-English name of school]

Mhm.

And you know that the Catholic sisters are very [? pushy. ?] They tried to convince you-- to convert you, rather.

OK.

Very strong.

Oh, really?

And not for me. It didn't work. I said, no, I'm Jewish. I'm not going to do your stuff. I mean, I didn't say it like that.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I was a little bit more diplomatic. But by then, I was a teenager.

Yes, yes. And what made you have this sense of increasing identity as being Jewish and also resistance? How do you explain that that grew?

It's very interesting. I don't know. I've thought about this lately. Why? Well, partly because it was of my friends. I had a boyfriend who was Jewish and another friend who was Jewish. They were more into religion. And we went to the VÃ©l' d'Hiv' where they rounded up all the German refugees at one point.

Were you rounded up?

No, because I was Russian. You know? They rounded up a lot of German Jews at that point. Before, it was just at the beginning of the war. But before the German won. And my friends-- I don't know how. I don't remember where. But my friends persuaded me to go because we knew one couple who had been taking us skiing and thing-- and to bring them blankets and food. I didn't tell my mother that I went.

Oh, she would have been shocked.

Yeah. But I was always very independent. And I saw this.

Tell me what you saw.

I saw all these Jewish German refugees. And the VÃ©l' d'Hiv' was like the Madison Square Garden. And they were on the floor and surrounded by police.

French police?

French police, of course. And I never forget the sight of these people, and something did it to me. I suddenly thought there was something that wasn't right, that really was not right at all. I didn't really know that much about my father's story because he never spoke about what I told you.

Yeah.

I though, this is not good. This is not good. What are these people are doing? Why are they suddenly-- this charming couple that took us skiing and that I liked very much. The woman was wonderful-- German. She was a German gym teacher, people like that. She, by the way, ended up in Auschwitz, but he survived. He went into the army, something, in Africa, but he survived.

What was their name?

[? Osaiah. ?]

[? Osaiah? ?]

Yeah, Madam [? Osaiah. ?] [INAUDIBLE] I don't know their fir-- I don't remember their first name. Or maybe we didn't-- you know, we didn't call people by their first name.

Of course not. Of course not.

Yeah. And I never saw him after the war. But I just knew that he survived. The sight of these people being treated like that, which were people that I sort of-- I knew them. They were very nice, proper people-- is triggered something in me. And then came the war.

But tell me this. You say that you were excluded.

It must have been in-- during the war already.

Yeah.

Yeah.

It was during the war. And the French lost the war maybe the following year. And the Germans came to Paris.

Let's not go there yet. I still want to-- you said earlier that both your mother and your father had to-- took German citizenship and nominally converted. So they would have been German citizens even though they're Russian. Why wouldn't they have been included in a round up?

Well, because they already lost, in the meantime, the German citizenship. When he was put into prison, they took it away. And when he came to France, both he and actually my mother became nanzen. The French, you didn't encounter them. They gave the refugees in France who had basically no nationality but who were Russian-born-- it went a lot by where you were born-- nanzen papers.

Nanzen?

It was called "nanzen," N-A-N-Z-E-N.

OK.

It was not even really a passport, but it was a--

Like identification papers.

Paper, identification. Because they lost their German-- you know, with the Nazis. That was finished. My mother was-- felt guilty all her life that she had ever converted. It's interesting because they were not religious, as you asked me, but they felt very strongly Jewish. There is-- you can--

It's more than religion.

Yeah, it's--

It's more than a religion.

Yeah.

It is. And I don't know that people have been successful in coming to a consensus on exactly defining. Because some

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people say it's this, and some people say, oh, it's more than that. And that's why we don't have a definition like we do for ethnicities.

Yeah.

Some countries call Judea-- someone who's Jewish an ethnic identity like being Russian, or Italian, or anything. And others say, no, no, no. It's not that.

That's why when your lady called me, I said, you know, I am not a religious Jew.

Yeah.

But--

That is-- yeah. It doesn't--

And she said, that doesn't matter.

No, it doesn't matter. What kind of identification papers did you have?

And that was my problem when we-- so when the Germans were coming, my uncle came to our house. My uncle was my mother's younger brother.

The one who survived the Spanish flu.

Yeah. And he did very good bu-- he became a very good businessman, and he was a brilliant man, a wonderful person. I adored him. And he had Parker Pen business. In those days, there were pens, Parker and Waterman. That's all. There was nothing else. And it was a very big business in Paris.

So he was the distributor for Paris.

To Parker Pen, yes. So he had a big business. But he came, and he had a car. And he came to our house and then said, the Germans are coming at the door, wherever, and we are leaving in one hour. You are coming. So my mother and I took-- my mother was-- well, my mother, she said, well, that's a good idea, probably. We packed a suit-- one suitcase, and we left.

I want to interrupt right here. One thing I didn't ask you about is during the '30s. Now, you're already a teenager in the late '30s. Do you hear much? Do you listen much? Is the conversation at home about what's going on in Germany, about the increasing repressions, and so on? Was that part of daily conversation?

No, I don't think so.

So did you have a --

But my mother said, there will be war. There will be war. There will be war. And but she didn't prepare for it. And all of the people I knew said, there will be war. I knew there was going to be war, but how this was going to happen?

And that you might be particularly vulnerable, that didn't occur to you?

Well, I only became [INAUDIBLE] when I saw this thing at VÃ©l' d'Hiv', the Germans. Because the French-- we didn't speak German anymore because that wasn't a good idea. But the French were thinking there was a Ligne Maginot. You know?

Tell us. What is the Ligne Maginot?

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Well, the French built a wall.

A fortification of some kind.

Fortification along the North of France. But it didn't go all the way so that when the Germans wanted to invade France, all they had to do was to go around. They were so stupid. I mean, now you know that how stupid it was.

De Gaulle said too that this is not going to work. You need to have tanks. But nobody listened to him at that time. So as soon as the Germans started to come, it was obvious that the French army was incapable of holding.

Yeah.

So--

And nevertheless, when your uncle come--

The French was-- the whole idea, the French said, the war will come, but it's going to be fine. We are going to do like the last war. We are going to win. We're going to hold them.

Then there was a disaster at-- in the North of France and at Calais. And the French had to give up the whole North of France, and the British fled at the last minute from Dunkerque-- and whole war business. So my uncle came with a car and said, we're leaving.

And this ends up being a shock. Because even though you know the war is coming, it nevertheless wasn't something that you were expecting.

No. I was by then 16.

OK.

So I made a terrible -- I was crying because I said, I will not leave my dog. I had a dog, airedale. In the meantime, my sister had been married to a Frenchman. And so she was out of the picture already.

They were gone on a honeymoon or something-- Catholic. She had become Catholics. They had married in a church, and that was in the spring of 1940. So she was-- this was just me, and my mother, and the dog.

What was the dog's name?

Peter.

Peter. And did Peter come with you?

And my mother-- I'm amazed. Both my mother and my uncle said, OK, you can take him.

What about your mother's boyfriend? What happened with him?

Oh, that was-- he had died. He had died some years before of appendicitis-- I remember that-- when I was 11 or 12.

What was his name?

Roichel.

Roichel.

R-O-I-C-H-E-L.

OK.

And he was a very nice man, actually. And I found out much later that they couldn't marry because he couldn't get divorced from his wife. So but in France, that didn't matter. You could do all kinds of things. But my mother's was --

Anyway, we tried to convince my mother-- my grand aunt, who was living just a few blocks away, [? very sure, ?] and who was like my grandmother because she was with us all the time. And my mother loved her. I loved her. She was always visiting with us and eating with us, an older lady. At that time, she seemed very old to me, but probably wasn't. Tant Bitty was I called--

Tant Bitty?

Yeah, [? Kliatschko. ?] She would not come.

Why not?

Because she had a daughter who was still in Russia, and she thought she would not come. Maybe she would be able to see her-- her own tragedy. And she is the one who died in Auschwitz. We could not convince her to come with us. What can you do? You know?

I have her picture now, which I found a very small picture. And because my daughter has been reading all the people, she found her name. I knew that she disappeared, but we didn't have a proof.

OK. So your uncle comes. He has the car. It ends up being you, your mother, Peter. Peta or Peter?

Peter like Peter.

Peter like the man.

He was a male. They're all males.

Peter and your uncle.

Yes.

And within an hour you leave Paris?

And that was the time when the French lost the war. Because I'm seeing it in French right now. And we started driving south.

I have two questions. Number one, did your mother own the house that you lived in?

Yes.

Did she ever get it back?

Yes.

OK. Number two, can you tell-- paint a picture in words for me of what you saw as you were leaving Paris?

Well, there were millions of people leaving Paris. It became--

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[BOTH TALKING]

There was a movie about it. I mean, millions of-- thousands of people left Paris in cars, by train. I was just reading about somebody talk about the last train-- on foot, practically. It was a cart-- any old way they could leave.

And that's what you saw.

That's what I saw on the road. And we were lucky to have a car. He had a very nice-- I don't know. I saw. I had a picture. One of my grandchildren told me what kind of a car, a Ford probably.

And on the way out of Paris, we met two young men that my uncle knew, who were Portuguese, on a-- not on a bicycle, a motorcycle. And the motorcycle wasn't working very well. My uncle knew them and said, well, why don't you come with us in the car?

And did they leave the motorcycle by the [INAUDIBLE]?

Probably, yeah. I don't remember ever seeing the motorcycle again.

Do you know where you were going at that point?

Well, he, my uncle, who was very smart man and who had decent papers at that time, wanted to go to the United States because he knew Parker. He had connections. And I will say this. My mother had money in a bank. So that's why I was very privileged, you know?

Yeah.

But to go to Portugal from where you could go to America, it wasn't so easy. We didn't have any visas.

And we didn't find out till the very end what kind of papers you had.

Well, we didn't. We had this nanzen paper.

For your mother.

For my mother. And luckily for me, I was below 18. I was only 16. I could be on my mother.

Ah.

Because if I had been a German-born, forget it. I would never have gotten it. So I was on a nanzen paper, which was not really a passport. But somehow--

And you were born in 1924. January, was it?

Yes.

January 8?

Yes.

OK. And you're leaving in 1940?

Yes.

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So that would make you 16.

I was 16, yeah.

Still 16.

I said, but I was still 16, not 18.

OK.

This is how you see me now.

I see.

Otherwise, probably not.

I see, OK. So the luck, the luck of being born that will-- the luck of being young enough.

Yes.

OK. All right, so you were on that--

So they managed to put me on her paper, which was really not a good paper either. But a lot of the Russians had this nanzen.

And your father did too.

Yes, apparently.

Did you think of-- did you know where your father was at that point?

No, no idea.

OK.

I never knew again about my father until he arrived in the US.

The United States. OK.

Because he and his wife-- I mean, I found out later-- went to the South of France, but in a different way. He went to the South of France. Because you know that France was divided. At first, into the North was occupied by the Germans, and the South was free French.

Yeah. And so you were heading south, and he was--

We were heading South with the two Portuguese guys. And that, of course, was fantastic luck. Because when we got to the South of France, we stayed over in Biarritz. I'm sure a lot of people did. My mother knew somebody at the Carlton Hotel, which is-- was the-- I mean, this is so crazy when you think of us fleeing anyways, but spending the night in a fancy hotel in Biarritz.

[LAUGHS] Yeah.

It's--

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It's so contradictory.

Yeah.

You know? Yeah.

I remember going walking on the beach in Biarritz with this dog-- you know, I had to walk the dog. The dog also ran away in-- at one time, but we got him back-- and seeing little kids in the sa-- in the beach playing war.

Oh, wow.

It's sort of a picture, you see, that stayed in me for years. Here I was going away. This was the war. We were persecuted. We are running away. And these little kids are still playing war.

It's not real for them yet.

Because it's [FRENCH] It's human nature to do war.

Absolutely, yeah.

And so we have no visas to go to Portugal, and you need a visa from Spain because you have to go through. So this Mendes was the consul, Portuguese consul-- this is how I got to know his [INAUDIBLE], the lady who does the foundation to revive the Portuguese consul-- who gave visas to people.

I see.

And Salazar, who was the president of Portugal, told him, you are not going to give any visas to any Jews. And he felt that that was unfair. And he felt that-- he was a Catholic-- that religion told him, you have to be kind to everybody. And we were standing in Bayonne, which is a small town south of Bordeaux, between Bordeaux and the frontiere. And they--

Border.

Fort. Border. And we were standing on the street. There was a consulate. And our Portuguese friends, who, of course, had visas-- and they were Portuguese citizens-- talked to the people to give us visas. But he had decided to give visas to all the Jews.

Did you know this at the time?

And he saved-- I didn't. He saved-- that I found out now, and he saved 10,000 people--

That's huge.

--10,000 Jews. He's like a Schindler. And when Salazar found out, he demoted him, and he never was able to get another job in his life. And he died a pauper. And this woman, who is some kind of a relative of his, is doing a foundation in his name. And the Israelis have given him a special name and a special title because he had saved basically so many Jews, including us.

Yeah.

And but while we were waiting on the street in Bayonne to get into the consulate, the French police was going back and forth holding us and carrying a dead rat.

Oh!

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That's how they behaved. Mind you, I've been back living in France since, but they behaved dreadfully.

Why?

I don't know. You know, I don't-- to this day, I don't understand human nature. As you know, I'm now 93 years old, and I still didn't figure it out.

Yeah, yeah. This wasn't their thing. It had nothing to do with France.

I mean, my poor grand aunt and her cousin too-- I remember now, [PERSONAL NAME] -- they were old ladies. They were perfectly fine. There was nothing wrong with them. Why did they have to ship them? The French did that. They shipped people from Paris to the Germans. So many they would ask for, you know?

So did you actually see him? Aristides de Sousa, is that--

I must have, but I didn't pay attention. Actually, my uncle had the papers and did. I was standing with him. I don't know. My mother was probably at the hotel. But I stood with him because I remember the episode with the rat

With the rat, yeah. And so you got the papers.

We got the papers. And but before we got the papers, we didn't have any hope of getting the paper. And so I said to my uncle-- my uncle, we were all young, you know? I didn't realize. I thought my mother was old. But I found out from the Mendes papers that they had-- she had all the papers from people who traveled-- that my mother was only 49. But in those days, people seemed old to you.

Yeah.

And I said to my uncle, well, if we don't get the papers, we can go across the Pyrenees on foot. I can walk, and the dog can walk. [LAUGHS] This is just-- my uncle reminded me of that years later. And he said, well, I don't think that your mother is going to be able to walk. But I would have.

Of course. Many people did.

I was scared to death. I was frightened. You asked me. We didn't know about concentration camps yet. No one knew. But we knew there was something very bad. And seeing the way they treated these people at the VÃ©l' d'Hiv', I knew there was something very bad going on. I would have walked.

Yeah, many people did.

Yeah.

They tried. It was tough.

Yeah.

Some got through.

Yeah.

Now, remind me of geography because I'm not that familiar with it. Do you have to cross through Spain to get to Portugal?

Yes. So once you had a visa to Portugal, you could get the visa to Spain, even though they were very pro-German. And

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we had a car, as I say. When we went, we had to go over [INAUDIBLE]. The border was to Spain. And then you had to travel through Spain until you got to Portugal. Portugal is on this side of Spain.

Right.

And they were not very nice, the Spaniards, at that. The border people, the guards and the police, were very unpleasant. They didn't like the idea of the dog either. But he didn't bark. He didn't, and he was OK. So then we get to the border of Portugal, and we want to go to Lisbon.

Excuse me. While you're in Spain, are the roads as full as they were--

No. They're not that many people. And we spent the night in a small village where there the people were OK. You know?

Yeah.

I remember there was a house without children. I remember this thing. There was a house without a toilet, and you had to go outside to-- but we were in Spain. We were already pretty happy.

Yeah.

And we go to Portugal.

[DOG BARKING]

I want to say that because we went around --

[DOG BARKING]

OK, let's cut for a second. All right, so--

We arriving in Portugal--

[DOG BARKING]

Oh, Mateo. I mean, I can put them in--

The people in Portugal?

They're very nice. But the government didn't want the refugees to go to Lisbon, and we were assigned to go to a village called Figueira da Foz-- da Foz, which was a beach place. It was a place where people would go for--

Vacation?

--vacation on this Atlantic Ocean. It was actually a nice place. But--

Was it far from Lisbon?

--it was not where we wanted to go, and they made it impossible. In order to get a visa to the United States, you had to go to the US consulate.

Of course.

The US consulate was either in Lisbon or Porto. And you couldn't go there. They didn't give you permission to go there.

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So when you get a vis--

So we were actually-- a lot of people, very nice people. We lived in a hotel. And in a way, if it was a summer vacation, it wouldn't have been so bad. But you were almost a prisoner there unless you-- somebody called you to the consulate.

And fortunately-- so in one way, the Portuguese government was really not very nice and because Salazar was pro-Nazi. And here we were sitting in this little resort, and there were lots and lots of people, lots of Jews who were refugees. And we were lucky again because, extraordinarily, Mr. Parker gave us affidavits.

So your uncle--

Because he knew my uncle.

Oh, OK.

And I think this is particularly extraordinary because Mr. Parker, of course, was not Jewish. The United States government did not give access to Jews, as you well know. And thanks to him, we were able to come here, so we were very privileged.

And we left this village where there were still hundreds of poor people who could not get any visas anyway. A lot of people went to Cuba. I know people went to Brazil. But very few people got visas to the United States.

So he alread-- your uncle must have gotten in touch with him--

Yes. I'm sure.

--even before, even before.

Probably on the phone. Or actually, he got-- I know that he got a telegram telling him to go to the consulate in Porto. He went to Porto.

Was this village-- can you say the name again? Figueira--

Figueira.

--da Foz.

Figueira da--

F-O-Z, Foz.

Uh-huh. Figueira da Foz.

And that village is between-- it still exists, of course-- between Porto and Lisbon.

OK.

Porto is in the north. It's actually a university town. It's still very nice. That's where they make Porto.

OK. And so Mr. Parker was the person who got you out of there.

Exactly. And I think-- I never met him, but my uncle, of course, did. And it was quite extraordinary thinking back that he did that. Of course, he knew my uncle, and my uncle was able to retake his business after the war and had it for a

long time.

Did he go back to France then?

Yes.

I see, OK. So at that point, how long did you stay in the village, in this little resort?

I think it was about two months because we didn't get here--

Well, that's a while.

Quite a long time.

So do you remember the day or the month that you left, the date or the month you left Paris? It was 1940, but when?

I don't-- it was in June.

OK, June, 1940.

Because a few days later, they did-- they choose between France and Marshal PÃ©tain and divided France in two. And at that point, we were already in Biarritz.

OK, when France is divided, yeah.

And I remember hearing it on the radio very clearly.

Did you ever hear Hitler's voice on the radio?

Yes. He was yelling. Like all the time, we heard it when we were in Paris before the war.

OK.

Don't ask me. I have still nightmares about it. Horrible. He used to scream like--

Was he written up in the newspapers?

All the time, yeah.

That's why I asked you about was conversation at home--

Well, we knew about Hitler by then, yes, yes. I mean, especially after my father came, we did. He didn't want to talk about it. I never heard him talk about it. My mother would tell.

So do you think he told her, but he wouldn't tell you?

They didn't want to tell me.

Yeah, of course not.

Because I remember we were in [PLACE NAME] on vacation when he was imprisoned. And she knew, my mother. And she didn't tell me what it was. Because she was-- even though they were divorced and all that, he was my father.

Of course.

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And she was very disturbed. And I asked, what is the matter? Well, they wouldn't tell me. My uncle wouldn't tell me. I found this out much, much later.

Were you close to your mother?

Did I what?

Were you close to your mother?

Very close, yeah.

OK.

I adored my mother, and she adored me. I must say, she actually preferred me to my sister. I realized this much later. But I was the younger one, and I was very close to her, I mean, to her death. She lived with us the last years of her life.

Oh. She sounds like an extraordinary lady.

She was extraordinary and, in a way, very difficult. And at the same time, she was very special.

Yeah. So your uncle is able to procure these visas from Mr. Parker. He goes to Porto. You have stayed in the village about two months. And then what happens?

[PHONE RINGING]

OK, let's cut. All right, we were at the point where you're leaving the village to go to Porto or Lisbon.

Well, we got to Lisbon then.

OK.

And we book a trip to the US. And my uncle did all of that, you know?

Mhm.

I must say, I adored my uncle. And clearly, without my uncle, I wouldn't be here. And he books us on the Clipper.

What's a Clipper?

The Clipper was the first planes that went to the US, but they were landing on water.

You took a plane to the United States? This is the first time I heard it.

I'm probably the only person alive today who took the Clipper because they stopped going. I think it worked only-- and I should look it up-- maybe five years, and then there were planes that-- real planes. After the war, we took planes. But I took Clip--

Was this the first time you were on a plane?

Yes.

And what was the airline?

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Pan American.

Pan American Clipper.

I think, yeah. I should look it up anyway.

Tell me what the plane looked like.

Oh, it was looked inside like other plane, like planes ever. There were quite a few people in it. I don't know how many people it took, maybe 13.

Was it small or--

No, it wasn't that small. It seemed pretty big to me. And it landed at LaGuardia on the water.

How long did the trip take?

We stopped at the Azores once and a second time in Bermuda for breakfast. I remember lavish breakfast. And then so it must've been 18 hours maybe. I don't remember. I should look it up.

Oh, my goodness. What a way to get to the US.

And on the plane--

Yeah.

I must tell you, I was privileged, really. They served apple pie with cheese, which I can't forget because the first time I ever had apple pie with cheese. And I thought, that's wonderful, great food. It can't be bad in the United States.

[LAUGHS]

What happened to your doggie?

So the dog went on a ship.

[LAUGHS]

We put him on a ship in the cargo before. My uncle arranged that. I think my uncle was a saint. And we, both my uncle and I, are very seasick, so we put the dog on this cargo. I don't know. Just looking at the ship, both he and I became seasick.

[LAUGHS]

But the dog went, and it arrived. And because-- I mean, that really had nothing to do with the story or Holocaust Museum, I must say. But because the Clipper could only leave when the sea was smooth--

Really?

--because it couldn't land when it was agitated. And particularly at the Azores, the sea was rough. The plane was delayed. And I arrived in United States after the dog. [LAUGHS]

No kidding? So the dog--

And the dog was-- the people, they're very nice. They put it in a kennel at some vet's, and I did find him.

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But the dog went by ship? And the ship went quicker. Oh, or maybe it left earlier than the plane did.

Because the plane was delayed because of bad weather at the Azores.

So the plane wasn't able to land on land? It only would land on water? So how would you deplane if you were in the water?

Well, in the water, it was like a ship. [BOTH TALKING]

So near a pier?

Yeah. There was a pier at LaGuardia.

OK, so there was a pier--

LaGuardia's on the water, you know?

Pardon?

LaGuardia here is on the water.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. But so at the Azores, it was on-- near a pier, in Bermuda on a pier, and then here on a pier.

I always wanted to go back to Bermuda. I haven't managed. It was beautiful, summer.

Yeah. So you arrive in New York. It is yourself, your mother, and your uncle. And your dog's waiting for you in the kennel.

Yeah.

OK.

I got him back.

You got him back. What happened after that?

Somebody had done an apartment for us on Riverside Drive. And my mother thought it was too windy, and she didn't like it. And so we moved to Central Park West in a hotel. That would be-- I know it was 82nd Street and Central -- It doesn't exist anymore. It's a building.

Yeah.

And then we eventually took an apartment. I remember it, 150 West 79th Street, very cosy.

Mhm. And she had money. She had bank accounts that she had been able to--

She had a bank account at the Chase Bank. I was there the other day. I yelled at them. I said, my mother already had it, and they wouldn't. Because we changed something for the foundation, and they were so difficult. I said, you know-- [INAUDIBLE]

Yeah.

Never mind.

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But at any rate, she wasn't penniless. When she arrived here, she wasn't--

Yeah, well, I must tell you, they wouldn't have let us come into the United States if you didn't have money here. A, you had to have money. And B, you had to be in good health. You know, that if you had some eye disease or something, it was very difficult. You couldn't come. You couldn't come in.

OK. And your uncle, did he go to see Mr. Parker? What did he do?

I don't know. I really don't know what-- we were separated. I mean, we didn't live together. I only lived with my mother.

And did he stay in New York City?

He stayed in New York City. And he went-- he had a cousin who was already here. They had a gallery, so he did that and too was working at a gallery.

And you didn't know what was up with your sister or your father at this point?

No. We didn't know about my sister for a long time actually. But then she lived in my mother's house in Paris eventually, which is--

Ah, that was one of my questions is, what happened to your mother's house when you had left? Did it stay empty? Was it taken over? And so you answered that now. She lived in the house.

They were in the South of France when the war. But then her husband was French Catholic from a very well-known French family who owned the [PLACE NAME}, French You know that?

No. What it that?

It was a famous restaurant in Paris. And he had brothers and sisters, I mean, big family. And they went back to Paris, and she lived in my mother's house.

And so she was never rounded up because she was married.

No, no. Because she had this-- except at the very end of the war of the French, of the German occupation, somebody said that she was the daughter of my father, of Shapiro. And at that point, she already wasn't getting along well with her husband. We don't have a very good family. She was taken in by a friend of hers in the country. At that time, she had already a child.

OK.

So the last year or-- she lived with her friend in the country, hidden because it was not so good.

Not so good.

Then after the war ended, she went back to the house. But in the meantime, the house was empty, as you said, maybe a year or so -- and they stole a lot of stuff, paintings particularly.

Would it have been the Germans? Of course.

Yes, I'm sure.

OK.

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Yes

And then so your sister, your aunt, you only find out-- or your great aunt, when did you find out what happens to her?

After the war. But we didn't-- we knew that somebody, that she was-- I went to the place where she was living, and they said they had taken her away. So why did she suddenly disappear?

Of course.

There was no way we figured. And these people said they took her.

OK. Now let's go back to your father. By the time you're in New York City, you still didn't know what happened to your father and where he was.

No.

What was his route? What did he do?

He went to the South of France in the free-French part where at the-- and then they also tried to go via Spain to Portugal. But in Spain, I don't know exactly, but his wife told me that they tried to arrest him, the Germans. Because basically, in Spain, it was like going to Germany.

Of course, yeah.

And they managed to escape, and they went back to France and eventually got a ship from Bordeaux to the United States. How he got the visa and how they did-- but that was later. That was almost a year later.

Uh-huh.

And I think it must have been in January the following year. It was during the winter.

So it was '41 or so?

Yes.

January '41 or maybe even more?

Maybe. You know, I don't know the -- exactly.

Yeah, yeah.

So then they took an apartment here in Central Park South.

So not so far from you.

Pardon me?

Not so far from you and your mother.

No, no, no. I saw him then all the time. I did see him a lot.

Did his manner change? Had his personality changed?

Well, he was not as optimistic. I felt that he was-- I felt that he was sort of low, low-key. And he had diabetes very bad.

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And people with diabetes go to-- I mean, he was not supposed to eat sweets, but he would eat sweets anyway. He was heavy.

And how did you learn of what he did?

It's a strange story too. But it was -- I was in college, and I was in a play, in a French play. I was doing a lot of French. All my friends were French at that point. I had one American friend whom I-- still my friend now. And I was the ingÃ©nue in the-- obviously, with the way I looked-- in this French play. I can't remember the name of the play.

And he came to the first performance and saw me. I remember that he was sitting like in the second row. It was at Columbia. I was at Columbia. And the next day is the day that he committed suicide. And I think his wife told me. Somebody told me. And then we had another per-- I'll never forget because we had another performance.

Oh, dear.

And in those days, you understand, they didn't have anybody else who was going to be able to do a play in French. So I finally did it. But sort of I did it, I thought, to his memory for him. I don't know. We should have known. We should have.

But you know that you say these things. My mother said they should have known. He at that point had money problems. He had invested in also cars again. And my mother and my uncle had money. They could have helped. But they didn't say anything.

Yeah.

So who knows? Maybe it would have been anyway. I think he was not well by then. He was clearly not well. And he was older-- I mean, not very old for me now, but he was in his 60s, 60, 65. And with diabetes, they didn't know how to take care of it in those days.

Well, there are many, many ways that you can wear a person down.

Yeah.

And there were secondary sorts of effects, if not a direct assault, and there would have been a direct assault had he not been able to avoid arrest or pay his way out, you know, when he was in Germany. And we don't know much about these things.

Yeah.

We don't know about that.

I mean, I found out-- I don't know-- much, much later that he was three months in prison. Can you imagine what that did to a man like that who had been and was a great--

Those are the toughest--

--financier, financier who-- a great ladies man. That's the personality that you asked me. I mean, I didn't know all that.

Yeah. When was the first time you went back to Europe?

I was married, so it must have been-- the war ended in '45. My uncle went right away-- maybe '47 to '48 [BOTH TALKING]

To Paris?

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Yeah.

OK, by plane?

No.

[LAUGHS]

I went in a ship, and I was seasick [? right then. ?]

Oh.

Yeah. Well, my sons were born. So it must be even--

Later?

Yeah. No, no. It was '46 probably, '47, something. Because my husband, my first husband, owned a building in Paris, so we went to live in it. I lived there for a while.

OK. And what about Berlin? Did you ever go back to Berlin?

I went back to Berlin later with my se-- with my husband to watch the opera singer who sang in Berlin at the opera and while it was still occupied.

Oh, really? When it was-- he sang in the East German--

When there was a wall.

Yeah.

And he sang in West Germany.

In West Germany, OK.

Deutsche Oper.

Deutsche Oper, yeah.

And we stayed there. And then I went back later, and I looked at the house.

Did you ever get any restitution for any of the things that your father--

Well, we got something. My sister and I, we got a little money, but we didn't really do this very smartly. I think his wife got something too. She passed away, lived in Paris after and died there. And I think we-- we took a lawyer in Paris. And but it was too right after the war, and they didn't know all the things that I know now. And people told us that we should have. But especially this house in--

Charlottenburg.

[BOTH TALKING] No. And the house in the country and on the seashore-- it was right on the shore-- they just took away from him. No. And the guy who was the mayor just took the house and owned it. I know this story now, but it's so many years.

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Did you ever go to the seaside again?

No.

OK, OK.

I was there. I mean, it was beautiful. But what I'm going to do on the Baltic Sea?

Of course, of course. It probably--

And my life is here.

Yeah. No, I just wondered if you had gone to visit.

Well, I didn't. No, I didn't. Because I didn't-- I might have if I had the opportunity. But what-- I didn't have an opportunity. But I did go to Berlin several times, and I did visit and look at the house. And I saw-- I mean, it's pretty much like it is. But it had a big roof like this in stairs. They took off the roof

Oh, that's sort of like those roofs, I think, had a Dutch kind of--

Yeah, yeah. And apparently the architect of the house was a very famous architect at the time. But I couldn't go in. Because the door was the same that I remembered, the entrance. But and they still had the veranda, I mean, sort of where you could go outside.

But there were apartments. It was not the house anymore. But I could see from the outside. And it had a very big garden, and the garden doesn't exist anymore because it's another block that's constructed.

That's right. That's right. Did you ever go to Odessa? You said you had been in Moscow.

No. I would have liked to. But I have a friend who went to Odessa, and she said it's rebuilt. It's a beautiful city apparently. And it's on the sea and so forth. But my mother never knew how to swim. Because in those days, nobody went on the beach, she told me. I ask her, did you have a bathing suit? They didn't know what it was.

Did you-- wait. Between your mother and yourself, was it Russian or French that you spoke?

French.

French, OK.

I wanted to-- I learned Russian eventually. But I think that my parents wanted to be able to speak with each other without my understanding. I think it was a practice in those days.

Yeah. And your sister, did she stay in France, or did she come to the United States?

She stayed in France basically on and off for her life. But she did come to the US to visit me, and met a American man, and married. But apparently, he was actually Greek. And so she lived in Athens for 25 years.

Wow, wow. Did she ever talk about what those war years were like when she stayed in France?

Not much, actually. It's funny. She was there. She was in Paris, however-- that she told me-- when Paris was liberated. It made a lot of news.

That's right.

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And she and her girlfriend were in Paris and were there when they welcomed the American troops, and she said she would never forget that. That was extraordinary. So then she stayed in Paris. Well, she lived in my mother's house for a long time.

And what year did your mother pass away? What year did your mother pass away?

'85, 1985, here.

Yeah. Is there anything else I haven't asked you about your story, about these events that you think is important for people to know about?

No. I don't know.

Has it shaped you?

Oh, yes. I am sure. First of all, I can leave anywhere within minutes and go someplace else. It doesn't affect me. I don't really have any roots anywhere. Maybe here, now, but not really.

If you told me tomorrow-- my husband was Canadian, my second husband-- I would go to Canada tomorrow, it wouldn't matter. In that respect, it shaped me forever. And I moved a lot in my life. It didn't affect me.

What about your personality?

I don't think-- I think not that much, maybe. I was a tough little person, I think, from day one. But maybe as a young person, because of the circumstances, I always was very eager that people should like me. It was important. Not anymore, of course, but as a young person, as a young adult, as a teen. I always thought that I was a minor-- part of a minority.

I had an incident in New York. I was invited at some people's house very often. And one day, somebody made a remark against Jews. And I said, but I am Jewish. People didn't know very often because of the way you look like that. I look like that. I was never invited again.

Really?

And this was 20 years ago.

That's a little bitter.

And I knew that it-- there was like a silence.

Yeah.

But I wanted to say something. You know?

Yeah.

That's a good ending.

Well, it is a sad ending. It's a little bit--

And a sad ending.

You know? It's a little bitter.

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Another thing that I can say has nothing to-- well, my husband was Jewish, George [INAUDIBLE]. He was a famous opera singer. He sang in Bayreuth--

Beyreuth, yeah.

--the German stronghold, because he was a great Wagner singer. And everybody knew that he was Jewish. When he made his debut there, there were people who said, it's not going to happen because he's Jew-- a Jewish singer.

And Wieland Wagner, who was the head of the-- who was a grandson of Wagner, said to him, it's OK. It's going to be all right. And but there was a second where they-- it's the [INAUDIBLE]. But it was OK. He sang there for 10 years--

Wow.

--every summer. But people at times would tell him, you shouldn't be doing this. Because you are a Jew, you should not sing. But he did it anyway. I mean, there were a lot of Jewish singers actually at that time who sang there. What are you going to do?

He was a Jew who grew up in Canada. He actually did his bar mitzvah. He was much more Jewish, in a way. He used to say that I was a bad Jew.

[LAUGHS]

But he didn't have the kind of feeling that I had about because I was in Europe. He was not here.

Yeah, yeah.

I mean, I didn't-- I was with him in Beyreuth. And we had decided that anybody who was older than we were at the time-- we were both very young. He was 30-something-- and was a Nazi, and that younger people were not. And that way, we managed to live there.

So that's how you coped.

Yeah.

That's how you-- uh-huh.

This was unusual situation, you know?

Yeah. When did people start inquiring about your father-- I take it they must have been from Germany-- when they wanted to reconstruct what his role had been, what his achievements had been?

Well, I have this. I'll show you this if I can.

Was that recent?

Just pretty recently, two, three years ago [INAUDIBLE]. Because all of these papers are now open. You know? At the time, when we were first trying to find out things, you couldn't find any papers. You couldn't find anything right after the war--

That's right.

--in the '50s, in the '40s, late '40s. But now, everything is open. All these papers are there, but except that they destroyed a lot.

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Yeah.

Everything was destroyed. My daughter, who is very smart, found this book where it says quite openly that the Nazis had decided to get rid of all the people who were in the automobile business. They were all Jews. The problem with us is that we are too smart. I have told this recently to my children.

What have you told them?

I told them-- because I have very smart children. I didn't do anything about it. They just happened to be. They all went to Yale. They are all very successful. And I said, but that's dangerous. Look what's going on.

That's very sad. I mean, they will continue. But that feeling inside that you should fear for your achievements, that's very sad.

Well, I don't have any complexes, as you can tell.

Yeah, yeah.

But with what's going on in the world now-- did you see the one-page article in the Times last week? I saved it. I'll show you. I mean, it's horrible. Now my friends in Austria, when they read about what's going on here, he said, well, that's exactly what Goebbels did. When you lie enough, people believe you.

That's a problem. That's a real problem. Yeah, I can see why people are nervous.

So people who are from-- even my friends in Austria, they are like 20 years younger, 10, even that generation, they are very conscious of this. I wasn't so conscious of this 20 years ago. I wouldn't have talked to you like this.

Well, the world influences--

This is new.

Yeah, yeah. The world influences us, and events influence us.

Yeah.

And things happen that we never expect that they would.

So this is why I feel so strongly that what you're doing is very important.

Thank you.

And when I told my daughter, she said, you absolutely have to do this. Because I was, oh, well, I don't really have anything much to say.

And, see, we've talked for several hours.

Yeah.

Yeah. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Thank you for asking me. I wish I could do more for you.

Well, thank you for what you have done. This is quite a gift, and we appreciate it.

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You're welcome.

And I will say this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Nora London on April 29, 2017, in Manhattan, New York City. Thanks again.

You live in Washington, yeah?

Yeah. OK, tell me, who is this a photograph of?

It's a picture of my great aunt, Betty [? Kliatschko, ?] born Schiller, who died at Auschwitz.

How do I spell her first name? Mettie?

Betty.

Betty, Betty, B-E-T-T-Y.

Yeah, I think.

OK, all right. And how did you fi-- you said you find those-- or you found this just a little while ago?

Yes, I had a lot of pictures of family members, and I saw this.

OK. Thank you for sharing it. About what year do you think she was-- this picture was taken? Do you have-- this was while you-- how you remember her?

Yes, very much. We used to spend a lot of time together. She was very close to me.

OK, thank you. OK, tell me, who is this picture of?

This is a picture of my Uncle Simon Begagon-Aronson, who took me from Paris to the United States.

Your mother's brother.

My mother's brother.

And about when was this picture photo taken? It looks like a 1960s, kind of.

Yeah, it's probably later. Yeah.

OK. All right, thank you. So now I'm going to ask, who is this beautiful lady?

This is my mother, Jean Shapiro, born Schiller-- no, born Begagon-Aronson.

OK, Jean Shapiro, born Begagon-Aronson. She is stunning. And when do you think this was taken?

I think it was before the war. It was in Paris, obviously a posed picture.

Yeah, lovely. Thank you.