

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Margret Hantman on April 18, 2018 in Queens, New York. Thank you very, very much, Mrs. Hantman, for agreeing to speak with us today, for agreeing to share your story, and for letting us know some of your experiences. I'm going to start the interview with basic questions, and from there we'll build your story.

My first question is, can you tell me the date of your birth?

3/31/26.

So that was March 31-- 3/31, March 31, 1926.

March 31, 1926.

OK. And where were you born?

I was born in Berlin, Germany.

Do you know what part of Berlin? Do you remember the neighborhood and what it was called?

No, we moved quite a bit because my father had a store. And the area in-- where we lived turned quite early.

OK. We'll come to that. What was your name when you were born? What was your--

Simon.

Simon.

Yeah.

And your first name was still Margret?

It was Margret.

In German, is it Margarita or something?

No.

Just Margret.

It was Margret. My mother read a lot, and-- it was the name Margret with M-A-R-G-R-E-T--

Ah, Margret.

--without the A appealed to her.

OK . Well, let's find out a little bit about your mother. What was her name?

Her name was Ella Anita. She had a double name.

Ella Anita?

Yeah. Stahl.

S-T-A-H-L?

S-T-A-H-L, yeah.

So in German it would be Stahl.

Stahl, right.

OK. And your father's last name was Simon?

Simon, right.

And his first name?

Willy.

Willy. And do you know when they were born, what years they were born?

Oh, yeah. My father was born in 18-- 1896. And my mother was born 1901.

OK. Were they both from Berlin?

Yes.

So they were-- and their families, had they been from Berlin? Do you-- I'm trying to find out whether there had been several generations on one side or the other that were from Berlin.

They both-- both were-- my parents were born in Berlin.

OK. So is it fair to say that your family was a German-Jewish family?

Yes.

OK. Not, let's say, from Poland who had come and lived there a generation or two.

No.

OK. Did you know either of your grandparents?

Yes, I did. I did know my father's parents. And I met my-- unfortunately, my grandfather from my mother's side, he passed away three years after I was born. So I don't know him. But my grandmother--

On your mother's side?

My mother's side. And she was not-- she converted to Judaism.

Oh, so your grandmother on your mother's side was not Jewish?

No. She converted to Judaism.

OK. Do you know her name?

Yeah.

What was it?

Anna.

Anna?

Mm-hmm.

And her maiden name?

Her maiden name, I--

It's OK.

Often I don't--

OK. OK. But anyway, she was Anna Stahl when she was married.

Yeah.

And how many children did she have? How many brothers and sisters did your mother have?

My mother had one brother and one sister. They were three in the family.

Did you know your aunt and uncle?

Yes.

What were their names?

Their name was-- my mother's I'm blanking.

That's OK. Don't worry. We can take time, it's just--

No, no, no. That happens. I blank out names, especially names. Let's start with my father's brother, was Erwin.

Erwin was your father's brother.

Erwin Simon, right.

Erwin Simon, your father's brother.

Yes.

Did he have a sister or any other brothers? Or just the one?

No, there was just one. And my mother's was-- Rosa was my mother's sister. And Karl was my mother's brother.

So it was Karl Stahl.

Karl Stahl and Rosa Stahl.

Did Rosa get married?

No.

And Karl?

Karl was married to a non-Jewish woman. And that kept him in Berlin during the war.

Aha. So your uncle, did he survive the war?

He survived the war and died three years after.

OK. Did they have children?

No.

No. So was Karl and his wife non-Jewish? And he was half-Jewish-- I mean, his mother converted, but by the laws he could have been--

Yeah.

And Rosa, did she perish or did she survive?

Rosa was a very strange lady. She lost the sight of one eye, and she had a glass eye. And that made her withdraw from a lot of-- even from her family. I mean, she lived in the building that belonged to them, but--

But she kept to herself.

She kept very private. Her private life was-- was private.

Do you know what happened to her?

I only heard that she died, not in Berlin, that she had moved away from Berlin and passed away.

Before the war?

During the war.

During the war, OK. And your grandmother on your mother-- on your mother's side, that is, your mother's mother.

My mother's mother died when I was-- I remember going to the hospital when-- on her last days. And she died before the war.

OK. OK. Did your mother go to any higher education? Did she finish--

Yes. Yes.

What did she study?

I don't-- we don't-- I don't know that much.

OK. All right. But she went to a-- she went to gymnasium?

Yeah. Yeah, she went to gymnasium but I don't know how-- what degree she-- I really don't know. We didn't-- somehow didn't get to talk about it. I was living as a young person and being separated from schoolmates at first, and so and so forth, I became a Zionist.

You know, we'll come to those parts. I will ask you about those things. Right now what I want to try and do is establish-

Family background.

--family background, when things were still normal. You know, what was--

Very little do I remember from it.

But to get a sense of what the world was that you were born into. So that's part of these questions. And then we'll go on to other ones.

Sure.

OK. Did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes. I had a sister.

One sister.

One sister.

And she-- what was her name?

Eva.

Eva? OK. And when was she born?

She was born-- we were two and a half years apart. She was younger, two and a half years younger than I was.

So she would have been born perhaps 1928?

Yes.

OK. In the fall. If you were born in March--

Yeah.

OK. And your father Willy--

Willy, yeah.

Willy Simon. He had one brother Erwin?

Yeah.

OK. What was his family like, your grandparents on your father's side? Did they have a store like he did, or-- how did they make a living?

Yeah, they had a cigar store. And then-- ended up, the last I knew, ended up in an old age home.

Did they die before the war?

No.

OK. They died during the war.

Yeah.

OK. Do you know what part of Berlin the cigar store was in?

Prenzlauer Berg, I think.

Prenzlauer Berg. OK.

I think that's--

Well, that's pretty-- that's pretty central. Prenzlauer Berg is one of the more central neighborhoods in Berlin. What about your own family? Your first years, where did you live as you were-- your first memories, what place was that?

Oh, that was where he-- where my father had the store. Kolonialwaren, they called it. It's like a-- what would it be here? Like-- like a-- can't think of it.

Was it a grocery store?

Yeah. Grocery type.

OK. So did it have-- was it like a Woolworth's as well, or--

No, no, no, no.

No. So it was a grocery store.

Yeah.

All right.

A privately owned store.

And it was called Kolonial--

Yeah. The way I remember it.

OK. So the name was Kolonialware, yes?

Yeah.

OK. And where was that store located?

I think it was Wittenau, if I'm not--

OK. Did you live close to it?

Yeah.

OK. And could you walk from your home to the store?

Yeah.

All right. Tell me a little bit about your home. Were you in a house or an apartment?

In an apartment.

All right. So was this part-- were you living in a city environment or more a suburban environment?

It was more suburban.

OK. It was an apartment but in a suburban place. So residential-- residential area.

Yeah.

All right. Were there many-- was it several stories, this apartment?

No. No. I don't remember. No, I remember his store, my father's store.

OK. And did you own your own home? Did your family own the home they lived in?

No.

They rented?

Yes.

You said that your aunt lived in the same building but kept to herself. Was this the same building you lived in?

That was a family-owned building. My mother's family owned.

So it was not the place where you lived.

Built the-- that building, and lived in it. And we moved-- the last-- our last move was into that house. There was an apartment for us.

Because they owned it. So there was an apartment there.

Yeah.

How would you describe your own family, that is, your mother, your father, yourself, and your sister?

Yeah.

Would you say you were well-to-do? Or would you say you were middle class, or would you say you were just getting by?

Well, we were middle-- I would say at first well-to-do, then middle class, and the last they sent my father on a-- building houses, carrying the stones.

So in the end he was a laborer, a construction worker.

Very much so.

We'll come to the sequence of what happened to him as we go along.

Yeah.

Right now I'd like to learn a little bit more about him and your grandparents on your father's side. How-- were they educated? Had they--

Yes.

OK. Did your grandfather own his own business?

Yes.

What was his profession? What did he do?

Yes, he owned his business.

Was that the cigar place?

Yeah.

OK. Had your father gone and had higher education?

Yeah.

OK. And your language that you spoke at home was--

It was German.

OK. Did anybody in the family speak Yiddish?

No.

OK. Could you tell me some of your earliest memories? Do you remember, you know, when you were just a toddler? It can be just an episode here or there, but do you have any such memories?

Yeah. Most of them mischievous.

Yeah?

Yeah, like going into the store and taking a pickle out of a barrel and taking a bite and putting it in.

[LAUGHTER]

But otherwise I was-- I was quiet.

You were a quiet girl?

I was a quiet person. Yeah.

Did your father have hired help in his store? Or did he do everything himself?

He had somebody help him.

OK. And your mother, did she help him in the store, or was she--



No.

--taking care of the two of you?

She was taking care of us.

Were you a religious family?

No.

OK. And do you have any memories? You're born in 1926, and Hitler comes to power in 1933, at about the time you were seven years old-- something in that area. Do you have memories of what life was like before Hitler comes to power?

A little bit, yes. Yes.

What would those be?

It was the friends that I had took for granted, that we lived with neighbors. It all changed.

So they were friendly first?

I was-- I was, as a matter of fact, at one point, envious of them being in the BDM-- you know, Bund Deutscher Madchen.

Bundes Deutscher Madel. OK. Madchen, yeah. Which was the Nazi Youth Organization for Young Girls.

Exactly.

What was it-- it would be the Association of Young--

I didn't know.

Yeah, of German girls. Yeah. So you would have liked to belong to it because so many others did?

Just to belong, you know. That's why-- I loved groups, to be with people. That's why I--

Were you lonely as a child?

No, I had my-- my family. But when it came to the outside, I didn't want to be different than any of the other people.

Yeah.

I felt that I wanted to belong, too. And that's why I became a Zionist.

Yeah. That's so understandable. All children want to be able to be part of everybody else. They don't want to be separated. Yeah. How did-- in your family, in your life, how did the first effects of the larger political world-- that is, Hitler comes to power-- how did it make itself felt? What happened in your family?

They were very upset.

Yeah, you remember that?

Stuck to the radio, listened to changes. Yes.

So you remember that. You remember--

Yeah, vaguely. Yes, I do.

OK. Your father owned his own grocery store, yes?

Yes.

And was he able to continue working in the grocery store and owning it?

Later on?

Well, in the beginning. In 1933.

Yeah. In 1933, he still had his things. And then it-- it was-- they boycotted him, you know, because he was Jewish. That changed very fast, that area. I suppose it was the workers that changed--

Was it a working-- excuse me, I'm interrupting. Was your neighborhood a working-class neighborhood where you had the grocery store?

I didn't think so. But the fact that it turned so fast made me think later on that it must've been, because this is the type of neighborhood that changed fast.

I see. I see. So all of a sudden he loses customers.

Right.

Were there-- we have seen pictures and photographs of brownshirts standing in front of Jewish-owned stores in Germany at that time, and saying--

That was before.

Yeah. Did that happen to your father's store, that there were even--

No, that was-- that came later. That was not--

So he in the beginning it was simply boycott. OK. And that happened pretty fast?

Yeah.

So that's 1933. What about 1934 and '35? Was he still owning the store even--

Yes.

OK.

Well, it took-- you know, it went for me-- for us it went fast. We lost our home already. And then he was hired by a-- when he lost the store, he became a Vertreter.

A representative.

A representative of Blauband, which was a margarine outfit.

So one of the products--

They hired him.

To be a sales representative.

That's right.

OK.

So that was decent. That went for a couple of-- couple of years. And then that ended, and, you know, we had to-- he had to go on the building things.

So he became then a manual laborer?

Yes, right.

OK. What kind of personality did your father have? Was he an outgoing person? Was he--

Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah?

He was very much into sports. He was a volunteer sport teacher for Father John, but whether that means anything, that-- was one of the sports imagery, you know.

Was it a club, Father John, you're saying?

I don't know.

OK. You're saying-- was it something you said, Father John? Or was it-- I didn't hear it properly. He was a member of what kind of organization? You said he was into sports.

Yeah.

And you said, if it means something. And I didn't catch what it was that you were referring to.

It was-- it wasn't Jewish. It wasn't Christian. It was a sports club.

What was it called?

It was Berliner Turnverein or whatever.

Oh, OK. Berliner Turnverein.

I think that's what it was, yes.

OK. So he was a member of such a club.

I was not.

No, no, he. He was.

He was, yeah. He must have been. Because that's where he volunteered.

OK. And which of your parents was the one who was most involved with you and your sister?

I don't know-- I--

Were you close to either parent?

Yeah.

Yeah?

Yeah.

We were close. I mean, I as a child was very close to my parents. It was-- well, that comes later.

Tell me a little bit about your mother's personality.

Very quiet, calm. Good-natured.

Mm-hmm. What were some of their interests, your mother and your father? Your father, you mentioned was sports. Did your mother have interests that she pursued?

She turned into-- she became interested in sewing, in making things for us. We were two girls, so she--

Your aunt and your uncles, would they visit you often? Would you visit them often? Was there-- I--

Yeah, there was-- we were close. We were close.

Did your father and mother have friends who were not Jewish?

Have they what?

Did they have friends who were not Jewish?

I don't think so.

OK.

Even though they were not religious, but I don't think that-- it just wasn't done at the time, you know.

But you, because you lived in the neighborhood, your friends were not Jewish, as a little girl?

As a little-- when we moved-- see, when we-- when he lost the store, we moved to Bernau, which was the for--

Vorort?

Suburb.

A suburb.

A suburb of Berlin.

OK. Tell me, is it north, south of Berlin, Bernau? Because I'm not familiar with it. Was it north of Berlin, or west or

east?

North, north.

OK, north.

Buch, where the-- Buch-- it was the-- for mentally ill-- had a big Vorort of Berlin. And this was north, north of-- Bernau was north of that.

OK, so there was a facility for mentally ill people--

In Buch.

In Buch.

We had nothing to do with it. That was just the Station-- a station, before the Stadtbahn ended in Bernau.

Ah, so this was the S-Bahn. You could get by S-Bahn to Bernau.

That's right.

OK. And you said you lost your home. Were you kicked out of your home, or you could no longer afford it?

Apparently we were kicked out.

OK. Do you have memories of that?

When it was a Neubau.

A new construction?

A new construction home. So I don't have much of that [INAUDIBLE].

And then you go to Bernau.

In Bernau.

And Bernau was a Neubau.

Yeah.

OK. Before Bernau, when your father had his own store, you mentioned that you lost your home before you get to Bernau.

Yeah.

Now, was that because--

I don't know. I don't know why.

You don't know.

I just know the-- we lost it. I was-- you know, when you are young, and you're already dealing with being an outsider, your interests--

Of course.

--are different.

Of course they are.

You know, they are for existing.

Yes. And it's through the eyes of a child, and your parents probably would not have told you everything.

Exactly.

Yeah. So forgive me that I ask such questions. I know that I'm asking you questions that most of the time a child would not know the answer to it.

That's-- could I--

We can cut.

And to overcome, to have overcome that, I am well prepared for this, you know what I'm saying? It took me-- took more out of me to sit with my little tape deck, and I told it into this and this-- a human touch is different than the--

It's very-- it's not easy either way, but it is very difficult when you're talking about such things and such losses.

And we collect all these--

Yeah. There's a cost. There is a real cost. And I know-- I know that people often feel nervous before an interview, or sometimes it takes a few days after an interview to kind of come back to today.

Yeah.

So thank you for doing this. We appreciate it. We know that-- its costs.

Oh, I expected it. You see, when everybody told the story, and Spielberg pushed for this. My husband just had passed away. And I was in no condition, no mood, to touch this. So that's why I never did it.

Yeah.

And my children wanted to. No, I couldn't.

Did they know the details when they were growing up, of what you went through?

I wasn't able to talk to them. I remember my little grandson coming to me and said, oh, my, I want you to talk to my class. These were children of third grade.

Eight years old. Mm-hmm.

How could I talk to third graders like that? Or even think that they could understand? He could because he felt-- it hit him. It affected him. So my daughter must have said something in preparation.

Those are such burdens to carry, such burdens. And I look at things I did then. It's nothing like me. Nothing.

Well, you know there are people who write about times of great stress and trauma, that different aspects of a person's

personality come out that they never expected, that is not the way they behaved in a normal situation.

That's right. The courage-- I was not the pusher. I was always one in the background. Don't-- you know, that I did, that I-- picture of my-- my sister's picture, how I got to it, I don't know. And my star, I took off. But to keep it away from the Germans--

And the middle of Auschwitz. This is when you're in the middle of Auschwitz?

In the shower. In the shower. Here I am standing naked, all stripped, and putting things down, right?

And you take your sister's picture, and you fold it. And what do you do?

Put it in my mouth. I folded it, put it in my mouth. And the Star of David, the little thing, put it in my mouth. It was--

And you--

Carried it all through. And as a matter of fact, one of my cellmates, or whatever, she saw the picture and she said, I'll make a frame. And she, from a mattress, she took a piece and a piece of plastic, and made a frame out of it. I donated it with the frame. They can take it out, put it in--

So you saved that picture from a normal time, through Auschwitz, through the years in the camps, through liberation, to coming to the United States, and then very recently in 2018 donating that, plus the Star of David to the museum.

Yeah. I thought-- I wanted this explaining to my children what happened, what we all decided that the best way to serve was to donate and have it--

So your children also came to the decision with you.

Yes. They felt they would put it in a drawer, and they only would benefit from it, but nobody else.

Well, it's an extraordinary, extraordinary item, that it went with you through all this, and is a symbol of what you did that was, you know, how to preserve something of your life at a moment where they're taking it all away.

I can't explain it myself.

Before we go back to what we were talking about before, one more question about the photograph and the Star of David. After you took it out of your mouth after the showers, how did you keep it? How did you save it on your prison clothing? How did you-- how did you hide it?

I hid it under the mattress, in the mattress. I hid it anywhere, wherever I felt it was safe, wherever I felt it was safe.

OK. So it was in different places--

Yes.

--throughout the time that you were imprisoned.

Yes.

And you managed to save it all.

Yeah.

That's amazing. That's amazing. We will at the end of the interview film these items so that whoever sees the interview

will know what we are referring to.

Yeah, well, I don't have the items anymore.

No. We will film the photograph of the items. That's what you-- the originals are now with us. And thank you, they are now part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection. And so people will see a photograph of this here. And thank you for donating it so others would know what it was and what it meant, what these items meant.

And that it was real.

And that it was real, yeah. So let's go back a little bit. When you were-- when you were seven years old, Hitler comes to power. Had you already started school?

Have I--

Were you-- had you already started school?

Oh sure.

So you went to school before those elections that brought Hitler to power?

Yeah. As a matter of fact, I had a teacher in regular school, before we had to go to a Jewish school, who pointed out to the class that you can tell a Jew from anybody else--

You can?

You can.

You cannot?

You can.

You can, OK.

Because of the shape of the head, OK? And he called me to the front of the class. The only thing is, it was not what he preached. It was supposed to be-- it was supposed to be flat, and mine is not.

So in other words, you're supposed to have a flat head, but you didn't.

Yeah. So, this poor man was wrong.

And you were a little girl.

I was a little kid-- sure. And in front of everybody else for then. This was the beginning of my school.

So it was yet one more step towards being other. Were there other Jewish kids in the class, or were you the only one?

No, I was the only one. As a matter of fact, this was Bernau. We had a rabbi come in on every Sunday morning, A rabbi from Berlin came to give us religious training.

So that's when you were at the Jewish school in Bernau.

No.



Or was this a regular school? This was still a regular-- a public school?

That was a regular public school, because I couldn't attend the religious training classes that were given in religion. I couldn't partake in it, so I had to make up with a rabbi on a Sunday. It was a blessing.

I can-- to explain this, in Europe in public schools, it was often the case before the war that children had religious classes even though they were public schools. So Jewish children would have Jewish religious classes, Protestants Protestants, Catholics Catholic. But before all of the changes happened. And then when they happened, of course Jewish children could not have Jewish religion instruction in a public school.

Right.

OK. So the memories that you have of school don't sound like they were particularly positive.

No.

None.

Zed.

And how did the children behave to you?

How did she--

How did the children in school behave towards you?

It depends on-- some of them just ignored me. And some of them would go like [VOCALIZES] And others, it didn't matter.

So did you have any playmates?

Pardon me?

Did you have any playmates?

I did have one or two, yes.

OK. So life continues to get worse. Your father first has a store, he loses the store. You live in a better home, you lose the home. You go to Bernau, where he is a sales representative for a margarine company called Blaubund?

Blauband.

Blauband.

I don't know how I still remember that.

Yeah. Well, there are certain details people remember, you know.

Certain things that--

And in Bernau, you live in a new construction apartment. And your father's the sales representative. And that lasts a couple of years, yes?

I time--

You don't know.

It's very hard to pinpoint.

OK. That's OK. That's clear. It's one of the hardest things to recall when we're talking decades later how long something lasted. But it was a while. And then after that, that ends, and he then is a manual laborer in construction.

Yeah.

And you at some point, do you continue through public school? Or does that end for you?

When we moved, when we moved from Bernau to my parents'-- to my grandparents' home, to the house. And the school, I first went to public school. And then came the news that we had to go to Jewish school. And there was not-- well, the Rykestrasse. It was a distance.

What was the name of the street?

Rykestrasse. There was a synagogue.

Rigastrasse, like--

Ryke. Ryke.

Like the city Riga?

Ryke.

Rika.

Rykestrasse.

Would that be R-I-K-A? Rika?

Yeah.

OK.

Rykestrasse. There was a synagogue, became a school. We had--

Did you-- did you walk--

Jewish school. No, walk.

OK. Did you go by S-Bahn?

By who?

How did you get to the school?

We walked.

Oh, you walked. Excuse me, I didn't understand. You walked.

Yeah. No, we walked.

And what part of Berlin was your grandparents' building in?

North.

North Berlin, OK.

I think. I think it was Oderberger. I just-- the house, obviously, was taken over by the government. And sold zwangs-- they called it Zwangsverkauf.

Zwangsverkauf.

Zwangsverkauf. Yeah.

Forced sale.

Forced sale. Right. Right, right. And they--

And your grandmother was still alive?

No, my grandmother had passed away.

OK. Were your uncle and your aunt living in the house?

They didn't live in the house. They didn't live in the house.

So by the time you were in that house, you're going to just a Jewish school--

No, I was going to register at the regular school. And then came the warning that the Jewish kids had to go to a Jewish school. That's when they switched us over to a-- made out of the synagogue, a school.

Do you remember how old you were?

[SIGHS]

Must have been 11, 12, something on that order.

OK. So that would have been 1937, 1938, something like that.

Approximately.

Yeah. Did you like the Jewish school that you were starting to go to? Did you feel better there?

I felt better there. I felt like I'm with my own people. As a matter of fact, I had a young teacher who-- he convinced to become a Zionist and become a leader in a camp. It was a work camp.

Officially?

Officially, a work camp. But it was, obviously, in preparation for Israel.

So was this--

Because it was-- it had-- well, I'm talking about the Zionist part.

That's fine. That's fine. Now we're at the point where I'd like to know more.

Yeah. The Zionist, this Zionist camp was obviously under the name of work camp. It was a work camp, and it was-- Landwirtschaft. It's something--

If you want to say it in German, say it in German, if it's easier.

No, it's in-- you know, in all of these years I never spoke German. Now, going into this setup, in the German setup--

Of course. Those words come back, because that's what they were called.

Somehow the label is-- so this was in Landwirtschaft. We had-- we had a stable. We had outside a garden and things. We took care of our own [? water. ?] I mean, you know, it just was like in a kibbutz.

OK. So this sounds like it was farming of some kind.

It was right after 13-- after 14.

Right after 14 what?

After 14 years.

After you were 14 years old.

I was 14, yes.

OK. So first year in the school, where for the first time you belong-- you're with your own people--

That's right.

And there's a young teacher who you convince, the children convince, the students convince, to become a Zionist leader. He then becomes the leader of this work camp. This, officially a work camp, but unofficially is sort of like preparation for living in Palestine.

Yeah, it was.

And was this place-- I think in your papers that I read, was it Neuendorf or Neuen--

Neuendorf.

Neuendorf.

Neuendorf was one of the camps, one of the Landwirtschaft things was Neuendorf.

And was this far from home, far from Berlin?

No, in-- was it in Schlesien or the-- traveled too many places. Yeah, it's-- obviously you had to go by train.

OK. So if we looked for Neuendorf on a map, would we find a village that's called Neuendorf, and the camp was then in that village? Or would it be that the camp itself was called this?

Neuendorf was a work camp.

OK. It was the name of the work camp. But officially by the German government, that's how-- the Nazi government.

It was a work camp.

It was a work camp. Unofficially, it was this preparation.

Neuendorf was more or less known as a Jewish-- there was Deggendorf, Neuendorf-- there was the other one. There was one more. Can't think of it.

So how did you get interested in Zionism at the age of 11 or 12? Was that talked about in this school?

I had Jewish friends by then. And they were organized. They formed huge groups, Zionist groups for young-- at the age-- I must have been 12 years old.

What did your parents think of this?

My parents were not in favor of it. They were not Zionists. But they realized the need. And it took quite a bit of convincing. as a matter of fact, this teacher convinced my parents to let me go to Hachsharah.

Aha. It's called Hachsharah?

Hachsharah is the preparation for Israel--

Got it.

--in Jewish.

Got it, got it.

That was the--

OK. So that's-- these things are happening right before war starts, right before World War II starts. If it's 1937, '38, World War II starts in September, 1939. By the time that happens, do you come home, or are you in the camps? How does life progress for you and the rest of the family?

I stayed. I stayed as long as I knew my parents were safe from transport. Once they started to transport people, I wanted to go home.

You wanted to be with them?

Yeah.

I was young. I was--

Of course.

Too young to be--

Of course. I mean, those are the early teen years. You're just-- you're still a child.

If it wouldn't have been for the outside pressure, it wouldn't have-- you know. But the outside pressure brought you together, made you strong together.

Yeah. So you return home. And what is-- is your sister going to school at the time?

Yeah.

What's going on with her?

With her, she went to school, and then she was-- when she finished school, she was the Jewish Gemeinde--  
Community.

--had a foundling home, a--

Orphanage.

Orphanage for babies, basically. She worked there.

So after school she would go to work in this place?

It was--

That was part of the Jewish community's--

That's why she had to go to work. She was going to work with babies in [INAUDIBLE].

And she was young, too. She was only 10 or 11. She was-- when she was 13.

So this was in '41.

When she was taken, was about 14. And the-- she was 14 when she was taken. In any case, she worked there. And there was a transport that was formed of people-- illegally went undercover. And because of that, they made a Strafrtransport.

Uh-huh, punishment transport.

Yeah. Made a transport as a punishment. And since she was-- since she was working for the Jewish Gemeinde, and it was a Strafrtransport from there, they included her in the transport. My parents couldn't volunteer, I couldn't go along. We had to let her go.

Did you see her?

She was-- we were-- we said goodbye. Then she was taken. Was a heartbreaker for my mother, because this was her baby, you know? And she-- we couldn't do anything. We couldn't go. We couldn't stay. It was--

How did you find out that she was taken?

--bad time. Well, we know-- we heard, you know, you hear from one another what happens.

So did you go to the jail where she was being kept?

We couldn't go. From the moment she left, that was it. And that later on, I heard that that transport went to Riga.

Riga, Latvia.

And this whole transport, they had to dig their own trench. And they were shot in that trench. They were killed right there.

So this was '41, '42. Probably '42.

Yeah, like I said, the years are--

She was a-- she was just a young teen.

Just a child.

Yeah. So in the beginning of the war years, this is your daily life of, you hear of transports. Is that correct?

Well, daily life for Berlin started a little later for us. And the reason why Theresienstadt for us, for my parents and myself, is Theresienstadt was a place where you sent mixed marriages or people from the-- were in the war. My father was in World War II--

World War I?

World War I, and made the Iron Cross.

So he had been decorated veteran of World War I.

Yeah. And that brought them to Theresienstadt.

So that means on one side of the family, your mother is half-Jewish, half-Gentile according to the laws. And your father is a veteran of World War I with the Iron Cross. So that means instead of Auschwitz directly, it's Theresienstadt.

Theresienstadt.

OK. Do you remember the day that they came to take you away? Do you remember what that was like?

Oh. They took us first to a Sammel-- to--

A collecting point.

A home which used to be an old-- Jewish old age home, Litzmanstrasse.

Litzmanstrasse? OK.

They took us there for a couple of days, and then-- and then they transported us to Theresienstadt.

And do remember what you saw when you got to Theresienstadt? What was that like?

Well, it was-- here again, I was supposed to meet a Zionist group from Vienna from Vienna because my leader in the Zionist group was engaged to a leader in the Viennese group. And his group was in Theresienstadt, so I was supposed to visit with them.

Mm-hmm. So from the camp, from the Zionist network, you were able to find people that you had known or who were also--

I didn't know them, but I knew of them.

Got it. Got it.

So I had contact there.

So they were prisoners also, and you made contact with them when you were in Theresienstadt?

As soon as I got to Theresienstadt, I saw to make sure that I meet these people that I didn't know.

Got it.

But they heard of me because of their connection.

And how did-- did that benefit you at all, making this connection?

Hmm?

Did this benefit you?

Sure.

In what way?

Yeah, at least emotionally you had a tie. You had-- you found that you know people. And they were going for the same thing. There were Zionists. They wanted the same-- the same, the best.

So that's for yourself. For your parents-- did you live with your parents when you got to--

No.

How did this work out? What had happened with your father, your mother, and yourself?

We were all-- we were all scattered about. We were assigned to certain things. My father was assigned to a station where people-- that were full of lice and things. He had to work there. And he--

Deloused them?

Delouse them, and then they-- so that was-- my mother didn't-- didn't-- she befriended a woman, a few women, actually, that were swing. And so she joined them and kept herself busy this way. And I was assigned to Stabsgarten. It was a moat around Theresienstadt.

Stabs--

OK.

So a Stabsgarten to me sounds like a garden for the staff of Theresienstadt.

Yeah, it was.

So it was for people who were running it.

That went through the garden-- they had gardens outside the Theresienstadt, too.

Ah, OK.

You know, they had land where they-- tomatoes and things.

Well, that's a pretty good-- that's a pretty good job.



That was nice, but I was in the-- in the moat that was around, that was very-- this garden, same school where you were-- we had tomatoes, and we had cucumbers.

Were you allowed, officially by the rules, were you allowed to eat them?

No.

OK. Your job was to just cultivate them and pick them for the staff, is that correct?

Make them grow from scratch. Obviously, we all learned how to take some stuff in. And--

How would you do it?

How? The brassiere. Under the brassiere a cucumber. In the pants maybe tomato, on the bottom.

So at the bottom of your pants tomatoes, underneath your brassiere cucumbers.

You found ways. And I brought them to my parents. And they were able to get cigarettes for them all, whatever.

Were people caught taking the fruits, the vegetables, and whatever was in the garden? Were there times where people were caught?

Who was in charge? In charge were the Chetniks, the Tschechische police.

Oh, these were the Czech police?

They had them to stand by the gate, to see who goes in and out. Somehow-- I am sure they knew or they didn't, I don't know. I never-- I'm sorry.

OK, can we cut for a second? OK. Before the break, we were talking about the sequence of events of what happened to your family as time went on. And where we stopped was Theresienstadt, that you all were brought to Theresienstadt, but you were in different places.

Your father was assigned to a section that deloused prisoners of lice. Your mother was with sewing-- you know, she was with other women in a sewing kind of activity. Was that assigned work, by the way? Was she assigned?

I don't think so. I think they were helping others fix things up, you know.

And you worked in a Stabsgarten.

Yeah.

And occasionally you were able to bring some food back, occasionally.

They called it schleusen.

Schleusen. What means to be able to bring it in secrecy.

We schleus'ed it. To bring it in.

And about-- and you got to Theresienstadt, you were brought there in 1942.

Mm-hmm.

Do you know how long you stayed?

We stayed from December, '42 to October.

'43?

'43.

OK. And was your father with you the whole time?

My father was in a transport. They transported men. And I think he was in the second or third men transport to Auschwitz.

Did you know it was Auschwitz?

There were rumors. I didn't-- nobody really knew.

OK.

So then we stayed--

It was then just your mother and yourself?

I-- and I had promised my father that I would never leave my mother.

Were you able to say goodbye to your father?

Yeah. Yeah, we knew he was going away, but not where to. So. And then came the time when women were also on transport. And my mother was in a transport. I never forgot what my father-- what I promised my father, that I would never leave her.

Even so, the Stabsgarten at that time was exempt from Auschwitz transports. We were not-- we were allowed to stay, so to say. But having promised, like I said, I went with my mother. I volunteered. I went--

Did she know this?

She knew it, because it gave her also a sense of security, that I was going to be with her.

Yeah.

Needless to say, the transport was horrible going into Auschwitz. And we got into Auschwitz--

Tell me, before you got into Auschwitz, what was about this transport that was horrible and different from how you got to Theresienstadt?

Well, Theresienstadt, it was a human transport. Whereas, from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, it was for animals. We were-- really in cattle cars going. And that was-- that was already the sign of, things are not getting better.

So as we got to Auschwitz, and we-- we got out of the car. We walked, we were met by SS standing there and going with his thumb to one side and the other side-- no idea, naive, not knowing what this meant.

The thumb, one side--

The thumb one and the other side. I couldn't go with my mother. Before I knew it, she was already gone. And I had to

go to the other side.

This is 1943 in the fall, yes? October.

This is October, '40-- wait [MUTTERING] the war was in-- finished in '45.

So it's two year-- less than two years before the end of the war. A year and a half before the end.

Year and a half before the war-- right. So--

Then she was 42 years old. She was a young woman.

She was not-- what happened was she broke down when she saw what was going on. She felt bad for me. Then she got me in, and then she started to cry. I couldn't stop her.

And then it was just one of those things that she-- you know, how you can change to look like an old lady in a moment, when you let yourself go. This is what happened.

Oh, the poor woman.

And she was not a tall woman. And she just broke down. She couldn't-- there was nothing we could do.

Well, you know, that's a thought that occurred to me. Had she known where you were going? I could have imagined she would have told you, don't go with me, don't go with me. But she didn't know.

No one really knew for 100%. Nobody could tell. Everybody-- there were so many rumors that you didn't know was real and what was rumor.

So it's at that point that you're separated.

Yes. At that point.

And what's the last vision you have of her? What's the last image you have of her?

Turning around and crying. So I [? went on. ?] And even then I didn't know. They said that they would transport them by bus to where we were going to be.

And that didn't happen.

Nobody knew. At this point, we all knew that the rumors were true. When we saw the setup there, we knew it.

What did you see?

Human beings-- human beings pushed, you know, just pushed into these-- and then we were pushed into the sauna, into the dressing room to get undressed. And the whole procedure started, the hair shaven off. It was horrible.

Did you have normal--

Degrading. It was-- yes?

Did you have normal clothes on when you got to Auschwitz, or did you have prisoner's uniforms?

No, no, we had normal clothes.

So when you go into the showers, you're taking off the clothes--

We took everything off.

Did you ever see those clothes again?

No. It's all in a pile of--

And was it at that time, at that point, that you see your sister's photograph, you have your sister's photograph--

At this point, getting undressed, I came across it-- how I grabbed it I don't know.

OK. So you had her photograph. And you had your Magen David chain.

I had the Magen David hanging around me, and I just pulled it off. That was easy to get. But to get to it without anybody--

Seeing.

--seeing you do it.

Yeah. Yeah.

That's it.

That's quite an accomplishment. And nobody saw--

Must be stupidity, otherwise who would take a chance?

But were there guards everywhere? I mean, were there masses of prisoners or masses of guards?

Not visible. Not visible to me. I was more involved in being degraded, the hair off, and-- you know, that affected you more.

Yeah. Yeah. Do you remember about how long that process took-- the showers, the hair--

No, no idea. In all honesty I cannot tell.

Did you get tattooed?

No. You see, that was, the transports that came at my time didn't get the tattoos anymore. There was no more time for it, or no more numbers-- I don't know what the reason was. But we did not get any more tattoos. Those earlier transports, the husbands, the men got all that. They didn't anymore.

So as they were shaving your head, had you gotten a new uniform already?

Yeah, nightgowns. Any-- any junk that they could find, they put on you. As long as it covers you.

So it wasn't like a uniform either. It was just anything.

Uniform was later. First came this. It's whatever they collected, they just distribute it, you know. Who knows? I don't know how they did it, but I ended up with a nightgown. Didn't matter.

Was it prisoners who shaved your head, or was it guards and staff?

Well, we had a lot of Polish prisoners. They were rough and not likable, that were watching over you.

Yeah. And then after all this, after you go through this process, what happens to you then?

What happens to me then is they took you to-- to the sleeping quarters, the--

Barracks.

--the different cots up and down in different--

What did they look like?

Just-- just wooden. Wooden-- wood and straw. You know, straw-covered mattress.

And did anybody talk to you when you got into those barracks?

Everybody was afraid to talk much.

OK. Did you think you'd see your mother again at that point?

No.

You realized?

No. At this point I-- it was-- no.

So you were the last one left.

So I was what?

You were the last one left from your family?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Was there anyone you knew from Theresienstadt who was in the same barracks with you?

Not-- maybe. But there were people from Theresienstadt, but I didn't personally know them.

OK. So from that group of Zionist youth that you met, first in Hachsharah, I believe it was, and then from that work camp Neuendorf, and then the ones that you contacted who were from Vienna, did any of them end up in Auschwitz near you? Or were you completely alone? I guess that's the real question I'm asking.

I was alone, because there was nobody that I personally knew.

OK.

The last people that I knew that I was familiar with was in Theresienstadt. That was the last.

So after the barracks, then what happened?

Well, in the barracks something happened. We were sorted to different camps, different work camps, concentration camp related work camps. And we had one rope coming this way, and next to us another rope going down this way.

And as I am standing to wait to go forward, there is a girl crying. I said, what's the matter? Why are you crying? Because my sister is over there in the other transport, and I am here. I said, you want to change which-- you go ahead. I take your place, you take mine, and then you're with your sister.

And I did. I--

So you left your line and went to the other line?

And I took her name. I know it like today-- Eva Polakova. She was a Czech girl, and her sister was in the other lane, in the other line.

OK. So Eva-- you became Eva Polakova.

She never changed her name. I didn't have the guts to go with my name. I was afraid, because I changed it.

You changed lines.

To change back, I was afraid. I didn't do it. I understand that they both made it alive, thank God.

Did you ever see them again?

I didn't see them, but I heard from Czech people that they did.

Oh, how wonderful to know that.

Yeah.

And that they were then, at least for a while, together.

That they were together, period.

That was a huge thing in the camps. That's why I asked you if you were alone. Because people who were together had a greater--

They had the moral support, sure.

Yeah. So you became Eva Polakova.

Eva Polakova.

And where did that line take you, that you got into?

I went to Sackisch, which was an airplane factory who had a camp adjacent to it. And it was 5 kilometers out of Nachod, Czechoslovakia.

So it was on the German side or the Polish side of Czechoslovakia?

On the German side.

OK.

Yeah. On the German side of Czechoslovakia.

So it was not a subcamp of Auschwitz. It was a totally different place.

Nothing with Auschwitz.

Got it. OK.

It was Sackisch. And it was, I understand, near Bad Kudowa.

OK.

It was across the lake.

OK. Bad Kudowa.

Yeah. That was a famous--

Resort?

Spa. Yeah, yeah.

On the Czech side or the German side?

I think it was on the border line, yeah. Because we saw it from the camp.

OK. So the camp was named Sackisch?

Yeah. The town in which it was, Sackisch.

OK. And what was the conditions like in this camp?

This camp were just barracks. Empty barracks. And you worked, and you got your-- one piece of bread, like everything else. But I had a good experience in-- at the factory. We were working with Czech people, workers.

And there was a Czech gentleman, could have been my father.

He looked like your father?

He could have been my father. And every time when he saw me, he blinked either left or right, wherever. And I realized wherever he blinked to, there was a piece of bread for me. Every day when he saw me, he would, you know, just focus on that piece of bread.

Do you think it was your father?

No, no.

No, it's just that he looked like him.

He could have been my father. He was his age. That's what I'm trying to say.

OK. So he was-- he was another prisoner.

Yeah. He was not a prisoner, he was a worker from Czechoslovakia. They had Czech people working there.

Ah, OK. So there were different classes, different groups. There were workers and then there were actually concentration camp prisoners working in the same factory.

Yeah, and really were watched, obviously.

OK. What was your job in that factory?

I don't-- anything-- nothing special things.

Did you have to operate machinery?

Helping with things. No, cleaning up the machinery, or doing something on that order. Nothing-- no important job.

And when--

They didn't trust us.

Yeah. When did you get to Sackisch? In other words, you were in Auschwitz in October '43.

Auschwitz three weeks.

OK. So by November you're in Sackisch.

Through the end of the war.

OK.

What happened is, first of all we got-- a couple of days before, we got planes flying overhead that Roosevelt died.

So leaflets came down?

And when they came down, we all said this is the end of us, because our hope, somehow for whatever reason, was that he's going to save us.

Yeah. Yeah. What kind of planes? Do you know? Were they--

I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I just know something flew down and we wait, and that was it, you know.

Got it.

And then like a couple of days after, everybody very jittery, the Germans. They got very-- and one day, they went, gather yourself together, get going, 1, 2, 3. You're going on a walk 5 kilometers from Czechoslovakia. That's where we went, to Czechoslovakia.

Oh, really?

And they were waiting for us. And they were opening their arms, they guided us at the school, pushed us all into that school. Families from all over came to take us to their homes. I went to a family that owned a milk store.

OK. A dairy store, yeah.

They gave me-- they fed me and things. As a matter of fact, I took a bath. And they thought I killed myself because I didn't get out of the bathroom.

You hadn't had a chance for so long.



I felt so good being in that tub that--

Now, I have a few questions.

Yeah.

When they said, get yourself together, we're going for a walk, were these still the guards of Sackisch, of the camp, were these still the German guards who said that?

They just let us loose.

Ah. OK.

OK, they got us to get out.

So it wasn't like they accompanied you.

They disappeared.

Oh. And the prisoners yourselves,

We didn't-- we didn't see them. We were just shift one way over to Nachod.

Czechoslovakia. OK. All right. And so it was at the Czech border town, is that right, where you were met by Czech families?

Yeah. At the school where we were gathered there.

And do you remember the name of the place?

Nachod.

Nachod.

Nachod was the town.

OK. So you were taken by a family that had a milk store?

Yeah.

And they-- the first bath that you had, you hadn't had for such a long time, they were worried that you might have done something to yourself.

That's right, that's right.

OK. And then what happened after that?

So--

Did you ever try at that point-- so at that point it's freedom, yes? It's liberation.

That's right. That's right.

Did you know that your sister was gone and that your father was gone?

I didn't know it, until I got to Theresienstadt. I went back to Theresienstadt to see, thinking I would find my family there.

Just hoping, yeah? And what was the news that you found instead of that?

No. No, no, go on to Theresienstadt-- to Theresienstadt, and if they made it, they're going to be there.

I see.

And then came the news that they were not. Then all the news spread as to who was alive, where. And then after weeks, I got a note from my father's cousin in St. Louis.

So your father had a cousin in St. Louis, Missouri.

In St. Louis, right. And she contacted everybody. They used to get me over to come to St. Louis, to come to the States.

OK. Had you known of her before the war?

I knew, yeah.

Had you ever met her before the war?

Yes.

So she had come to visit you in Berlin?

Yeah I met her in Berlin.

What was her name?

Laney-- what was-- Lowenthal was her maiden name. But Riesen was her maiden name. [NON-ENGLISH]. God almighty.

It will come to you.

Yeah, sure, it will come to me. Sure. Oh, God. Eve-- I can't say.

OK. OK. Before the end we will probably remember. If not, I have what you wrote down and the name is in there. So we will find it and we'll say it. So she finds you. All the way from St. Louis, she tries to find where-- what happened.

She read all the survivors' things and she found my name.

OK. OK. And did she find you--

That was a DP camp already then.

OK. So you don't stay in Theresienstadt. Once you find that your-- none of your family is there, where do you go?

I had befriended a Czech girl who didn't want to let me go, wanted me to stay with her in Prague. She was from Prague, Czechoslovakia. And at first we went to a Zionist meeting, the first one, in Budapest.

In Hungary.

So I went with her to Budapest. Through the Slovakia into the-- and we got back to Prague. And she lived in a-- she got an apartment from a German actress. And she-- we found her clothes in there and everything.

So she gave me things, clothing, and-- and I went back to Theresienstadt.

From Prague. Yeah.

From Prague to Theresienstadt.

OK. And you then-- that's where you were looking for your parents?

I kept on looking. And they had reformed DP camps. We went back into these. And I chose-- by then I found some people that I knew, and I went into a DP camp.

And where was that DP camp located?

Deggendorf.

Deggendorf.

Yeah.

So that was outside of Czechoslovakia?

Deggendorf, yeah.

Was it in Austria or in Germany?

In Germany.

In Germany. OK. Deggendorf. And that's where I reformed the theater group, and--

Is that where your cousin found you, in Deggendorf?

No, she found me through the agencies.

OK. And were you-- when you made contact with her the first time, were you in--

In Deggendorf already, yes.

All right. All right.

Yeah.

And Deggendorf, then, must have been in the western part of Germany?

Yeah. Was it Bavaria?

Bavaria.

Bavaria. Was it almost exclusively Jewish DPs?

Yeah. Oh, you mean the camp?

Yeah.

Yeah.

OK. No other nationalities were there? OK. No other types of DPs?

No, Jewish DPs.

OK. And how long did you stay in Deggendorf? How long were you living there?

In Deggendorf?

Mm-hmm.

[MUTTERING] Oh, a year.

OK. So did you get there in 1945 or '46?

'46. The end of the war.

OK.

Sure.

OK. I guess I'm trying to find out, between the time you're let go of Sackisch and you get to the Czech border, between that moment and when you get to Deggendorf, about how much time elapsed? Was it a year, was it several months?

It was months.

Months, OK. So that would have still taken at 1945.

Almost a year. Almost a year, I think.

OK. OK. Now, were there any other Jews from Berlin who were in that camp? Any other German Jews? Or were they--

Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah?

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

OK. Did you join another Zionist group? I didn't join a group. I had friends that I knew formed Zionist organizations. But I did not join-- we did not join together. We each, each individual, made their own connection somehow.

OK.

And some of them went to-- went to Zionist group and registered for the Israel, made contact with the-- and got there. And at that point, I was so hungry for relatives.

Yeah.

That I am a little tired of camp life.

Well, you had enough of it.

Honestly sad. And then I decided that I want to be with my family.

So what was left of it?

They did all the necessary things, got the papers ready. And I wrote it from my end, and that's--

So did you-- do you remember when you left Deggendorf? What year it was?

Deggendorf, it was the year I came here.

No, what I'm asking is, what year did you come to the United States?

What year? A year after the war.

1946 or 1947?

'46.

You came to the US in 1946?

Yeah.

Oh, that's pretty early.

I was the second boat coming from the US--

Coming to.

Coming from Germany on a troop transport.

Oh, wow. So were-- there were still troops on those--

No. The Marine Perch.

It was called Marine Perch.

Mm-hmm.

OK. Did you go alone? That is, did you have any friends who were with you?

No, I already had friends. As a matter of fact, my-- afterwards became my husband, a friend. And then we married here in the States.

So as you were coming over, he was your boyfriend.

That's it, yeah.

OK. And when you got to the United States, tell me what the-- tell me what that was like, coming over on the boat.

Well, I-- when I saw a Statue of Liberty, I walked down. And we saw that light. We came in at night. We stayed overnight in the harbor.

And the realization set in. You know, you-- you made it. You're in a-- a strange land. You've got to adjust. But at the

same time, thank God.

Yeah. Is that when-- had you still felt insecure until you arrived here?

Oh, yeah. You're facing a new life. And you're still young. You're not a mature person.

Yeah. How old were you at that

Point? At that point I was 19 years old.

And all your teen years you had lived through so much.

The best years of your life you spent in a camp. The best years that anyone can have growing up.

How did that change you? How did that experience leave its mark on you?

It left a mark everywhere you turned. Whether you were-- later on, more mature, married, or maybe you lived someplace, it was a holiday. And the holiday was celebrated with family. And you had no family. It was always, always there.

It's up to this point, even.

Yeah.

I'm bringing up my children, we have no family to speak of.

So you would feel that. And you'd feel what was missing.

Oh, and how. And how. Even in raising up your own children, the life that, thank God, you could offer them, you realize you didn't have it, you know? But you were happy and thankful that you had a chance to give them the life you never had.

Yeah. Yeah. What was it like when you met your cousin again, who had done all-- made all these efforts to get you over?

Oh, well, she-- we were so thrilled. She has a daughter one year younger than I am. And she was actually my father's cousin. And they were close as cousins.

And she-- [INAUDIBLE] And I accepted her as my mother. She took over, you know.

Did you tell her of what you had been through?

In part. She knew more than I did of any-- she had more information here than I had been over there. I only had my own experience. But the overall--

She had.

She had.

OK. Did you feel that-- did you feel that warmth that you had been missing? When you finally got to her and you were with her and the family, did you feel again, I am with my family?

Yes. I still feel that way even so, these cousins-- I call them cousins. She had a sister, this Tante Leni. She had a sister in the West Coast. She was good-natured. She known by the whole family as the best person there is.

When she heard about it, she fell apart. She ended up in an asylum, and she died there. So my aunt that got me also took over her sister's daughter and became a mother to her, too.

Oh, wow.

So she was quite a woman, yeah.

Yeah. So while you were in St. Louis with your aunt, what happened with your boyfriend?

He was in New York with his father and brother.

I see.

They were here.

And how long did you spend in St. Louis, and when did you get back together again?

I spent, I think, five weeks in St. Louis. Four or five weeks. And then I wanted to come back to friends that I had left. Because most of them ended up in New York.

OK. And when you came to New York, where did you live? I rented a room. You know, people rented rooms.

Yeah.

That's what I did, I rented a room.

And when did you get married?

I got married a year afterwards here.

And did you then work?

Oh, yeah. I worked the minute I came. And the only thing I could do is work on a sewing machine. I didn't know what else.

So where did you find work?

It was easy. The Joint-- the Joint Distribution, the HIAS. They all held places that they could recommend. And those jobs you could have, you know.

And what kind of work did your husband do?

My husband worked in a leather factory-- leather handbags.

And so between the two of you, that's when you started to build up whatever savings you had and eventually bought the house we are in today. Is that correct?

Yeah. We-- we rented apartments before we moved here.

OK. And your children? How many children do you have?

I have two children.

Their names?

I have a boy and a girl. My boy is named after his grandfather Alfred, Freddie. And I have a daughter. My daughter is named after my mother, Elaine-- Ella.

Ella Anita.

Yeah.

OK. So that comes through Elaine. Did you ever go back to Germany?

Yes, I did. I was invited to Berlin. And I did go, because I wanted my husband to see where I came from.

And what year was that? What year did you go back? What year-- '77, was that?

OK.

Yeah, it's--

But in the '70s, was that the only time you went back?

To Berlin, yes. I once went back to Deggendorf to see the DP camp.

OK. And at the beginning of our interview, we were talking that you didn't talk about this for a long time.

That's correct, yes.

And when your children were growing up, did they know anything of your story?

They-- they wanted to know. But they didn't want to hurt me. And they felt that in asking too many questions it might hurt.

OK. They sound like sensitive children.

Yeah, they were.

And when did you-- when did you feel like you were ready to share this story?

I don't know. I gradually went into it, that I got myself to dictate my story and then got even-- And then my daughter pushed for it. My daughter felt that, mom, it's time. And I said, do you know what, I feel it's time.

It took a while, didn't it?

Yeah.

You know, we're talking over half a century.

Took a long time.

Yeah. We've come pretty much to the end of it. And my final question is, is there something you would like people to know, to understand from hearing your story? Something-- some thoughts you'd like to leave with them, or-- yeah.

I want people to realize that the stories that they heard were not stories. They were truth. It's a fact. It's not a story. And the more they know about it, I think we would all be better off and prevent these things from happening again.



Couldn't say it better.

I wish that people would open their eyes and realize there is good, and there is bad. And you've got to know which is good and bad. You've got to realize it. There is a lot of good, but you have to bring it to the surface.

Mm-hmm. Well, thank you for everything you've done today and for whatever price you're paying by telling us. Thank you for that.

I thank you for letting me tell my stories.

You're welcome.

Because only then will people learn that, don't let's do it again. Don't. Don't fall into the same pit again. Whether it happens to Jews or Africans, or whoever it happens to, human beings are human beings and should be treated as such.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

I thank you and the museum for trying to bring the truth out.

Thank you again.

Thank you.

And I'll say, with that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Margret Hantman on April 18, 2018 in Queens, New York. Thanks again.

I thank you.

Now, before we--

OK. Go.

You got it? OK. So Margret, tell me, what is that photo that Gus is now filming for us? It looks like a bell.

Like a bell? OK. Tell us who it is.

I cannot see.

Oh, excuse me. I think it's the one that you folded up and put in your mouth. Can you tell us about that?

Oh, that is not like it.

OK. Let's cut the camera for a second.

OK. Margret, tell me, what is the photo that I see? What is that of?

The photo that you see?

Yes.

Is it the one that you had when you were in Auschwitz?

Oh, because, you know, I see a lot of the chain but I don't see the Magen David, which is hanging on the bottom. That--

OK, Margret.

You see the frame.

Yeah. What is this?

I see a framed picture.

OK. What is there?

And the inside of the frame shows my sister with her big eyes.

And is this the photograph that you folded and put in your mouth?

And I can see the crease that it took when I folded it, when it got wet from my saliva.

And then the frame around the picture, how was this done? The frame around the photograph?

The frame around the picture was done by one of my people that lived with me in the camp. She wanted to do me a favor and wanted to put the picture in the frame. And she took it from a mattress, the straw mattress, and made it and gave it to me.

That is a most precious item. And I am very grateful that you and your family have donated this to the museum. Thank you. OK.

Is this-- that you are holding up now, what is that of?

I am-- I am holding my own chain and my little Magen David that I got when I was born, I suppose, because it has all my little teeth marks. And I used to chew on it, I suppose. But it was dear to me, and I wore it a lot.

And what did you do with it when you got to Auschwitz?

When I got to Auschwitz, all I could do was, 1, 2, 3, took it off my neck and put it into my mouth. And I kept it my mouth all along until I felt safe to take it off and shake it out of my mouth.

And you kept it hidden along with the photograph?

Kept it with the photograph in a little-- yeah, in a little piece of cloth, really, so it would stay dry, because the photo was a little moist.

Mm-hmm. Thank you. Thank you, Margret.