This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Susan Flusser Tausig on April 26, 2013, in Manhattan, New York. Thank you very, very much for agreeing to speak with us today to share some of your story and your family's story. I'm going to start with basic questions, and we'll go from there.

I'm at your service.

Thank you. Tell me, what was the date of your birth?

December 26, 1936. I am 81 years old.

OK. And where were you born?

In Vienna, Austria.

And what was your name at birth?

Susan Flusser.

Susan Flusser.

I kept my maiden name as my middle name. I usually just use the initial, but I gave you the whole name.

Well, thank you. Thank you for doing that. And often we ask that because people change their names.

Yes.

Some have kept the same parts of their names from before. Like, Wilhelm will become Bill, something like that.

Well, you know, it may have been Suzane.

Was it?

Flusser. Yeah.

It was Suzane Flusser?

But I dislike that. I never use it. But to my German-speaking friends or my family, I'm Susie. Never mind all that other stuff. So I'm Susie, or professionally, I didn't want to go around. Just call me Susie. So I'm Susan, but that's what I was born with, actually Christened and all.

Were you christened?

Yes, yes.

Then is one of your parents not Jewish?

Correct.

Which one?

My mother.

What was her name?

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Her--

Her first name and her maiden name.

Her name was Blanca Lipiner.

Blanca Lipiner?

Lipiner, L-I-P-I-N-E-R. And there was some-- she was, if you want to call it that, half-Jewish, half-Protestant. But in those days, if you are in a middle European environment religion and you weren't practicing like some people, where it was very important and their lives centered around a synagogue-- but in general, in Austria, where she was, it was not a factor. So yes, she had one parent who was Jewish, one who wasn't. She married my father, who was Jewish both sides.

But how is it that you came to be christened being one-quarter Christian? Was she practicing enough?

I guess.

OK. Just asking.

Not practicing, but it was, quote, "customary."

OK. Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had an older brother.

What was his name?

Peter. Peter Flusser. And he passed away about 15 years ago, unfortunately. He was older, and he died of complications of diabetes. But he was a mathematics professor in Kansas.

I see. How many years older than you was he?

About seven.

And he was born, then, in what year?

1930.

1930. OK. And you're 1937, December '26?

Well, December '36.

December '36, yes. Sorry.

Yeah, so seven--

Yeah, it's close. It's close. And tell me a little bit about-- well, first of all, I asked your mother's name. Your father's name. What was your father's name?

My father's name-- he was called Rudy-- was Rudolf Flusser.

All right. And were they both from families who had been in Vienna for a long time, for generations? Or were they newly arrived?

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My mother, as far as I know, was from a more established Viennese family. Her father was an attorney there, as far as I know. My father was born in Budapest, Hungary, and he came to Vienna. The parents had some business. He was mainly in textiles. And he came to Vienna and met my mother. Actually, he met her brother first. And guess what?

[LAUGHTER]

So let's talk about both sides of the family a little bit. Your mother had how many siblings?

My mother had three biological brothers and one half-brother. We go back now a step to her parents. Her father was a widower with two adult children when he met the lady who was to become his wife.

And your grandmother?

My maternal grandmother. She was-- [GASPS] divorced with a little boy, who became-- he never legally adopted him because that, quote, little boy eventually found me to talk to me. And so her married name at that point was Morganstern.

That means before she married?

Before she--

After she married?

After she married. I have her maiden name somewhere. But my maternal grandmother was a Mrs. Morganstern with a young son of 3 or 4 whose name was Oscar, who married this widower.

Named Mr. Lipiner.

"Lip-ee-nah." Right.

"Lip-ee-nah." OK.

L-I-P-I-N-E-R. There is an interesting aside to that name, because my uncle, who then became a practicing physician here in New York, he got tired of people saying, hello, Dr. "La-Piner." So he decided to spell his name differently, L-E-P-E-N-E-R, but it was with an i.

I see.

And some friends were, oh my goodness, he wants to sound like a Frenchman. I said, no. "Le Pener." He just wanted to get closer to the original pronunciation of his name. But to answer your question, there was big brother Oscar, whom they all idolized. And then this couple with the two adult children and one little one had four of their own.

Wow.

That became my Uncle Pepi, who was Joseph, Uncle Fritz, who was Siegfried. Then came my mother, and then came little Guido. So my mother had three biological brothers and one half-brother.

And all I heard from her is they idolized that half-brother because his age was closer to them. Daddy was an elderly man as far as they were concerned, and he was. And so if you're in trouble, you go to Oscar, and he will intercede with father on your behalf.

What about the two older children that were your grandfather's?

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They did not look kindly on the fact that he married a woman so much younger. Apparently he married this lady who was just two years older than one of his children. So well, he was in his 40s, I guess, and she was-- anyway, I don't remember the exact ages. I could look it up somewhere. But they decided they didn't really want to have much to do with the new family.

So did you have any contact with them ever?

No. No, my mother didn't even have, and she was-- that would have been her half-brother and half-sister. As far as she told us, there was really no contact. Maybe they spoke to their father once in a while. But they went--

Separate ways.

Right.

And it was your father, your grandfather, Mr. Lipiner, who was the Protestant part of the family and Mrs. Morganstern?

I never quite figured out if he was half and half. But Mrs. Morganstern must have been the Jewish part, because her son, Oscar, had his problems when the Nazis came. He had married a Christian girl who tried to hide him. But then a neighbor ratted him out, and he ended up in a work camp.

But he survived-- not too long, but he just barely survived the war. So in the camp that Oscar was sent to, it was some labor camp, and he was not permitted to wear any protection. The other workers could. Anyway, his lungs got damaged. So from his son, I heard little bit about what happened to my mother's oldest brother.

So that would be Oscar?

Oscar.

The half-brother.

The half-brother. So he must have been the Jew. I never was quite sure whether the grandfather was partly Jewish or not. But the children, the other children, were allowed to identify however they wanted.

Excuse me, please. So did you--

So we were at my mother's side of the family. So there was the-- obviously the Jewish oldest brother, the half-brother. And then came the four of them.

And they were Joseph--

They were left to decide, basically, what they wanted. There was no emphasis on any religious education in the family.

So they were secular?

Hm?

It was very much a secular family.

Secular, right, because I know, next-- the biological brother, the oldest, Pepi, meaning Joseph, he managed to come to the United-- he was a doctor. He could manage to come to the US for much earlier than others, because he was specializing in some lung-- in addition to some lung disease. And there was an expert in New York. So he was involved-- he was the head of the Viennese medical something. So he came very early on here to work with that expert, that specialist.

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Before you were born?

Oh, yes. And he never went back anywhere. Next in line was another brother, Fritz, or Siegfried, Lipiner. And he became a dentist. And he was with us in Shanghai. Then came my mother. Then came a few years nothing. I once asked her how come. She said, you know, things happen. Sometimes, anyway, there may have been, but we never talked about a problem. And then came little Guido, who was quite a bit younger than my mother.

When was your mother born?

My mother was born on June 7, 1896.

OK. So she had you when she was about 40?

40. She was 40 years old. She was obviously 33 when she had my brother. And her baby brother, as she called him, was, I think, six years or more, nine years, younger.

Oh, wow.

And so she helped raise him because their mother died-- I think she was only-- mother told me she was only about 53. She died very young. So she left behind three-- all these children. But one was still in school, was a little boy. And my mother told me how he would come to her office and sit at a desk to do his homework. And then they would go home.

So you never knew your oma?

No. No, no, no. And so that's my mother's siblings. Now, Fritz was in Shanghai. He eventually went back to Vienna. That was an option I can describe later, that people from Shanghai, if they wanted to get out now, they could agree to be repatriated to where they came from.

We'll come to that point. That's interesting.

So Fritz went back to Vienna and became-- practiced dentistry in Vienna. There was no place else. The youngest of my uncles--

Guido.

--Guido, he went to South Africa.

Oh, wow.

He went-- and he identified totally Jewish and married a Jewish lady. He had a friend, classmate, and they made a wager together. Look, we have to get out. Now, we don't know if we can succeed, but we'll try. So you're the one who's going to America. I will go to South Africa. If one fails, there's another one to help. So Guido ended up in South Africa.

And his friend-- do you know if his friend ended up in America?

Yes, in Connecticut, in-- I forget where. Danbury, I think. Yeah, Danbury.

So when Guido left Vienna, did you know him as you were a little girl?

Not then. Not then. I met him. He was my favorite uncle. He was delightful. But I only met him as an adult, because I was six months old when my parents left Vienna.

Really?

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So I do not remember the-- people ask me, do you still remember something? And I say, no, I don't know the color of my crib. I was six months old when they-- both parents went from Vienna to Prague.

OK. We'll get there. We're right now still on family, who is who.

Who's who.

Who's who. So does that pretty-- and obviously, your grandfather, Lipiner, you wouldn't have known because he was so much older.

He was old, and he passed away before all-- I think both that grandfather and grandmother passed away before Nazi anything.

Yeah, OK.

Which is different from my father's side.

So if there's nothing else to add right now to your mother's side, any other people that are significant who were part of their lives, their social circle from your mother's side?

Not right now. It may pop up, because that oldest uncle's son found me.

I forgot to ask his name. What was his name, first name?

It'll come to me.

Fine. But he is a Morgenstern. Oscar was a Morgenstern.

He was a Morgenstern, right. Oscar Morgenstern had two sons. And the one I know-- well, anyway, his name will come to me. One of them made it his business to try to find my mother after the war, because he survived. And eventually, through my uncle Guido, he found my married name. And when I went to Vienna, he got on a train all night just to get to Vienna so he could meet--

With you.

--his little cousin.

Aw. All right. Let's turn to your father's side of the family. He's from Budapest.

Living in Vienna.

Living in Vienna. Did he come alone, or did his family come with him? Or did he come with his family? How did that transfer happen, and who was there?

I don't think they were in Vienna, because-- or they were-- I know them to be in Prague. So they were-- the rest of the family I knew to be Czech. There were Hungarians living in first Vienna and then in Prague.

And his parents, my father's parents, I never knew Hugo Lipiner. I don't know when he passed away. My little cousin now knows all the dates, and she's been doing the family history. And his mother, Elizabeth, who was quite the family matriarch that I heard a lot about. And she did not survive. And she had three children. My father was the youngest of three.

Who were the others?

The others were the oldest, a girl, Hermine Flusser.

OK.

The middle one, Jula, I guess Julius. The Hungarian was Jula. And then my father.

Rudolf.

Rudolf. And Hermine married, I guess, at the age of 17 or something, 18. Anyway, and she had a baby girl. And that was my cousin. And that made my father an uncle at the age of 10. Oldest, got married, had a baby. He was an uncle.

And that part of the story is that Hermine's marriage did not look happy, and Grandmother Elizabeth, my child is not happy. That means the baby is not happy. She packed them up to come home.

So my father was-- had his sister back, and he had a little niece who was the baby of the family, almost like his baby sister.

So they kind of grew up together.

They grew up together.

And he grew up-- now, remind me-- he grew up in Budapest when you're telling me this. Or his family--

By then he is in--

Prague.

--Prague. Vienna and then Prague. I don't know which is which. But no more Budapest.

So he leaves Budapest for which of these two cities first?

I believe Vienna. Vienna. That's where he met my mother.

And then he meets your mother in Vienna, but he grows up in which city? In Budapest or in Prague?

Where he grew up, my father?

Yes.

Oh, he grew up, obviously, in Budapest. As a young adult, he is in Vienna, where he meets my mother.

And then his family that was in Budapest moves at some point--

To Prague. I think they were in Prague, yeah.

OK. And so do you have early memories, earliest memories, of Prague?

Oh, I was in Prague till the age of four. So I have very vague memories. We went back, my husband and I, on a vacation and met some people, like that son of Oscar-- Gustav. It'll come to me.

And the only thing that looked familiar is I looked at the paving stones. There's a very distinct way that they pave the streets in Prague, sort of a curved pattern. Whatever it was, I go, I remember that, but nothing else. I don't remember anything else of Prague on going back on vacation. And yet Czech was my first language.

Was it, rather than German?

Because in Prague, the Germans were not well-liked anymore.

That's true.

And my parents did not want their child to me saying something or calling out in German. So they hired a Czech nanny for me, and my first language was Czech.

Interesting, very interesting. Now, what part of Prague? Did you visit-- even if you have no memories of it, do you know where you lived in Prague? Did you know details from before?

I had a street name some place. I had no memory. I mean, when you're-- little scenes might come up. And I have a couple of snapshots that my father took with me on a sled going down in the snow. But no, I don't-- when you're four--

Of course not. What I meant was is that from any documents your parents might have had, did you discover what part of Prague you had lived in?

If I find some documents, I may get a street address or something.

But you didn't have it, for example, when you went to Prague with your husband later?

No, no, no. We just went with a relative who was Oscar's granddaughter who spoke Czech and had survived in Prague. And so she met us in Vienna, and we drove to Prague. And she showed us all the sights.

What year was this?

I have to look. I forget.

It could be approximate.

My date-- you know.

Chronology is the first thing that everybody forgets.

Yes, yes.

And the only thing I need to know--

Maybe in the mid-'90s or something.

It was after the Velvet revolution?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. The Velvet revolution is another factor in our lives because my father, who then lived in Vancouver, British Columbia-- goes all over the place-- he was registered with the Red Cross in case any relatives, in case anyone is found. And he gets a notification. We found a Rudolf Flusser who escaped in the '56. That date I know the Velvet--

Oh, that's the--

The Hungarian--

That's the Hungarian uprising.

Uprising.

Yeah.

And he escaped with his wife to Vienna. He had survived the war in Hungary, protected by his Christian wife who had a sister who was a nun in a convent-- so very Christian. But they were not practicing. And when they came to Vienna, my father got the information he was named after that uncle, Gustav.

Oh, so this was a relative?

His uncle, his uncle. So that Hungarian uprising brought that uncle-- his uncle Rudolf, my grand uncle, to light. He didn't know that man had survived, and he was named after him. So my father was ecstatic. He, of course, flew to meet him and helped support him a little bit for the rest of his life in Vienna.

Yeah. Can we cut just for a second?

You know, came to the fore, meaning that my dad suddenly found his favorite uncle.

Which is wonderful.

And so that's the only reason he flew to Vienna. He was never going to set foot on that country. But for him and my father, he got there. He got to his hotel. He got to visit the uncle. He went back to the hotel. He went back to see the uncle. He did not visit any of the places that he had lived in in Vienna or anything. He just would have none of it, but he went to see the uncle.

Why?

Because what they did. There was the Nazis and they-- the names he had for them. So since he lived in Vienna and had to get out and their first stop was Prague, with a seven-, eight-year-old boy and a six-month-old baby, he was not very happy with the Austrians.

That's understandable. I wondered whether there was some specific experiences that he personally had that you found out about, that he told you about his life in Vienna.

No, it was-- you know, he had a happy life or something, normal life, busy. I do not know of any restrictions that he faced. But he had a contact in Czechoslovakia. In fact, at one point, he got Czechoslovakian citizenship.

Oh, wow.

And that I know because I found his passport, an old passport. And so the family was now in Prague.

One of the things that is interesting in the dates that-- you were born in December 1936--

Correct.

--as a half year old baby. You moved to Prague.

Yes.

That's pretty early considering the sequence of historical events. It is before the takeover of Austria.

The Anschluss.

The Anschluss. And many people who-- many Jewish people who were still in Vienna felt everything is fine until the Anschluss.

Yes.

So for your parents to leave earlier, it's either very prescient, or something must have happened, I would think, to say, OK, we're out of here.

We have a contact. We had business opportunities. All I know is they packed up and went to Prague.

OK. And what was your father's business? I don't know if--

Textiles.

Textiles. And who was the lawyer? Who had finished law school?

Grandfather on mother's side.

Mr. Lipiner. Lipiner. The Lipiners.

Yeah, the Lipiner was-- the old man was a lawyer.

A lawyer. And did your father go to-- did your father have higher education?

Yes. We had to have whatever education and then specialized education to commercial-- to be a textile engineer.

OK. And did he work for somebody else, or did he have his own business?

At one point they had their own business. It was a family. His father had a textile business, and I assume that there was an outpost in Prague and seemed a good idea to manage that.

OK. Well, that makes a lot of sense. That makes an awful lot of sense. And your parents-- and then for some reason, not only your parents are in Prague, but the rest of his side of the family comes from Budapest to Prague, because you mentioned your grandmother being there.

Yeah, pretty sure that they didn't stay in Vienna, unless-- I'm not sure at this point whether Grandmother Elizabeth stayed in Vienna. I should ask my cousin. She's been researching it. They could have come out of Vienna.

So they also would have done Budapest.

There's a contact in Vienna. Whether they ended up in Prague, might not. They may have stayed in Vienna.

When you were in these early years in Prague, did you know any of your father's side of the family?

I have a very fleeting, vague memory of my grandmother.

Elizabeth?

Elizabeth. And actually, it was one of saying goodbye. Wave goodbye to grandma, whoever else was there. So I guess they stayed in Vienna. That's from where they got arrested. So Elizabeth and her daughter, Hermine, and son, Jula, stayed in Vienna.

Did not talk to her?

And I remember-- no. And I remember that scene of, wave goodbye to grandma. And there were other people there. And everything else was from family stories or history.

So what happened to Grandma Elizabeth and her daughter and her son?

Grandma Elizabeth, my father found out, was in Theresienstadt.

North of Prague, yep.

And don't know where else. Son, Jula, also went there. But my little cousin Betsy, who's named for her Grandmother Elizabeth and her middle name is Susie, for me, she found out that Jula went to several camp-- was arrested and then went to several camps. And the last camp that she traced him to was this name that I asked you about, Schwarzheide.

Schwarzheide.

And she ordered a book and she left already. It's here. And she is fixated. She knows where he went, the next camp, the next camp, and the last one is this Schwarzheide.

Schwarzheide.

She's trying to find out more, if it can be done.

So is there documentation that your Grandmother Elizabeth died in Theresienstadt?

I don't know. And if my father found out more, he didn't talk about it. He found out the Theresienstadt, and with me he left it at that. If he ever found out more, I do not know. If he ever found out more about his sister, I do not know.

Did she also go to Theresienstadt? Was she also arrested?

She was-- yeah. So Grandmother Elizabeth, Hermina, and Jula died. And the little one, my father's niece, Ilus, Ilona. Ilus came to Shanghai. So my father basically had himself-- I mean he survived-- and his niece survived.

And she was whose child?

Hermine's child.

She was also-- Hermine had a son and a daughter?

No, no, she just had a daughter. My father was an uncle at the age of 10. So there was his little niece, who was Hermine's child.

That's right. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I got--

It can get confusing, and it'll get more confusing. But we'll get to that.

We'll get there. We'll unravel it all.

But there we have the father's side, where the grandfather, I think, passed away. Hugo died just before, natural causes of heart attack or something. Elizabeth survives, becomes a widow, and she and two of her children disappear. Her youngest, Rudy, manages to go to Prague and then end up in Shanghai. Hermine's daughter ends up in Shanghai.

How does Hermina's daughter, Ilus, Ilona-- when your father and mother and you and your brother left Prague, I would assume she would have stayed with her mother and her grandmother.

Right.

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What was her route to be with you in Shanghai? How was her fate different from her mother's and her grandmother's and her uncle's?

She married. She met the love of her life, another Jula. Married and was able, through, I guess, talking with my folks-- because as things got bad and suddenly there was no place where you could go and no visas were issued and no quotas were full, there was one place everybody found out about.

And that was, if you had the money, you could buy yourself a tick to Shanghai, no other restrictions. So Ilus and her husband managed to get out. And I forget which route they took, but it was early, by boat-- by land and then by boat. And they got to Shanghai.

From Vienna?

From Vienna. They go to-- whatever-- Genoa and take the boat there. My parents, who were in Prague, started exploring how do we get out of here.

When?

Well, they started-- soon after they got there, I guess they started exploring. There comes a point when I am-- by the time I'm two years old when my parents separate. And they separate by way of my mother and brother leaving for Shanghai.

Is this a formal separation?

It then turned out to be one. So they separate. And from what I'm told, they decided it would be easier for a woman alone to go with a 9-, 10-year-old than a little toddler. So what happens is she leaves. She can still get all her transit visas to get to Genoa and board a boat and ends up in Shanghai by boat.

By boat, OK.

My father was more hesitant for whatever reasons. And finally, to hear my mother tell it, she was bombarding him with letters, "But you have to get out. You have to get out." He agrees to leave Prague with me.

By that time, no transit visas, like what's happening now. They're afraid the Syrian refugees won't go and they'll settle along the way, so no more transit visas. So to get out of Prague, my father and I in a small, very small, group of people in a similar situation managed to go on the Trans-Siberian railroad through Siberia--

Do you have any memories of this?

--to Vladivostok.

Wow. Do you have any memories--

I have some memories of that train ride. I remember it being very long and a lot of snow to see outside the windows. And that was, I guess, March or something.

'38?

'41.

[GASPS] This is March '41?

We are practically the last people out of Prague.

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So your mother is leaving in 1938--

Yes.

--when you're about two years old.

Exactly.

And you leave when you're four and something, four years old, with your father. And at that point, for the historical record, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were in an alliance.

They had a non-aggression pact.

Which means that you could--

Which means that we ended up in Vladivostok. But the Chinese, who were aligned themselves with allies, they blocked the train communication, because there's a way to get south. They would not let the train go south.

So in Vladivostok, everybody ended up getting, obviously, off the train. And we ended up going by boat to Japan, going south in Japan. And my father and I arrived in Shanghai by boat from Japan.

Wow.

So I guess Kobe and so forth. Anyway, so that's-- as you pointed out, there was this non-aggression pact because the Russians joined the Allies practically at the end of the war.

No, it was actually June '41. It's three or four months later that Nazi Germany attacks the Soviet Union. And then they're no longer allies.

But they didn't formally agree to be ally-- whatever.

Yeah, they did. They did.

Oh, they did. OK.

Well, it's OK.

Not at the time when we had to go across Siberia.

The reason I brought it up is because once they're allies, that means that you wouldn't be blocked within the European part of the journey. You'd be able to go from German-occupied Czechoslovakia. And do you know how you got onto the-- where you got onto the Trans-Siberian railroad, whether it was in Moscow, whether it was--

Oh, no, it was in Prague somewhere.

Oh, so it was from Prague?

We went the whole route.

I see.

I think it was two weeks on the train.

OK. So it passed through Prague and then goes further eastwards?

All the way.

And it wouldn't have had political hindrances because of that alliance. That's why I bring it up. But it's interesting that, at the other end, you do.

But they did check, and there were police going through the train periodically. But anyway.

Did the train stop? Do you remember it stopping on the way?

I remember some stops, but no one could really could step off and step back on.

OK. And was there--

I remember one incident. Apparently, my father was able to take three little suitcases-- one for him, one for me, and one for the child's toys. And I remember him sitting me down at a train where it stopped. And he went somewhere, had to obviously show some papers or something.

And that I remember. He sat me down. He says, please-- and he could be stern. He could be soft. He said, you sit on this suitcase till I come back. I remember that. You do not move. You do not go away.

Anybody talks to you, you smile, you answer, but you do not leave these-- and there were three suitcases. And then he tells the story that I got a little bored there. And I took one suitcase and I started rubbing off some chalk marks. And my dad said he almost had a heart attack. But these were what the--

Officials.

--Gestapo people had put on there. And oh my goodness. But anyway, we got back on the train with all three suitcases. [LAUGHS]

So then I remember, because he was very quiet and very stern. Sweetheart, you shouldn't have done it. You know, I need that mark on the suitcase. Oh.

Well, you know, one can only imagine what your father was thinking as he was on the train. He is seeing all of the stress. He is feeling all of the stress that it takes to get from point A to point B. These are not the friendliest of officials.

No.

From where he starts to where he goes. And until he reaches the end point, he has no idea whether you'll really get there.

Right. No, I was pretty good about it. I think I had one bad night in Kobe. They put us up, the little group. And there was someone-- there was one older-- somebody's older child. And I always-- they said, you look after her. He became quite a well-known professor and worked at the UN, but anyway-- from that little group.

But I was apparently very good, except when they got to Kobe and we were in the hotel. And I was fast asleep, and then the adults went somewhere. And I woke up, and my father was not here.

And where could he be, of course?

And apparently I raised quite a ruckus. And people came running because the next thing I know is there's my dad running up into the room. He has me in his arms.

And what else to do? I remember him walking me down this great big hotel staircase and the other people from the group in there. Are you all right? Are you all right? Susenka, all the names. And people looking. So I know I must have

raised quite a ruckus in that room. That's all I remember.

You were four.

But I was all right.

Yeah, well, you were four years old. You were four years old, and it was dark. And you didn't know the place. And it's normal.

Right.

Is that normal, [INAUDIBLE]? I guess it's normal.

Yeah, it's normal. But you see, what makes these things interesting is the normal human reactions people have in these extraordinary times and the significance that then they take on because of that. Kids are kids. And they continue to be kids when bombs are falling.

Oh, yeah. And I had to, yes.

So thank you for sharing that. Thank you for sharing that anecdote.

I liked that episode. Anyway, the whole group then ended up the same on the train and then by boat in Shanghai. And on that trip--

By boat.

By boat to Japan, train, and then boat. And on that trip, [INAUDIBLE]. On that trip, my father started to teach me a little verse. That part I think you've heard. He started to teach me a little greeting in German. Remember, I only spoke Czech. So he was trying to teach me something in German, so that I remember when we arrived in Shanghai, I'm at the railing, up to the lower railing.

My father is looking over, and he says, that's your mother. That's your brother. That's your cousin, Ilus, who's an adult at this point, with her husband and baby, Henry. So she, in Shanghai, had had a son who was one-year-old-- that I remember in '41-- in her arms. And they were there at the pier to greet us.

What was the phrase he tried to teach you?

Well, apparently it was a welcome statement.

You don't remember what it is?

No, I don't remember it. But I do remember something, what I understood enough after I came. And there's these strangers. And I recite this to my mother. And I remember my brother saying, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. And I held it against him all my life. I understood that. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

Let's tell the camera what that means.

What's she saying? So my brother, who at this point was 11, says what's she saying. My hard-learned welcome to my mother and brother.

Yeah, well, kids again.

So then in Shanghai, I had, except for one lady, nobody really to talk to in Czech. So gradually I forgot all my Czech language.

What language did your parents speak to one another in?

German.

And had that been true in Prague as well?

To each other, yes. My dad knew some Czech. My mother knew none. So they spoke German to each other. That's why they hired that--

Czech tutor.

--Czech nanny.

Let's break for second.

Before the break, we were talking about how you got to Shanghai. Before I forget, do you remember the date you arrived in Shanghai?

That's one of the few dates that are inscribed in my memory. And that was April 7, 1941.

So if you left Prague in March '41.

Whenever, yeah.

February, March.

Something like that. You were on the road for quite a while till you got there.

Exactly.

And you remembered an incident where you tried to greet your mother in nicely learned German. And your brother says, what's she saying there?

Right.

So let's follow that language topic for a while. When you were in Shanghai and spent some time there, what languages did you learn?

Well, I got reintroduced, essentially, to my mother since I'd had no memory of her from early, nothing much to speak of. So her language was German. So I picked up German. I immediately picked up English from life around me. And the first school I was sent to, Public Thomas Hanbury School, as a kindergarten or first grader, which the Japanese promptly took over.

So I wasn't there too long. None of us were there too long. And then being friendly with my neighbors and such and having a Chinese amah in the house, I picked up Chinese, the Shanghai dialect. And so as I grew older, I evolved, or I just improved, in those three languages, and I really forgot all my Czech.

There was the story of a soldier who was being operated on here after an injury, and the doctors were all saying, what is he talking about. What is he mumbling under his anesthetic? And then one of the nurses figured out, he's saying something in Yiddish. And he woke up. He had no knowledge. And they said, how come you spoke Yiddish?

Oh, he'd had a Yiddish-speaking grandmother, and that had been an early language which he'd forgotten but somehow, under the anesthetic, things came out. And they say any serious injury or something can-- speaking of the brain, can

rattle your brain. And Henry always joked, well, if I hit you with a 2 by 4, will you start talking Czech?

Henry was your husband?

Henry was my husband. So he joked, if I hit you with a 2 by 4, maybe you'll start talking Czech again.

You never know. You never know.

We never found out.

No, that's a good thing. That's a very good thing.

So in Shanghai, I grew up in these languages. And then in the schools, multiple schools I went to, the language of instruction was always English. So that was one of the greatest assets I had, that I was totally fluent in English. I mean, it's my basic language when I came here--

To the States.

--into the States because of the struggle to fit in and with language. And my language was pretty good, and it was my best language.

So that's an ease that you had that others who came over did not.

Correct.

Let's kind of circle back to something else that's a little bit more in your immediate family. You had not seen your mother for a couple of years and had no memory of her before.

Not really.

At this point, I want to ask a little bit about your parents' personalities, both from your mother's side and from your father's. So when you're in Shanghai, you start to get to know her. Tell me, what kind of a person was she like? What were her interests? What were her manners or the things that she found important, her values?

My mother was really the most-- trying to be the most resourceful person in a very difficult situation of being there as a refugee in China. I mean, the last thing that a middle European person ever thought of would be then they would be plunked down in the middle of a Chinese environment.

Of course.

When she got there with my brother, just ahead, my cousin Ilus and her husband had already arrived. So we lived at adjacent rooms or something. So that helped that she had somebody there that she knew from all her life, but it was pretty difficult for them to manage initially.

Did she have to find a job when she was there?

No, she didn't, although she was quite a woman's libber. She'd had a job at the Kreditanstalt in Vienna. Very few women had ever been-- had ever worked there. And once she came-- there's a reason for mentioning that. But once she was in Shanghai, no. But somebody who had been there much earlier was a gentleman who then became my stepfather.

So she met him--

She knew of him, the way you know of somebody in an organization, oh, yes, Mr. So-and-so. Didn't have much personal contact because my stepfather, who worked for the Kreditanstalt, he was an inspector, meaning when he went

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out to the branches, they weren't very happy to see him. Here comes the audit.

That's right.

So he traveled a bit throughout Austria, mainly the branches. But he was a little-- earlier in Shanghai, I think late '37 or '38, something like that. He-- who would have thought to leave? He was very comfortable in his life in Vienna. He was married, had a son. No such thing as thinking of leaving.

I'm now moving to my stepfather by way of telling you about my mother. My stepfather had a very close friend in Vienna, [PERSONAL NAME] something, Schneider. I get to meet him once. The most dignified and gentle of people.

And that friend, as I heard the stories from my stepfather, talked to him and said-- he was of a lesser nobility or something. He was untouchable, but he was a Christian the way Christians should be. And he said, my friend, I hear things that are troubling me greatly. I think you need to leave the country. And my stepfather-- what do you mean? Why?

He said, think about it. He said, look what's happening, and your son will be of military age very shortly. And Jewish boys are sent to the front as cannon fodder. They were right on the front lines. You must leave.

So my stepfather listened to his friend after not too long and decided to apply. Where do you go? He'd never applied for a visa or a quota anywhere. But you can go to China if you bought a ticket. So that's what my stepfather did with his wife and son.

What was his name, your--

Ludwig Rosenbaum. So Ludwig, or Luigi as we called him, packed up the family. The difference was that he could take some of his assets. He could take his belongings, his huge library. He was an accountant.

That's why he worked at Kreditanstalt. His hobby was music. He played the cello. He played the piano. He had a huge musical library of notes and the instruments, et cetera. He was able to bring all that to Shanghai and to settle in the former British section, because Shanghai was divided by the French and the British and the Russian, et cetera, sections.

So he was able to buy a house near a park, furnish it fully, and continue with good-- as good a life as you can under the circumstances, but better than most. By virtue of being there, he said people like him would go to the Jewish authorities who were helping the refugees and would check, can I help, what can I do, and so forth. And he saw on a list of newcomers-- he recognized Blanca Flusser, Blanca Lipiner Flusser, because that Lipiner rang a bell, because she worked as Lipiner, and son.

So he immediately introduced himself to my mother. And can you come to our place and meet his wife, meet the son? So he kind of started helping my mother and Ilus because they were together in a little kind of help and where to go for what and not to be--

Completely alone.

--so completely alone and isolated. So he turned out to be a big helper. In turn, when his wife got sick and eventually passed away, my mother could help there. And by then, they had established some kind of friendship, which a little later became a courtship.

So by the time your father arrives with you in 1941, was the courtship underway? Or was it something that--

Not really. Just, here's somebody who was in Vienna. But there was no reunion with my father. There was civil talk and so forth. But my father took an apartment, and they stayed in close contact. And to the wonder of many people, my father and my mother thereby separated permanently and I think divorced officially in '43. I found some marriage and divorce papers.

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And they stayed friends for the rest of their lives. And my mother remarried. My father absolutely adored and became friends with Luigi. He always called him-- that man is a saint for what he's putting up with. And they got along. And then my father met my stepmother in Shanghai. She had come from Russian origin, and in Shanghai there was the distinction between the white Russians and the red Russians.

Absolutely.

And the white Russians started escaping with the Bolshevik revolution, and her parents first ended up in Harbin, where she was born with her twin, and eventually as merchants made it to Shanghai.

What was her name?

Her maiden name was Ravve, R-A double V-E. So it was Dina Ravve and Raya Ravve. And her twin sister, Raya-- I mean, they were both educated first in the school in Shanghai. They ended up at the Sorbonne for further education. But subsequently, my stepmother who came back to her family group in Shanghai, Raya, went to what was then Palestine. It was not yet Israel. And she came visiting, but she lived in Palestine, then Israel for the rest of her life.

All these destinies intertwined now.

Oh, yes. So my stepmother's father had various interests with some of the old Sephardic Jews, who had been there [? street ?] people and were doing very well. And they had-- I think it was lumber, if I remember, lumber company, bringing in lumber, getting it to people who were building houses. But he was something to do with lumber.

So that's your stepmother's father?

Stepmother's father. And wheels within wheels, somewhere along the line my stepfather, who had worked for the, I think, British gas company as an accountant-- then with the Japanese, things got difficult, more restrictions. Anyway, he got a job at Woodcraft Works Limited, which means my stepfather worked in the same side by side with my stepmother in the same company, in the same area.

Wow.

So talk about wheels within wheels. So they were both there. After they were-- subsequently, I had four parents. Now, I took it very well.

Did you ever ask your parents why they separated, why they divorced?

We didn't quite get-- they didn't go into details, not at that stage. Didn't quite get along anymore. Being married is different, but we like each other so much. So they would have long discussions and dinners together. And they all, I guess at first-- maybe not in the beginning that it was easy-- but they agreed to be united for the sake of the children. And they continued to be the best of friends. And they were all presenting a united front.

That's pretty good.

But you know, a five-year-old or six-year-old, mommy, can I have that-- well, I don't know. Talk to Luigi. Well, Luigi never said no to me.

Of course.

I believe it was much easier for me being, quote, "a cute little girl" than for my older brother, because I know he-- it was natural for child to harbor some resentments against my stepfather for a while because he took his mother away. I mean, I'm sure Peter fantasized that the parents would get together, because he had experience of the parents being together.

Yes, yes. That makes sense.

It was a-- so he didn't know what went on, that one left and he left with the mother and didn't get to see his father for over two years. But that's the way it was. So fast forward, we are in Shanghai. I have four parents.

So here we are. And this all started from the question I asked of what was your mother like.

Right.

And you say she was very resourceful.

She was resourceful. She helped manage things in the most difficult of environments. She was loving to us. The children were her everything. She was very well educated, very, very literate.

Had she gone to higher education?

She had done something, but I don't know the names of the schools. But the fact that she got a job at--

Creditanstalt.

--as a woman, that was a big deal.

It is a big deal.

So she, in that sense, was-- she was very involved and knowledgeable about politics. She could argue with my dad about all sorts of things, to the exclusion sometimes of the others. My stepfather was more interested in anything to do with music.

My stepmother was more into the business end of the family business. So yes, my mother was-- she had a lot of hard things dished up to her. She managed this early stage just with her son.

That's right.

She managed to win me over, which took a while.

Did it really?

Well, I do remember rebelling. It's time to take a bath or go wash up. And who's this woman who's trying to scrub me down? So I do remember making a little bit of a scene. I want my father. So he came in and-- I mean, he was there. He anticipated something. So I got talked down and so forth. And gradually, I accepted this lady, that this was my mother.

Now let's turn, then, to your father.

Return to my father.

What kind of a personality did he have?

My father had a heart of gold and a very forceful personality. My father was the stereotype of the Hungarian. And I knew him with kind of graying hair, but he was a redhead. So he was a redheaded Hungarian. And if he got mad at something, the fist was on the table, and whatever was on it clinked.

He had a temper?

He had a temper. He was a brilliant entrepreneur. So he managed, in all this difficulty, to start up again in Shanghai a

textile company with a factory that imported whatever, the goods. And they created the woolens, mainly for men's suits, the stuff in it. And he managed to build up a very good business.

That's terrific.

Which is what encouraged him-- which involved his wanting to basically stay there. Life was good until Mao Zedong came. But that's a subsequent story.

Well, you know, you mentioned something that sounds like it's a pattern. He liked being in Prague, and your mother left. And he stayed because he liked being in Prague. He gets to Shanghai. He likes being in Shanghai.

Mainly that he built up his business again. And he was entrepreneurial. And he always said, you guys are smart, but you need jobs. And he creates his jobs.

Yeah, yeah.

And he did.

So in Shanghai, who did you live with?

I was shared.

Were you? How did that happen?

I don't know. They just worked it out. Weekdays--

No, I meant by, how did that happen, what was the pattern of sharing?

Oh, the pattern of sharing was that weekdays I lived with my mother and stepfather. And weekends, I lived with my father and stepmother. And that part you've heard. Their economic situations, while all were comfortable, they were a little different. So during the week, I sat on my stepfather's lap being taken to school on a rickshaw. But Friday after school, the chauffeur came to pick me up.

So your father was more better off than your stepfather was?

Yeah, my stepfather kept working, but my father did very well. And he continued to live in this then French section, former French section, of Shanghai. And he did all right.

Not bad considering he arrived with two small suitcases and a suitcase of children's toys.

Toys. And those two suitcases had counted how many pairs of underwear you allowed and how many socks and how many any of these. So that was all itemized. So he did well in Shanghai. And I don't know where to go forward. But when rumors came of, there's this communist--

Oh, we're not coming-- yeah, we'll get there in a bit.

--he took his time deciding what to do.

What I want to do, though, is-- now still circle back to those war years, the time between '41 and '45, when you are going between age four and eight.

Between the ages of 4 and 8, having arrived and going to the British school, which was the big layout school compound, big lawn in the center-- well, the Japanese thought that this would make a nice internment camp, seeing as there are bathrooms and classrooms for putting people in. So I remember that we were all one day being marched out of the

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school to some place, wherever. It was a holding pattern. So that was the end of that kindergarten or first grade.

What was the name of it, if you remember?

The school was Public Thomas Hanbury School.

You had mentioned it, yes.

From that school-- I guess that's '42 or whatever-- somewhere in 1943-- I remember seeing that date-- the Japanese issue a proclamation that everyone who arrived after '38, because it included my stepfather, had to move to a section of town called Hongkou.

Now, the Japanese take over. And occupation of Shanghai, I do not know my history in this part of the world that well. Can you tell me what year that was?

I don't know exactly what year the Japanese moved in. Evie is checking it. I'm going to google it. But the whole area was under Japanese occupation.

When you arrived with your father?

Yes, yes. But given the circumstances of Shanghai, the port, the Japanese trod very softly on how people could come in. They thought it might be a good idea that they would bring in some assets, so do some good.

So they, even though they were the occupiers, didn't always treat the Chinese too well, they allowed-- they didn't welcome but they allowed this to happen. When all these refugees came in, they got put under increasing pressure because they didn't understand all this Jewish business. They know from race, but not this other stuff.

So they got put under pressure by the German authorities to do something about these Jewish refugees. For a while, they just said, all right, we'll get around to it. Eventually they issued that proclamation.

Everybody who arrived after that date, we will put them in-- I don't know what's in New York. The Lower East Side is now pretty gentrified. We'll put them in this poorest part of town. It was then called Hongkou, and people had to move there. Officially, they said, we will just exchange your residence with somebody there.

Well, my stepfather had this absolutely beautiful house with all that goes with it, and he had to exchange his house with somebody from Hongkou. That person had ripped out the wiring from the light fixtures, just everything. And I just found a permit that he was given by the authorities to fix up the house that he was, quote, "exchanged into."

So he fixed up the house in the, quote, "ghetto area." It was on Zhoushan Road. And once it got fixed up, I don't know where we were in between. We all moved into the Zhoushan Road. But he was able, with whatever assets he still had, to afford the house, to have it fixed up, to bring in his instruments and his library. So everything came to that house.

So did he lose ownership of the house he had purchased?

Of course. I mean, the part that just fell apart-- well, the Japanese just said, you just exchanged. This new person now owns it. Which was an interesting experience to see that Chinese family start moving in, because the first thing we noticed was that a ton of vegetables were in the bathtub. And then the mother sat down on the throne surrounded by everybody, because this was indoor plumbing.

Oh, my.

So this was-- I remember that. I remember the vegetables in the tub. And I remember the mom was sitting on the throne and some of her kids surrounding her. You can flush this. You don't have to carry it out.

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So we were in Zhoushan Road as of, I guess, '43. My father was in an apartment somewhere separate, but they were friends. And somewhere along that line, he had met my stepmother. And I don't know where they lived, but my stepmother's parents did not have to move. They were the Russians who had been there for a long time.

So while some people were starving in Hongkou, literally, the big drama with the grandparents was if the cook could not find something that she wanted on the black market-- because on the black market you could get anything, practically. So they continued their life in their part of town, but all the post--

'38 people.

--'38 people were into the what was then called Hongkou.

So what's interesting in what you're telling me is the distinction might have been to target the Jews.

Oh, yes. Absolutely.

But the rule is specified by a year.

Yeah, a year.

So it means if you're not a Jew but you happen to have arrived after 1938--

They would be flexible. You might appeal or something. But it really applied to the Jews.

I see. I see.

And they were put under pressure, which I only found out from reading some things that came across, like one young man who was from Austria or Germany who was doing a study on people who were forced from homeland. And somebody told him about the Shanghai Jews. He had no idea about this whole episode, and he started researching it.

And that young man held a talk here in New York because he then studied Chinese and, of course, knew German. And he mentioned how one Chinese translator really fudged a little bit, at the risk of his life, some of those dispatches from Germany to make them a little milder.

Oh, wow.

And I just read by looking at something-- I think she took the book or I kept it here, my cousin-- how the Japanese offered a solution of, why don't you promise these people to transfer them to someplace and scuttle the ship. So I read that. I had had no idea of that particular episode. And I just read it in a book that somebody gave us about the Shanghai interlude.

So that means that their solution would have been save the people but sink the ship, so that it looks like the people sank with it.

Yeah, it was the Germans making a suggestion. The Japanese did not go for it. What did happen is that a series of restrictions were put into place. And if you wanted to leave the Hongkou area, say my stepfather to get to his job, which was outside of that, you needed to get a little passport, a little passport. I have some copies of that, some of them here.

And that meant you had to go to the Japanese commandant who was in charge of this part of town. And he was Mr. Goya. And there are lots of cartoons and lots of articles describing Mr. Goya--

Oh, really?

--who was quite a puppet. And he could be friendly to one person and slap up the next one who came to apply. So it got

very difficult because every few months you had to go there and get your passport to be able to leave the district. And they even mobilized refugees themselves to help monitor these in and out passports to make sure you don't overstay and so forth. And they called that the [NON-ENGLISH].

The [NON-ENGLISH]?

The [NON-ENGLISH]. And if you were a refugee who was on [NON-ENGLISH], and my husband Henry was one, you got an armband and you were stationed to help check that the person who was moving outside the ghetto area had a valid passport. Because if you try to come back and it's not valid, who knows what the Japanese guard might do.

Well, isn't that interesting. You mention now the word "ghetto," because that's exactly what it sounds like without barbed wire.

It was called the ghetto area, the Shanghai ghetto. Some book titles describe it that way. There was no formal barbed wire. There was guard stops and so forth. But if you left without having the proper identification, you left at your peril. And besides, there was nothing for you to do outside that. You were forced to live in that area.

So paint for me a picture, with words, if you can, what Hongkou looked like.

I'd be glad to show you some photographs that I have.

I'm thinking from your mind's eye as a child.

The ghetto area where people lived was-- it had been the poorest section among the Chinese. And the Chinese poor people continued to live there. And many people gave thanks that these poor people shared or were helpful to these refugees that came among them. The buildings were-- today Shanghai is a skyscraper city. They were little just houses, if you will.

And Shanghai was known to have a series of lanes. You go into one, and then you'd be in a whole lane with buildings. So if you can imagine that it would be an outside entrance that you go into-- perhaps a European village. You enter a main spot, but then you go through the narrow area, which were called lanes, because it was too narrow to call a street. And there would be houses alongside.

Now, life in Hongkou varied quite a bit. My stepfather, having had the means to fix up the house-- it was kind of luxurious to have that house. He still had a job to go to.

So we were comfortable. On the other hand, many of the refugees who came there, and I can show you pictures, had nothing at first. They were selling what they had on the street to get some money to buy some food. Some were put up by sort of a [? ORT ?] or a self-help organization and so that there'd be like a soup kitchen so they'd have something to eat.

There was some buildings that I walked through and knew of where they put up people who had no means and nowhere else, so that you lived-- you had a bed and maybe a bunk bed and a big sheet to separate you from the next bunk bed, where other family would be put up.

So there were some people who experienced the worst of hardship there who were in there. I remember an incident which my mother repeated to me. She went to the kitchen and asked the amah, which we still could have, what are you doing.

What's an amah?

Amah is a servant, a live-in servant. It's a Chinese word.

It's a Chinese word, OK.

But it became active in English conversation. I said, what are you doing? She said, Mrs. So-and-so asked me for the grounds of the coffee to take home that had been served. So there were people who were really hard up. And for a while, we were able to continue more comfortably. That came to a very abrupt end, but I'll come to that.

Now, let's turn to your father. He was better off than your stepfather.

My father worked. I forget with whom he worked at first. But then he was able to-- as soon as the war ended-- I mean during the war, he got by with whatever resources he still had. I don't remember who he worked with or for. But soon after, when he'd met my stepmother, who was not limited to living in Hongkou, he could, I guess, move in with her. And they were married.

That was my question, yeah.

And he got started up with his [INAUDIBLE], with his--

So in other words, while you were-- you and your mother and your stepfather had to move to Hongkou, your father did not.

He did, but I don't know exactly where. He lived nearby in an apartment not too far away, since he was a frequent visitor, and then eventually moved with my stepmother and could stay there. So somewhere, the dates get fuzzy. But I know that obviously between-- he married, I don't know, 1946 or something. I'm not sure. But all I know is in '43 everybody into Hongkou. My stepfather could still afford to fix up that house. And that lasted until July 17, 1945, when the war was just over in Europe.

That's right.

VE Day. And the Allies decided to focus on the Far East. And July 17 was the first real big bombardment in Shanghai. And there was a naval academy a few streets up from where we lived.

[PHONE RINGING]

And may I be excused?

Let's cut. Yeah. Hang on a second.

So let's repeat again. The bombardment was quite a--

July 17. It's a date that many will remember. And I think I started to say there was a naval academy not too far from our house. And one bomb went there, but it didn't explode. And the soldiers were able to defuse it. But one missed as far as the plane is concerned, the B-29, by very little, but it hit our house.

Your house?

Yes. And I have a picture of our house, a photograph. And was I surprised to find out that our house is now in all the pictures in the archives which show that Shanghai was bombed, and it really happened, especially on July 17.

So your house in Hongkou--

Was bombed.

--was bombed.

The bomb fell past our window. My brother and I had just been out on a bicycle, cashing in some rations. Everything

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was rationed at that point.

And we were caught in the sirens, and my brother said, shall we go visit-- shall we go over to-- anyway, Tante Erla, who was a family member, so to speak. She was my stepfather's sister-in-law, meaning sister of his late wife. But she became-- she stayed part of the family. Shall we go to Tante Erla, or do you think we can go home?

I said, OK, I think we can go home. He said, OK, hold on tight. So I got my-- I mean, I had my arms around his middle, and he pedaled furiously. And we made it home. We'd run up to our room. He jumps on his bed. He's going to read. He never did finish David Copperfield.

And I'm there taking my dress off, and I go flying because the force of the bomb generates a lot of whatever it's called. So I go flying, and I end up on top of the rubble of what was our house and part of the neighbor's house. I saw this thing. You know, it takes a split second.

I saw bomb before I ever saw a bomb. It went past the window. But I jumped through the-- I mean, I headed for the door. I didn't have to jump. The force of this thing picked me up and put me on top. What had happened, unfortunately, was when the air raid sirens went, there were people caught on the street.

And since our house was the first one in the lane to be-- here is street, here is into the lane-- there were people sort of pressed against the house. And I know the amah asked my mother, can we let some of these people in, they're right there on the street. So my mother told her, well, let some in. Keep them in the hallway and around here. Don't let them run all over the house.

Well, they would have been killed outside. They got killed inside. There were, they told me later, about 30 people killed by that bombardment. And my mother was home. She was a little scraped, but we both ended up on the rubble.

Were you on the first floor, second floor?

There was a-- call it the first floor. Up was the children's room and another two steps up to the main bedroom.

So first floor European is usually second floor American. So would it have been the ground floor or the floor above it?

The floor above it. You walked up a flight of steps, turned to the children's room, walked up another small flight of steps to the master bedroom.

Got it.

We had steps-- it's easier to describe if I showed you the picture. But anyway, we also had access to a roof garden because it gets very hot in Shanghai, subtropical climate. So we had a roof garden.

And thank goodness these cement steps that went up to the roof garden held the cable, so that the steps did not fall on top of everything. Because what happened is-- well, I got pushed out of the door and wherever. My brother, who was sitting on the bed, got buried under the rubble.

Wow.

And it took a lot of screaming and yelling. And after a while, there was still screaming for Peter, Peter, Peter. And what I remember what was scary, and I'll never forget that. Apparently a man who was also buried there heard this-- everybody took up the call who came to help Peter, Peter.

And he was like-- I don't know if you like opera, but he was like Jonathan in the cistern in Salome. And he was calling back, Peter, Peter. And I remember this deathly deep voice calling my brother, but he was buried.

From the rubble?

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From the rubble. So people came by hand. They pulled away bricks and what not. Eventually, I got carted away, and the parents or my cousin lived across the street from where we were, or rather worked there. And I got brought over there. My adult cousin put one of her blouses on me so it made like a dress. And they kept me there while they unearthed the [? people. ?]

Was the entire house destroyed?

Half of it.

Was your mother-- what floor was your mother on? She was up in the master bedroom, which was another little flight up. She, together with me, ended up on top of the rubble. She also got active right away, pulling bricks away. And then men came from all over, everybody to help, because she kept yelling, my son, my son. So everybody helped till eventually they got him out and got to the hospital.

And your stepfather was not at home?

No, he was at work. And sort of a funny aside, he and my father were going to come-- that day come home to our house for lunch. And the amah had made a big pot of plum dumplings, Zwetschgenknoedel or something.

Zwetschgenknoedel.

They found the pot with the knoedel and all the black soot on top.

Good god. Good god.

And they were walking down. They had reached the point where they were walking down. And as my father said, our eyes opened wider and wider. I mean, that's a house. Let's walk faster.

So they came on the scene, both of them, father and stepfather, to this horrible scene that-- house opened. And people helped and people looted-- not just the Chinese. The nice Europeans did their share, too.

And anyway, the main thing was they got my brother to the hospital. I won't go into all the details. It would make this story much too long. But my brother's leg was full of shrapnel. And the doctor who was there, who subsequently, we were told, was helping himself to drugs to deal with all the-- what was going on, he didn't do what needed to be done.

So my brother developed gangrene in his leg and sepsis. The point was they then had to amputate his leg. And to the end, I never knew if my brother really knew, or we didn't talk about it. But I knew from what the adults were saying that he need not have lost his leg if the right treatment had been done.

Anyway, they didn't have all the things. And one person who was a major figure in our lives-- his name was Pastor Werner Wedel, W-E-D-E-L, and he was in charge of the Lutheran community in Hongkou. But he had to come to Shanghai because his parents-- somewhat he was Jewish, with a J in the passport. And he was kind of a fast family friend.

My stepfather bought him the little gold cross for when he became an official pastor. Anyway, Pastor Wedel, as we then called him-- this is now July 17, '45. Peter's in the hospital. And we are all ducking now where I am under the desk, as if this would help. Anyway, soon thereafter, the atomic bomb's dropped and it was end of the war.

In August.

In August. In that period, from July to August, is when my brother got sicker and sicker and greener and greener. And that I can get emotional about. Pastor Wedel put on his collar. He spoke English. He went and met-- the American fleet, the Seventh Street, is chugging in to Shanghai.

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He with his missionary by then-- he had some missionary connections-- he gets to meet the reverend on that-- the chaplain on the boat, who introduces him to the surgeon on the boat. He gets them to come to the hospital. And there is a photo op that exists with the chaplain and a doctor shaking-- the surgeon and a doctor shaking hands over my brother's bed.

[GASPS]

And he got the first penicillin shot, a shot in Shanghai. Of course, the Americans, they brought more medicines for the hospital and everything. But he got the first penicillin-- there was no-- so you can blame the doctors for not doing all that they could do.

But I am told-- I wasn't there-- that when things got bad for my brother and my dad found out about that doctor, he landed him one. They had to separate the men. He cornered him in a corridor, and my dad had a temper. And so he handed him one.

But anyway, Peter got the first penicillin injection, which saved his life-- I mean, then more, but that was the big photo op. There was a little article in the local newspaper, whatever American bring.

Had it been an American bomber?

Actually, yes. So this was-- actually, the American bomber even killed some high-ranking American who was already there. I found an article. Anyway, back to my brother. He gets the injection. He survives that.

He gets transferred to the French hospital right after the war. Maybe they can do something to help. This butcher had butchered more of the flesh on the leg than the bone. They tried to stretch it. Forget it. He was there with weights on his leg. He needed another surgery.

So my brother really suffered because his-- the rest of what was left of his leg was very short, very difficult to handle with prosthesis. But the result was that he got some preferential treatment and got to come to New York because he had-- remember my uncle who was here all the time? He could go stay with him, and maybe something can be done.

And that uncle was a doctor?

Yeah. So maybe something could be done. Ultimately my brother suffered a great deal with heavy prosthesis. I see now they are running races with what can be done. And now they have thought control to prosthesis.

But he had this big heavy thing around his waist and metal bars. It was horrible, but that's what he got. And eventually he got rid of it all. He just used his hand crutches. He said, I can't deal with that anymore. So to the end of his life, he then just used hand crutches.

What a tough, tough thing.

But how were we together, you know, here he is 15 years old. All this happens to him. Then from the French hospital was closer to my father and stepmother's home. So to the extent that he could then leave the hospital just to get care, he went to live there. I showed up on weekends.

So he grew very close to my stepmother, who was changing bandages and so forth, because my mother was back in Hongkou. So they found someplace else small that we could live in. And I'm there and Peter is there.

Did anybody else survive from under the rubble?

I don't know. Maybe the man who screamed Peter's name. I mean, there were others. But on the record, there were 30 people killed. Well, they were right around our house. And the picture-- many years later, my nephew heard of-- an

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exhibit was being done by the Leo Baeck Institute in New York in connection with that young man who had done his research and talked about it.

He said, oh, come on, I'd like to see that. And we went to see the exhibit. I said, that's our house. What's it doing there? And then I have a photograph. I said, that's our house. So there's some pictures in books of people who write about Shanghai. Our house is the archival picture of, yes, there was a bombardment.

Too bad that it's in such a way. Too bad that it was as a result of a direct hit.

Right. That was the hit. So that was '45. War ends in '47.

No, no, no. War ends in '45.

'45, I mean.

And I still have a few questions about that.

OK, because then come the communists.

We'll talk about that. Before we get there, you mentioned earlier that there was German pressure to move the Jews into Hongkou and that eventually--

That they did. That the Japanes did.

Was there also German presence in Shanghai? Was there, for example, a German diplomatic community? Was there any Nazi kind of representation?

Not visibly and not that I would have seen as a child, because the Japanese weren't that interested in doing anything with the Jews. It was just the pressure from Germany. And the Chinese didn't understand this whole business, because I remember once my amah saying, now let's talk seriously. The master is so nice-- she meant my stepfather-- but what did he to? I said, he didn't do anything. He was of a religion, even though you don't see him running to a synagogue or anything.

But that was-- oh, come on. He must have done something that he had to run away. So they didn't understand that this thing of being Jewish could mean life or death of being deported from your home, because to the Chinese-- my friend who lived there, her mother was more Buddhist and her father was more Taoist, and you all lived together. You didn't accuse anybody of anything. Your religion was personal. I didn't learn about being Jewish as an ethnicity till I came to New York.

Oh, that's interesting.

Jewish was being a religion. You're Catholic. You're Protestant. You're Jewish. And you practice it actively, or you don't practice it actively. That's your personal decision. But I come here, and they say, oh, so-and-so is Italian American and this, and so-and-so is Jewish. I said, Jewish what? Jewish Italian American? Jewish Russian American? I learned it here.

From Jews or from Gentiles?

From everybody. You ask anybody. If you encounter somebody-- they mean it well sometimes. They don't mean it in any negative way, not always, I mean. But what is the Jewish ethnicity? You are Lithuanian or Russian or Polish. But what's this Jewish business?

Well, what you just touched upon is a question that I don't know many people have satisfactorily answered. What is the Jewish identity? Is it a religion? Is it an ethnicity? Is it something else? Is it a civilization? Is it all of these things?

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Many came to it then as a reaction. If you're going to call me that and so forth, they start looking into it. And some became here, that I knew, became more observant, if you will. My parents, step-parents did not, in the situation being where my father was pure Jewish, if you want to call it that. He felt Hungarian, I mean.

My stepmother, she felt Russian, but she was Jewish. My stepfather, Rosenbaum family, he felt Jewish, but he never set foot that I knew in a synagogue. And my mother was sort of half and half or whatever to do some good work. She was more active in the Lutheran community in Shanghai. They helped Pastor Wedel earn his stripes, or rather earn his cross.

Collar, yeah.

And everything was open. Between the bombardment of the house and prior-- I'll just come back to one fun--

Sure, sure.

--fun-- that's my mother for you. The year before the house got bombed, there was a meningitis epidemic in Shanghai. I got sick. My stepfather's son got sick. My stepfather's son, Wolfie, was 26 years old. I just found a picture of Wolfie and his new bride. He'd been married two years, and he keeled over and died.

From the meningitis?

Yeah. I was apparently very sick-- for almost a year. I mean, for many months they worked on me, but then I was so weak. So my mother got a doctor. She said her jewelry went to buy drugs or whatever. So he tried different things.

And my story there was not a very nice one. Being sick with meningitis is no picnic. I get very upset today when I see parents not vaccinating their children. Now there is a vaccine, for heaven's sakes, for some of these things.

So I was very, very sick. I remember horrible headaches. I had four lumbar punctures with no anesthetic. And people laid me down on a table. I'll never forget that and the pain of that.

And my mother told me that's the only time she ran out of the house, because I screamed. But my stepfather got into such a depression. He said if that child dies, I just lost my son, I'd kill myself.

So my mother had-- was watching out for me and had everybody watching out for my stepfather who for the rest of his life, wore a black necktie. You could buy him a nice silk one for holidays. But in memory of his son, he always wore a black necktie. And he did put a candle out on Wolfie's state of death. That was as religious as he got.

Anyway, to make a long story short, eventually I survive. I'm nine years old. We're still in the house before the bombardment. And my mother says, this child isn't going to want to learn anything. She goes to the British school. It becomes the camp.

She goes to something else, something else happened. She's now in school. She's out for a year. She's been so sick. What do we do and where is there a good school?

Well, there is a convent school nearby, and I am well known. So Institution de la Symphonie, I get there and I meet the Mother Superior. Even when I was 9, she must have been a little lady because she was barely taller than I was. I remember her with big teeth. Maybe it was a denture. She was half-Portuguese, half-Chinese, and we get to meet her. But my mother had the foresight. She said, I want my child to go fit in where she belongs, or she'll never want to study.

Solution-- there is a young man here who can use good dinners, which he gets, but he is a rabbinical scholar. He then becomes a rabbi. So Rabbi Sober-- I remember his name-- went with mother and me to the convent. I remember the library, where we sat around a big table. And they were discussing what I needed to learn to fit in to where a 9-year-old would fit. OK.

I got packed up. We went home, and the study started. And I either got rapped on the knuckles or I got cheered on. And I have a picture. I'm going through pictures. I just found one of me sitting on his shoulder. He was giving me a ride to go take the photograph.

So I rode horseback. You get a kid on your shoulder. And he worked with me till they all decided I didn't need tutoring anymore. I was fine in school. And so that's the school I kept going to till after the war ended, when my stepfather took me there in the rickshaw and my dad had me picked up by the chauffeur.

So I was taught-- as you can see, you asked what kind of woman was my mother. She fed the young pastor. She fed the young rabbi. She was open to just be a good human being, to help people. And there, in turn, was a good rapport back.

That's incredible.

So until I left I was in the convent school.

One more question about the Jewish community, the refugee community, during the war, and then we go to post-war. It's a statistical question. It's not one a four-year-old or an eight-year-old would know, but maybe now you do. I'd like to get a sense of how large was the community.

There were about 20,000 people, those refugees, there. The refugees started cleaning up things, building things. So that there is a picture I found in one of the books where it said, Zhoushan Road, this area before and after, where Europeans had started to fix up. They started to create little restaurants, especially till as soon as the war ended, until anybody could get out. But even during those war years with the Japanese, they started a theater group.

People who had been artists in Europe started. I remember and never forget, since we had the big house and we had a piano, they were rehearsing for some shows and by candlelight sometimes because electricity was rationed. And I remember singing the song about [GERMAN]. I can't sing, but it's the "Mack the Knife" song. And they would obviously be performing in German. And that's all the part of it that I remember in German.

But there they were. And I remember my father at the piano because he, too, played the piano, more in the pop area. My stepfather played all the classical. And there they were rehearsing for what was then going to be a theater performance in the theater. So what emerged out of that was a very lively refugee community, which there were still those who were poor as can be and those who got themselves up by their bootstraps.

So my husband, Henry, remembers then some family-- an uncle started a restaurant. And his parents, his mother knew how to cook. You got to do something. So they started a restaurant.

And ironically, he tells a story on July 17, a bomb went in the courtyard near their restaurant, which destroyed the restaurant part. But the kitchen was intact. So then they started just baking things and selling those. They couldn't run the restaurant. So it was wheels within wheels because I only met Henry here in New York.

That is wheels within wheels.

But he was in Shanghai, too, and he was hit by the July 17, affected by it. So yes, the refugee community was then quite active and lively.

Out of nothing started this.

20,000, out of nothing, they created something. So there were about 20,000.

OK. And now let's go to what is life after. How does life progress after August 1945? The Japanese disappear. Or do you see them taken hostage? What happens to them?

Slowly they disappear. There was some things about attacking. Somebody punched out Mr. Goya, who went, I'm so

sorry, I'm so sorry, for what he did and what happened. I don't know what happened to him, whether the Japanese helped him disappear or whether he disappeared, because he was quite the despot.

And then after-- now the war is over, he and my stepfather can continue working without needing a pass. My dad can move into the French section with my stepmother and have his factory running and hiring people to help run the place. So life everywhere is comfortable. Now my father, the entrepreneur, is doing well and feeling well.

The Nazis took everything away and so forth. Now he built something up again. So he was getting comfortable to stay. My brother, of course, is in New York. That's absolutely for his health.

Yeah, when did he leave for New York? What year?

My brother? They got him out, I think, the beginning of '47 or end of '46, as soon as possible, to see what can be done for the boy. And there is an uncle there, and let's get him out to New York.

Now, as rumblings start with the communists, there are those who say, another warlord, there have been so many. And then there are others who get a little more worried.

Were there people-- were there Jews who were going back to Europe at this time?

Very few, only the ones who figured they'd have no chance of ending somewhere else. So there were those who went back. Now, my husband Henry's family decided that his father was getting sicker and sicker in the tropical climate, so they opted to let themselves be repatriated to Vienna.

And they started a store there or something. But anyway, eventually both Henry and his brother got out. There are stories about that. But Freddy got to New York at Pittsburgh first, University of Pittsburgh. Henry managed to get to Montreal and then get the parents out.

So they didn't feel at home there anymore?

No, not at all. And his younger brother, who was quite the whiz kid, managed before leaving-- the teachers gave him the London matriculation exams, which, as a 14- or 15-year-old, he passed to everyone's-- not to everyone's surprise, but he managed. I was too young. They couldn't--

You're talking before he left Shanghai?

Before he left Shanghai. So he passed the matric and ends up in-- they all end up-- later my husband's family in Vienna.

This is Henry Tausig?

Henry Tausig and his brother, Fred Tausig. Fred goes to apply to the University of Vienna. He's got his matric. And they said, we never heard of it. By then he's 16. We never heard of a 16-year-old being admitted. So as Henry tells it, they go-- if the London matric-- people who are running the London matriculation have passed this young man, who are you not to accept him? Got to be a whole to do, but their hands were tied. Freddie got accepted as the youngest ever student at the University of Vienna. And he stayed there till he could apply on a student scholarship, which he got, to come to the States.

I see.

So he came to the States when-- at first to the University of Pittsburgh, got drafted. He majored in chemistry and then in business. He said, except for basic training, he got put into a laboratory because he had majored in chemistry.

And he would always joke, I've ruined more good steaks than anybody can do. Because they were doing research on irradiating food to make them last for the military and so forth. So he says, you do a lot of trial and error. He says, I

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ruined more good steaks.

Anyway, so he's in-- he's in the States. He applies as a special visa for his brother to come down from Canada. So Henry, who was in Montreal, where his father did pass away but the mother still lived, he comes to New York.

And he meets me. Through channels. Any way, I can't tell you all these details

It's OK.

--that's too-- no, I mean, they're fun. But they'd be boring and this would be going on forever.

Well, it is that--

No, not boring?

Not. First of all--

Not boring?

Not boring.

All right, then I'll tell how I got to meet Henry.

OK.

Tell how you came here first.

Yes. First time here.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

And before you come here, first you have to tell us about what happened in Shanghai after the war. Because all this started from my question of did the Jewish refugees go back to Europe.

So my-- all parts of my family went like hell will I go back there. And my father wasn't even interested in leaving Shanghai. But my mother and stepfather got a little nervous. And they weren't that enthused. I mean, they were comfortable, but they weren't that enthusiastic about continuing to live there.

So they go through the motions of applying to come to the States, to New York. My mother says, my brother is there. My son is there. I want to go there. So

They apply at the American Consulate or whatnot. And they are Austrian citizens. Still got their passports. And they apply.

Now, I do have to backtrack to one thing. I lived with them. My father, who was back in Czechoslovakia, in Prague, when the Nazis move, go in, they ask that people have to renew their passports by way of getting whatever it is that the Nazis issue. Not what happened from the previous government.

My father of course, is called to come in actions and you get your new passport.

A Nazi passport?

Hungarian redhead says like hell will I take that. Everybody was afraid this man is going to get arrested on the spot. But what they did do is they took his passport, which at that point is a Czech passport, and they stamp [NON-ENGLISH

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SPEECH] on every single blank page front and back and front and back. I found that one now.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] means--

No longer valid.

Right.

Not valid.

Invalid.

Invalid is one word. Mr. Wasserman is very interested in that passport. So he's left as stateless, and when we left Prague, we left on something like a Nansen passports were issued. I don't know much about them. It was based on some Scandinavian politician who help people.

Anyway it was something where you put a transit visa or a pet-- or visa into. But we are now both stateless, and I'm stateless with my father who is stateless.

And your mother and your brother are not?

My mother-- my brother was Austrian. He got shipped over here. And now fast forward again, my mother and stepfather, who are Austrians who applied to leave, they have to go through the shenanigans of but my daughter is stateless. But she's just a child. Put her on my passport because we want to go to America.

Well, it's getting very difficult. They-- well, the Austrian embassy or consulate, they got very picky, but she was only six months old when she left. Oh, yeah? You have to at least live there year to be considered a national.

Really?

Whatever they were told. Nothing doing. Well, how do I leave with my daughter? Put her-- usually a child goes on-- gets put on the mother's passport. They wouldn't do that.

My stepfather bribed the secretary at the Austrian embassy. Shouldn't say that for the internet to know but she has passed away I know. And so they issue a travel certificate. It's a cardboard, you open it, close it, but the outside has those Austrian double equals, the symbol of Austria, very official looking. But if you open it and it asks for name and date of birth and nationality, it says [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

In every language under the sun that my citizenship is unknown. But the Chinese guards, who's going to care? It looks very official. So that's the pass that my mother got so she could travel with me.

With you.

Right. And my stepfather. But that goes through the chores. We go get medical exams. What do I know. I go to school interrupted by minor formalities, and my-- and we get to the point where the visa is granted.

Visa is granted, and we are given a date to come and pick up our different travel documents with the visa in it. And by then the--

By then, the communists are getting closer and closer. This is now they marched into Shanghai in I think May '49.

And under the-- until then, it was ruled by Chiang Kai-Shek by the nationalist--

And Chiang Kai-Shek, yes.

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OK.

And we tried to go there, and Pastor Wedel puts on his collar because there's air raid and blockages. They see that. They let-- I hear that. I wasn't along. My mother and stepfather go. And he gets them to the door of the embassy, and they had it closed. They were shredding. They were--

Austrian embassy.

Getting rid-- American-- American embassy-- to pick up the visas and the passports. And nothing doing. You don't get in. Sorry, so sorry. They are evacuating the staff ahead of the communists coming in. So this was-- I don't know January, February. I know they came in May '49.

So nothing doing. We don't have the travel papers. They-- we don't have the American visas. And now the Commu-- now we're into '49, and the communists march in. And I was liberated by the People's Liberation Army.

Tell me what was that like.

Actually the initial impact was very minor because Chiang Kai-Shek troops ditched their uniforms and disappeared into the popular-- general population. And it was-- actually telephone lines were never cut, so my dad was in that section. I was in the Hongkou section. We could talk.

We've been liberated-- no, we're not yet-- as they marched in. So the initial impact, if you will, was barely felt in terms of turmoil. Only the turmoil was about to start because as soon as the communists had marched in, so now they have Shanghai. They went on to take over the south and Canton. Here they are.

Mr. Chiang Kai-Shek, who was so corrupt, whose wife here bamboozled Congress that she addressed where aid that was given to him was rotting on the Bund, the equipment, and rusting, he decided, well, I lost I'm going to retake my fatherland. And what is perhaps less well known, he embarked on a series of bombardments of Shanghai in the area to, quote unquote, retake his country.

And those bombardments were helter skelter. The drums were dropped in heavily populated poorer areas where people were. There was damage done. It was-- he couldn't get to first base with that effort 'til eventually I understand the Allies put pressure on him. This has got to stop.

But those bombardments were in a way scary. I remember being cool throughout all these other bombings, but once it was victory and people ran into the streets and were celebrating and this was all over, and then the communists come in, but it was initially very harmless. And as suddenly, it goes bang, bang, and I remember where we then lived.

One of the bombs hit some storage area whether it was gasoline or bombs, anywhere, some depot got hit. And when those bombs went off, one after the other, and my mother and stepfather said it's all right, sweetheart. It's far away. I said, no, I want to get out.

They took-- we all had little suitcase with emergency papers and what you had to carry. They-- I remember we were out in the lane because I would not stay in the apartment. That's when bomb, bomb 'til that stopped. Even the dog was hysterical.

We had a wonderful German shepherd who had been buried partially in the bombardment. He didn't like bombings, and he knew when the flyers were coming. We didn't hear them, but as soon as the dog started getting nervous and acting up, we knew the Chiang Kai-Shek bombers were coming.

Oh, wow.

So that was an into-- maybe a short interlude in the scheme of things, but in a young person's life, a chunk. So that was

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after the war, and then there was the Chiang Kai-Shek bombardments. And he tried to hold on to the economy, then he officially abdicated in favor of his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, who had been raised in Russia-- I mean in the Soviet Union. I think he had a Russian wife, so he knew how to-- he was going to do-- create order, nothing doing.

So anyway the communists came in. None of these Chiang Kai-Shek and Chiang Ching-kuo measures worked. And finally the bombing stopped.

And then what?

That worked. So then it was a matter of well let's see what we can do to get out. So now we are in-- I still go to school. Now we are in 1950, a year later, and the United Nations with the help really American money, they charter a Norwegian boat. And they're going to come in and help all the people who would want to get out to help them get out.

Would this be refugees only?

Refugees.

Not Chinese nationalists?

No Chinese. Refugees and some of the Russians who wanted to get out who could bribe their way on. But anyway, the boat-- and somebody wrote a book about that boat-- and now I found newspaper list that articles that they publish on a boat and one with a history Fred Wasserman is going to love that one as I'm reading it because that boat, they said people thought we're going to get evacuated. Yes.

That boat was stripped on the inside so that there were double deckers for the women, triple deckers for the men. The crew was inadequate for all these people. The boat originally I read could hold about 800 passengers. With all this packing they did, we were 1,300 people on that boat.

It was close quarters, and they-- the boat's name was the SS Anna Salen-- S-A-L-E-N, and it couldn't get into Shanghai. Whether the harbor was silted over-- it hadn't been dredged-- for still mine, nobody knew, so we were all who were in the process of applying to go somewhere else and had prospects, we were going to get on onto that boat.

By that point, my father had given permission for me to leave with my mother and stepfather, so they were in line to get on that boat. But that boat, by virtue of not being able to come into Shanghai, well, it had to go dock at [PLACE NAME] near Tianjin up north. So to get there after many delays-- yes, you're going, no, you're not, yes, you're going, no, you're not-- it took several months of--

Negotiations.

Negotiations and ready to go packed up. No. OK, unpack. That kind of thing.

Yes, you're going, no, you're not, that was because of your father and your mother saying--

No that-- he had given permission. That was with the authorities to let the people out or whatever. So off finally the whatever permissions were given, and we left by train to go up north.

They thought a bridge might be bugged or have some mines there. We had to get off, get on a raft, get across. The bridge held with the luggage, so then we got back on the bridge. Then we ended up at port-- at the-- where we were-- the [? cay ?] where we were going to go aboard the ship.

Now for that evacuation, people who had prospects to go, they were there. But there were many people who would have no prospects of coming to America or Australia or Canada because one member of the family might be sick. We were in couldn't get in here.

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So Israel said we will take any refugee from whatever situation who has no prospect to go anywhere else. So they emptied out the hospital. They emptied out the insane asylum with aids. They empty that everybody who could scramble to get onto that evacuation ship. That's how come we were 1,300.

And what was going to happen and what did happen is that we-- I will explain and how we got to Naples, but at Naples instead of going back down to Haifa, Israel sent a boat up to Naples where all the people who would have had no prospect got disembarked and went there and ended up in Israel.

Now the trip went-- and you could look at a globe-- we left, but we had to go from Shanghai through the Sea of Japan where there were two typhoons. It's called typhoon there not hurricane, which was kind of interesting. We went via the Panama Canal to Naples.

Yes, because at the time Nasser was president of Egypt and he said you people who are going to Israel, you may go there because a father is infirm and can't go to America. But you have to able-bodied sons, and they're going to be drafted in the Israel army to fight against me. So he blocked the passage up through the Suez Canal.

So in other words, you go from Shanghai--

Through the Sea of Japan.

Across the Pacific.

All across the Pacific.

Through the Panama Canal to Europe to Italy.

Through Europe along the African coast then the other time we went along Gibraltar. Anyway we end up-- we were in total-- my mother, stepfather, and I-- we were on that boat for 72 days without any ability to get off. Even when the boat docked somewhere to take on supplies, many of which the crew sold at the next port and instead of giving to the refugees on board, they-- we could not get off. So I was at sea for 72 days.

That's a long time.

Yes. It took many, many years 'til Henry and I agreed that we would go on a boat because I really wanted to see Alaska. And so by-- it was 1993, that's why I remember that date because between 1950 and 1993, I was not going to get on any ocean liner no matter what the bribe--

You had had your fill.

Right. But the luxury boat, hey, I got converted. We then went on some Caribbean cruises, Evie and her husband and together, so we were on some nice cruises together. But up until Alaska, you do not see me on a boat.

Anyway we in Naples was this switch, then from Naples the remaining refugees, we went along coast of Gibraltar up north to Bremerhaven.

And there we were unloaded, uploaded on some trucks, but anyway off to a camp. What do you do with the people? Now Germany was the one place which was full of camps--

That's right--

Where they had refugees, survivors from concentration camps, survivors from labor camps, whatever.

Yeah.

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So we ended up at a camp, Wildflecken, near Bremin.

Wildflecken, I've heard of it.

You've heard of it? Well, we were there for about two months It was winter. I didn't know how to walk. My stepfather-- I still remember him, where's the child. And he and my mother had walked a piece, and I was there. And I had never seen him laugh so heartily, and he was such a serious person.

I had never seen snow or ice before. How do you walk on this thing? So here is this old man comes-- coming back up the little piece of hill, and he holds me, and we go walking. Mind you, my stepfather is about 63 at this point, and they are going mountain air. I go the heck with mountain air. I like my at sea level air.

But never mind the air. How do you walk on this thing? I was slipping.

Anyway, we were at that camp for about two months, and then we got transferred by truck to Camp Foehrenwald.

Foehrenwald?

Foehrenwald. By Wolfratshausen, the camp by the village of Wolfratshausen, which was a short train ride to Munich.

Wow.

And all the people who wanted to go somewhere else, which was everybody, the beginning of documents because by now 72 days plus two months everything is expired.

Of course, it is. Why--

So we start from scratch, my stepfather and my mother and I. The application process and proving that there's somebody here who was issuing an affidavit, which was a relative of my stepfather's actually, and we start the process. And anytime you-- they need something, you get on the train to Munich. And the day you go for your x-ray but the machine didn't work when you had come back, you go back to Munich for the x-rays.

It took a year. We were free to come and go. We were the Shanghai group. But if your name was on a list for a next piece of whatever you had to do, you better be there, or you get to the bottom of the list.

So it was kind of constrained. But there we are in this camp.

Did you expect that to happen, or when the shift left-- ship left Shanghai, did you think your next port was going to be in the United States? Did people know they would be going to Germany and having to stay there and only from there go--

The adults may have known. I was not particularly made aware of where this thing would-- not it's like next stop. And being 14, I helped because there were all these pussy sick women and us kids would go scampering off to bring wet washcloths to put on their foreheads.

And the crew that tried to bribe us, here's an orange little girl, and I'd grab it, thank you, and bring it down to somebody who was trying not to throw up when the boat was going all sorts of crazy ways in the typhoon. So it was an interesting trip.

I just wanted to say there are published-- [PHONE RINGING]-- sources.

So there are published sources about--

They published somebody who wrote a book about that boat trip and all the horrible things that happen because some

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people thought, oh, we'll get evacuated now. Things will be good. They didn't know that the able-bodied people had to work on the boat.

And of the 1,300-- I just read a figure-- only about 200 were really able to work who were strong enough because people weren't used to certain manual labor. And seasickness was pretty prevalent. So it was pretty scary sometimes, these huge waves.

I remember going up on deck 'cause you needed air, the stifling air in the compartment, and I'm there hanging on to the railing. The waves and [INAUDIBLE]-- but, hey, that's exciting. And I suddenly I feel somebody grabbing me by the scruff of the neck the way you would pick up the cat, and it was the sailor. And they were wearing boots with thick wooden soles-- wooden soles so that they wouldn't slide and whatever. And he was, little girl, what are you doing up here. You get back inside. Yes, sir. I need some air.

And so there were some of these experiences. And one little aside. On the boat, who do we meet? A couple and their little son. Now who are these people?

I often talk to ask me what was an amah.

Yeah.

After the bombardment, because that amah and retired that I had, I get an amah and somebody comes in, a mother and daughter. And they can't really talk English. They're all Chinese, but somebody helps with hands, with gestures, with somebody helping.

Anyway my new young amah who was going to live with us was brought there by her mother and somebody with pigeon English could help translate. So she's bringing her daughter to us to take care of me and the house and to be the servant. And my mother said but of course. What a lovely young woman.

As we lived there in this house, where by the way we had string quartet every Sunday afternoon with my stepfather playing the cello and people coming in with-- for the other instruments, one of the gentlemen who comes in to listen goes for this young woman and approaches my mother. I'd really-- I'm really interested.

And my mother says nothing doing. This is a lovely country girl. You're not going to get her away from here and have an affair and then. Ooh, was she strict with him. Well, he was in love. He married her.

Then she became Mrs. Engle-- [? never mind-- ?] And lived somewhere else. We didn't really-- were in touch. I knew she had a little boy with her husband. Guess what? We're on this evacuation boat. Who is there? Mr. And Mrs. Engle and their little son George.

Oh my goodness.

And everybody calls to my mother, Mrs. Rosenbaum, how do you know them. And my mother goes why they were neighbors. That's my mother. None of this [INAUDIBLE]. They were neighbors.

And she was so happy because now she knew somebody there, her little charge. And we went through the camp experience together, both camp experiences. And she ended up with her husband in California. And after I was here, I still went out to visit them once.

How interesting.

So sometimes these things. But anyway I left you that we were in the camps--

You were in the camps. You were close to Munich. You could--

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We were close to Munich. Kids went to classes. I-- knowing German from home, which not all the refugee kids knew because the parents tried to speak English in Shanghai or Polish or whatever they spoke at home, so they knew English, but I understood German. So I picked up very soon. I was certainly understanding all the Yiddish around me, speaking some-- speaking it. And we had to go to class, and I was busy scribbling some things for the girl next to me. What did he say?

And so there I was in this Yiddish environment picking up-- thank goodness because my poor stepfather with his proper German was completely lost in that environment. And we went to school, and that's where I learned some Hebrew. It's very much easier with the vowels indicated than just to read the consonants. I learned my chemistry in Yiddish and could recite the chemical--

Table.

Yeah, yeah. And a few other strange things. I liked the guy who taught Hebrew. The other kids made fun of him because they knew some. So I thought that was interesting to learn. So I became a teacher's pet, and I learned some more.

And then-- and we went through all the I heard some horrible experiences. One girl I was friendly with and we were playing and going home, and I said shhh when we went home. She needed to pick up something.

What happened? But her mother was in the-- we lived in these little houses or whatever camp. And her mother had candles set out, and she said that was for my little brother. What happened? Oh, Gestapo came in. The kid yelled, it was a baby. He picked it up by the legs and smashed it against the wall.

For a young girl to see that and the mother-- whatever I knew of horrible things that happened-- and a few horrible things did happen in Shanghai and my goodness I'd been bombed and then left with nothing-- but then to hear a personal story like that was rough.

Although that was one of the questions that I had that during the years in Shanghai, did people know much of what was going on in the rest of Europe?

Not really. They tried through illegal shortwave radio sets to get some news, but by and large, news was hard to come by.

When did your-- so was it when you actually got to Europe or was it after the war was over and the Japanese disappear, when did people find out that there had been this Holocaust, this genocide?

I think a little sooner because as the Japanese are disappearing, some more radio sets come into action, and they start hearing. And then I see-- I saw pictures where people put up lists of family members to see if anybody on their family would showed up on any survivor list from a camp. So gradually, well, news spread as soon as anybody knew anything.

But when the American bombers came, the first few people ran out into the streets. The Americans are coming. So one bomb missed but-- the intended target, but people were overwhelmed with joy that this looks like this horrible end. So it wasn't 'til later that really the full newscast and everything came out.

But for you, you're like a face-to-face encounter with the consequences is something that sticks in your mind. You're in school. You meet this girl. She goes home. She says shhh. My mother--

Yeah, in the camp.

In that D camp in the-- yeah.

And what was-- I guess I have to bring that up-- is that I was not particularly raised in any one religion or the other. But if anything, my mother more or less identified with the Jewish holidays but as a Lutheran.

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OK.

She was a Jewish Lutheran. So we being officially Protestant, the camps were divided. There was another camp of Christian survivors. Foehrenwald was the camp of Jewish survivors. My mother couldn't speak Jewish-- Yiddish, so that was no problem of any slip of the tongue. And I soon figured out that if anybody found out that I'm a half breed here, they might clobber me to death for what they went through.

So I didn't-- we went to the Jewish camp, my stepfather, and so we were there. And I remember-- and I picked up habits or rituals. It was fascinating. I didn't have that from back home. I do remember that we ate in big community dining halls. I do remember Passover came, and I do know enough at this point about Passover rituals.

And the youngest person in the camp has to recite the four questions at the Passover Seder. What did I know about the questions of the Passover Seder?

Were you the youngest person?

And they started asking me. And at one point, I'm the youngest. No, there's so-and-so. No, he's a year older. So-and-so. Finally-- and he was a friend of mine. He was kind of nice. He was my age and was nice.

And I remember his name to this day, Manik Zitrenbaum.

He was a few months-- he was two months younger. And I remember-- never remember having been as relieved as scared I was how am I going to learn this. I don't know how to behave, how to say it because I wasn't taught any of that. In Catholic school, I knew the catechism.

I came home one day when we learned about different people, and I came home one day and I said, mom, you're a heretic.

[LAUGHING]

She said let's talk. What's going on here? Well, we had just gotten through Calvin, and we'd reached Luther.

Well, of course. And guess who he is?

He's a heretic. Mom, this is-- she said let's talk because here I was in Catholic school. Well, from Catholic school, I'm in Jewish school. What do I know about that? I knew about some procedures because you learn that in general.

And then came the Jewish people, and they needed-- and Moses asked for them to be liberated. And Pharaoh-- then he said let my people go. And Moses-- then came the plagues. I knew the story, but what I know?

So anyway Manik was the youngest.

And he had to--

And I remember to this day in my old age his name. He may or may not be alive. I never saw him after we left. But he was my best friend after that episode. As long as I was in that camp, he was my hero.

[LAUGHING]

I was petrified. That I remember.

End of story, we get our papers after a lot of delays because they misplaced mine since my name is Flesser and my mother and stepfather are Rosenbaum. And somehow our papers got separated, so they had to get themselves put at the

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bottom of the list 'til my papers were found and put together with them. So there were various stories that happened.

One I'll tell. That one you've heard. We go and my stepfather who had been a bank official-- and he has some retirement money in Austria-- and we had to leave with-- the communists counted how much he had on you. He said I could use-- well, they could use some money not just here in the camp.

So they decided-- they tried to go to Vienna. They are Austrians. And during the Christmas new year holiday, who works in Europe during Christmas, New Year?

Nobody.

Nobody. So let's go there. So story started. I'm 14. Not yet, I'm about to be 14. My birthday's December 26th. The first thing you asked me was my birth date.

That's right.

So they figure out very easily that if they go in mid-December to Vienna, there's no problem. I'm a child according to them. I can travel with my parents. But when we come back, I will be more than 14. So we went to the American consul in Munich.

And the popinjay, they-- excuse me, that's not a nice word. And, of course, to be nice and make a good impression, I get all-- they doll me all up. I get corkscrew curls just to look as nice as can be and so forth and were there.

And he goes I'm sorry there's nothing I can do. I cannot issue anything as long as the child is under 14. But she'll be over 14 when we come back. What do we do?

Well, he came with a solution. He said you'll be going over the Bremer Pass or something--

I don't know.

When you go there by train. Look, you're going in the evening. Put her in the corner of the train, put a blanket on her so people will see that she's asleep. Don't show her face because you had-- Vienna was surrounded by the four occupiers.

That's right.

And the path from Munich to Vienna was through the Russian zone. And these soldiers haven't seen a pretty girl in a long time as he looks me over from stem to stern while my curls.

But she'll be all right. My mother hears that. The Russian soldiers haven't seen a pretty girl and keep her asleep in the corner of the cabin. Thank you very much, sir.

Well, I remember a school chum whose parents left and returned to Salzburg. Oh, remember their name? Yes. I knew where they were. I'd somehow been in touch with her from Shanghai. We were still pen pals.

All I know is there were phone calls back and forth. Of course, she can come. I spent the holiday in Salzburg with my friend Inge-- I forget her last name-- and her parents. I just found the photo album. I have beautiful postcards and pictures of Salzburg.

My first trip, I got to go to every church. I got to go to all the Mozart places. I had two weeks in [PLACE NAME] with my school chum while my mother and stepfather went to Vienna, met people they knew there who had survived or been there, and then they came back.

And did they get the money?

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And I got a locket as what my mother called [GERMAN], which is--

Substitution price.

Well, it's to make you feel better.

That's right.

A kind of little trinket and I still have that blue thing here. Not that I ever get to wear it. But that was one experience that literally you can't get the-- pack-- you can't get the permit. But now her birth-- yes, she is 13 years and 11 and 1/2 months. When she comes back, she'll be 14 and maybe two weeks. Sorry.

So I wasn't very friendly with disposed as I grew up to any of these whether it was the Austrian secretary who had to be bribed. And whenever Henry said, well, I was born in Vienna. She was, too. And I go [INAUDIBLE]. I'll tell my own story. Don't tell people my story, these Austrians.

But this was an American? This was an American?

Now we are with the American popinjay can give you anything to for coming back. Sorry. So mama said who's going to be open. What office? What bureau will be open in Vienna around Christmas, New Year? Well, I don't-- whatever. I didn't get it. I spent the time in Salzburg.

But eventually the papers all came together. We were ready to leave. It was November, 1951.

We left the camp. We ended up I think in Bremerhaven again to go-- the English Channel is not a fun place in November.

I believe you.

But we managed, and we arrived in New York.

Do you know what the name of the boat was?

The boat that we arrived on, which was a regular-- they'd used it often-- I don't. The long voyage was the SS Anna Salen, S-A-L-E-N.

OK. Well, if you know when you arrived there were a number of boats that-- that can be traced actually. What I'm saying is if it was November 1951--

It was now '51.

OK. Was your brother waiting for you at the pier?

My brother was here. And we moved in together 'til-- first we spend a couple of nights in some hotel. My mother was horrified. There's not much money there. She found a place in a railway apartment, what was 90 Pitt Street in New York, which was then crummy area. Now it's become gentrified with the old buildings torn down. Then it was the Lower East Side.

And we lived there for a year and a half or something.

It had been five years since you'd seen your brother.

Yes. And then it took another five years 'til 1955 in the meantime to finish the sentence.

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Sorry.

It wasn't 'til 1955 that I saw my father. And he-- remember he's still back in Shanghai, and he finally gets out in '52 after horrible treatment by the cops-- the communists at this point. You dirty imperialistic pig. You-- where is the materials? I can't keep the factory going. I have no raw materials. This is now the communists.

You must be hiding materials somewhere. Where? The held sit ins. They came in a whole mass of people into his office so he couldn't leave. He played a lot of chess games with his-- as he called it-- his number one man which whom was Chinese.

He had to publish his name in the local Chinese paper. Any disgruntled employee could say something. Anyway, he finally got to leave everything behind and got out in 1952. He got the Canadian visa. Americans would not-- he applied here to come join us, but this was the McCarthy period, and my father is married to somebody who is of Jewish parentage.

Even in getting the visas when we were to Munich and back, I remember being interviewed by another person at the American consulate, not that one, not that popinjay, but another who would say, well, young lady I understand you spent some time with your Russian grandparents. Yes, I did every Sunday. Sunday lunch was with the grandparents. Well, what were some of the conversation around the table?

They were so hysterical about communist influence. What do you ask a 13-year-old what was the conversation about the grandparents? How was-- what can you tell me?

Well, I can tell you that the cook always made my favorite dessert. Even when he made something else, he always made mine if he knew I didn't like what everybody else was eating. I just-- what would I know how to answer.

Well, you're between a rock and a hard place.

Because if there was real, quote unquote, adult conversation, it wouldn't be held in front of the children. So asking me what was conversation like in the grandparents' home, meaning my stepmother's parents, come on. It was so far fetched, but it happened. People were so paranoid that it happened because it happened to me.

And also your father gets it from the other end.

Oh, yes. He's married to now a Russian lady, and there was no outlook for him. He just didn't get the American visa, but he got the Canadian. And my stepmother had two cousins in Vancouver. So if you're going to go anywhere, they wanted to go there because they were part of that earlier Russian--

The anti-Bolshevik.

Migration, and there were two of her first cousins. One was a professor at the University of British Columbia, and one was in a building industry, very well-established by this time in '52. When was the Bolshevik Revolution? And it somehow ended up in Canada. So that's where my father was.

So it was 'til 1955-- I'd been here now for four years-- that I went on a propeller, four engine plane to Vancouver.

And is that where your father lived the rest of the time here.

Yes. Yeah.

OK.

So every year, my vacations were there. And in 1960, end do around November Thanksgiving-- maybe it was '66 that I met Henry. And we were getting interested in each other. And comes spring, we're really dating, and comes the summer,

I go guess what. I have two weeks vacation.

That one Evie has heard 10,000 times. I'm going on vacation. I'm going to Vancouver. How long you going to be gone? Well, two weeks. That's all I have. I haven't been here long enough. Two weeks? Henry goes maybe I should meet your father.

[CHUCKLING]

Well, OK. Well, if you're going to meet my father-- we had talked. We should get-- you know how men are little, well, maybe we should get-- consider getting married. Maybe by end of the year, we should get married. And I always went OK. Fine with me. Whatever. OK. Well, maybe I should meet your father.

Well, in that case, we're going to get married there. And the story of OK. What do I do? My stepmother is all excited. My dad is all excited. My mother is in Europe. I couldn't handle everything.

And so I call up the Canadian consulate here, whatever the economic department-- whatever they have here. Hi. What does it take to get married in Canada, specifically in British Columbia because I know the provinces have different rules. And I guess that poor guy never had a question like that. He said, well, you have to be there.

[LAUGHING]

I said OK. I understand that. But what do I have to prepare to be there? Oh, you have to be there. I guess he thought it was big funny. I said, look, there are certain requirements. For example, here in New York at that point-- at that time, you needed a blood test.

That's right.

I think it was AIDS or before whatever, and you need to apply and get a marriage license. So he said, well, you do that. You get the license, which is immediate-- good immediately when you get there, and you just have to be there. I said you sure. He said I'm sure.

By then he-- I was explaining that my fiance and I want to get married in British Columbia in Vancouver with my father and stepmother. He said it's all right. My stepmother rushed to the city hall there to get us an appointment. Henry arrives on the appointed day. The guy has the flu. We have to wait two days.

And what does my stepmother do? Henry has to go to the basement and sleep there. And as long as we lived would anything had appeared or anything happened, he went can I come out of the basement. So that was a family joke.

None of my room was upstairs in the parents' home. He had to sleep in the basement. We got married. Henry was permitted to join me.

So that was my story with Henry who always joked. And then he joked-- he said you just didn't want to get-- do a blood test. I said that's right. That's why.

So you didn't have to do a blood test there?

No. They had no-- you just registered and whatever my stepmother did, my children want to come here and get married, you just go for the justice of the peace.

Like he said you just had to be there.

You just get an appointment.

Yeah.

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But this guy got sick on the day of our appointment. We had to go there two days later.

Did you ever go back to Prague to Vienna to Shanghai?

To Shanghai, no.

OK.

To Prague. I think I mentioned that Oscar's granddaughter lived in Prague and then in Vienna and heard about us through her father. So one time, she decided that if we took a vacation in Prague-- and she was perfectly fluent in Czech-- that she would drive us around, show us the sights, which really helped to get on the trams and everywhere with someone who spoke the language.

Vienna, I went visiting because after the war, there were relatives there from my stepfather where they survive there because there was this Jewish ancestor that nobody wanted to talk about, but the others were musical. My stepfather had the musical gene in him with piano and cello. And so there was this relative who was first--

At the Vienna Philharmonic. And you're either the principal player or back of the orchestra. So there was a relative who was with the Vienna Philharmonic, and to this day, when they come, I go there. And after the war when we're here, they went to Vienna quite often because frankly if I helped my mother and stepfather at that point in time with the currency, it was a lot cheaper for me to help them get to Vienna and stay in a pension than here in some resort place.

Sure.

And they could speak the language and so forth. So there were the family who were descendents of someone who eventually-- who was at one point, I heard that somebody tried to trace that thing and a very well-known conductor said you're not doing any of that because there were people who were then imprisoned and sent to concentration camp who were Jewish members of the Vienna Philharmonic.

That's true.

So there were quite a few Nazi sympathizers who were there. But that family member who was in the principal violin section and his brother was a cello player and there's a whole group of people I can identify who were into-- some had some musical connection with Vienna, mainly the Vienna Philharmonic.

So when my mother and stepfather went there for visits, it was like family surrounding them. My stepfather passed away. It was still easier to send my mom over there so they will continue to welcome her as a family member. So up until practically the end-- as long as she could, she went to Vienna.

So now I'd like to find out about the passing of all four of your parents, and you said your brother also passed away.

Yes.

So could you tell me the years that your father and your stepmother passed away?

I can tell you the years. First, I want to say that how I met my husband, which was a story. When we were in New York and we're visiting the widow of a lady whose husband had been active in the Masonic lodge in Shanghai as had my stepfather and we're visiting her, and in part of the conversation she says-- she's in Queens-- there's a lady who lives down the hall here and she, too, was in Shanghai. Do you remember a Mrs. Freed?

She used to have a store in Shanghai or men's gloves and scarves and things. My mother said maybe I was there. Not really. But she wants to meet you. She hears you here.

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So next time I go with my mother to have coffee and a Lily Hoffman's place, Mrs. Freed comes over and cottons to my mother and oh my goodness becomes a fast friend. That lady, who is super energetic, she comes to Manhattan. She visits my mother. We're going to go to the theater. I'm going to go get the tickets, and then on the day of the performance I'm going to come pick you up. We're going to take a cab down because my mother was starting to get some heart problems.

So energetic Selma Freed becomes a friend. And then Aufbau has charter flights. Aufbau was a refugee paper here in New York. They have charter flights less expensive to go to Europe. So my mother and Mrs. Freed decide to take one.

So they are there, and Mrs. Freed becomes very attentive to my mother, who's a little frail in health. And then the story starts. She said I need Susie's phone number and I need to call her if something happens to you. Oh, all right.

Then comes the story. My nephew just came to New York from Montreal. He's a lovely guy at this point. He doesn't know too many people. It would be so nice if Susie would agree to have dinner with him. And my mother tells me that, and I say, oh, no, you don't. You don't do that to me.

And this goes on for quite a little while, and she goes this woman is driving me nuts. She has your number, but I'm not giving her permission to use it because you don't want to. And so my mother begs me. She said, look, have dinner with him. At least you'll have a good meal. You don't ever have to see him again, but please go out with that nephew of Selma Freed.

And so the nephew of Selma Freed called Henry Tausig shows up at my door, where I lived at the time near Columbia University, and we go out for dinner. And then he asked me out for dinner again and again and again. So that was how I met my husband Henry because his aunt got friendly with my mother through a Shanghai connection in Queens. What else?

And then you found so many other things in common. You found--

Yes.

Yes.

Do you-- this, people would ask you know how did you meet-- you were both in Shanghai. Did you know each other? I said no. He would have pulled my pigtails. He wouldn't have been interested in me.

But, yes, there were common things. Some he-- some were some of his experiences being a little older that were just a little more mature if you will. And then his experiences that he had to go back to Vienna to then get to its Montreal. But then he came here.

So all that to say how I met my husband and how we got married because I was going to go on vacation to visit my father and stepmother.

That's a perfect reason. Perfect timing.

And after that, we went there many times and many vacations. that we spent there.

How many years where you married?

We were married 50 years. And when Henry agreed to go to Vancouver, that was the fastest decision he ever made. To get married after knowing each other from the end of November, we got married in July.

Half a year.

Half a year, eight-- not quite eight months. Because as Evie can confirm to you, he was very deliberate in his decision

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making. If it meant to buying a new used car, he would have checked 35 or 50 before settling on the one that he was taking. Anything. He was very methodical and very deliberate, so he never made such a quick decision. But he said see.

Well, he knew. He knew.

Yeah. And he was the most amazing person I could ever know.

Ohh, I understand. You've lost him just recently.

Yeah.

And that would have been in 2017?

Yeah.

What month?

End of-- last day of June.

Last day of June.

So it's not getting any easier.

No.

And anyway, he made me feel special. There was so much love in him as for me that it was incredible. So he was super special.

The biography of my parents started that in 19-- well, my stepfather was born in '88-- 1988.

1888.

1888. And he died in-- at the age of 76.

So that would have been in the '70s probably-- or the '60s even.

'60s.

'64.

'64. There's the mathematician there.

Yeah. OK.

And he died while we were living at university of wherever down at near Gramercy Park. And I had moved to my bachelor apartment. I was then at Columbia. And so he had just retired because he had lied about his age on his first job that somebody helped him get here, and he had said whatever. He'd taken 10 years off. And then when they started to celebrate him for retiring at 65, he had to admit he was 75.

Was he scared. Are they going to arrest me? Are gonna-- no, you're going to get social security retroactively. He didn't know. He was such a sweetheart.

Anyway, nobody could believe, and he had struggled to keep my mother and me going. And it was hard, and he was the kind of person if we went out my mother brought me a blouse, he said oh-- and I would show it off at home. Said why

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don't you buy her two. She looks so pretty.

But when my mother tried to maybe get a job here, she said I know-- I met somebody. I could maybe work in the lady's store, help people get the clothes on or something. That's the only time he threw a fit.

[PHONE RINGING]

I can support my family. What do you mean? This can never happen. So my mother gave up. She ran the household.

She left it on her shoulders. It was on his shoulders. My father when he picked himself up again in Vancouver eventually sent a little something for me, but that took a while. It was my stepfather who carried the whole burden. And his first job somebody got him was as a night accountant at Mount Sinai Hospital with the big ledgers on this stands where he had to stand all night to check what was happening.

Wow.

After a year, he got with a financial company that he could work with. So he was all hard everything for my mother and for the child. 'Til he died, I was the child.

Anyway, here I am at Columbia, and my mother reconnects with a Vietnamese friend who lives in this building.

The friend's husband is an art salesman. He deals with artists and travels the country to sell the paintings. I think some he tried to pass off as poor refugee man. He did that, too. But he travels all over.

There's a new pope. All the convents, monasteries need him. Oil painting of the new pope or whatever. I'm making that up, but that was part of it.

He didn't like his wife to be all alone for days on end. He was on a mission that anybody whose apartment was too small or who was an empty nester and whose house was now too big for them to try to get them to move into this building.

So we alluded during lunch that there were a lot of refugees and others appear on the Upper West Side. Well, there were a bunch of them in this building thanks to Rudy [? Budaben, ?] who made sure he got in friendly with the renting agent. He heard a part-- about apartments that were about to be empty I think before she reported it back at the office. He knew about apartments.

So there were a whole group of friends of friends of friends who were refugees who were now living in this building. So when there was a conversation that maybe my mother and stepfather might want to move up from Union Square, Gramercy Park area away because now that he was retired at 75, quote 65, and we lived in a brownstone and a skyscraper had come up behind, so that wasn't that bright anymore.

So he was on a campaign. Why don't you move up here? You'll be closer to the child who is at Columbia. She can come down for dinner very easily, not all the way to Union Square, a few more stops on the subway. Well, he was being very persuasive. He was a salesman.

Well, they agreed to move up here. They signed the lease. Things were being packed by the movers. And Luichi collapses in front of the brownstone two days before moving day.

I get a call at Columbia. This is Sergeant whatever he was. You need to come down. Why? Oh my God.

So I get this call, and Luichi is gone. First I sit there like I don't want anything more to happen. But Rudy, bless his soul and his wife, said look. At least we'll be there for your mother.

Don't drop everything. Look, everything is pulled apart. It's packed already. So it made sense. So we went ahead with the move.

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And your mother moved here.

And my mother moved into this building here. She was one floor above us. And it worked fine, and we could come down. And Henry and I had got married, but things got a little difficult that winter because my apartment near Columbia was lovely for one. But my closet got very crowded when he brought the winter coats and the winter suits. We had to hang them in the bathroom. He said that's-- that we need a bigger place.

So Rudy to the rescue. I know what apartment in this building. And I thought for a while do I want them to be right with his mother-in-law here. But my mother, as I have told you, was the loveliest and most thoughtful person.

And she never ever came in here without having discussed it. And, boy, was it lovely. We could come home from work, and, mom, we're home. OK. Dinner's ready. Come on up whenever you're ready.

This is nice.

So we moved into this apartment in winter. November seems to be my big moving month. We moved in here. My mother lived one floor apart-- up above us, and it was such a blessing because when she didn't feel right, I could be just right there. It was like living in the same house. Just she has the upstairs bedroom so to speak.

So we lived here together 'til she passed away. So now Luichi died in '64. My mother, who did the final ceremony, Pastor Wedel, who was in New York--

Wow.

With tears rolling down his face. My mother dies in '75 within 10 years. Pastor Wedel is still living here, tears rolling down his face. He does the service.

And then my-- so that leaves my dad and stepmother. And my dad had had a series of heart attacks. I think I-- well, anyway, I had to fly over. This is serious. You better come here. So there were three occasions where you better come here, and I picked myself up and flew to Vancouver.

And my father had being an entrepreneur, he had established himself there. Nothing doing about opening a textile firm. That wasn't going to work. Somebody referred him to a business man who had different businesses-- jewelry stores, pawn shops, investments.

So my father figured, well, I'm getting a lead to meet this man. Anything-- he may be able to help me get something. And the man says, well, you can't do this. You can't do this. Here's a balance sheet.

As my father told this story, a balance sheet I could read. And did I tell him what that balance sheet really said because the guy was so wealthy, he was something of a playboy. So did I tell him what that said? So you're hired.

You just come in and you help run this-- these businesses. And my dad, entrepreneur that he was--

[SIRENS]

So your father was became the manager of his businesses.

Of these various businesses and he took to the real estate part. The best way I can describe my father eventually in Vancouver, do you ever watch-- there is a program here called Shark Tank.

Yes!

Well, people who listen to presentations and decide whether they'll invest in them or not. Well, before he worked with

his own money, he worked with that-- this guy's money. He was like that. He helped-- some young man came to him. He wants to open-- also refugee something. A camera store.

My father said I like this guy. He was a good reader of people. I like this guy. He brought him to the bank. This guy-- you need a loan if you're going to establish.

Well, the camera shop became House of Stein all over Vancouver. That guy could build himself a beautiful home. He even bought Chateau Granville, a big hotel. He had to do something with his money eventually.

As my dad tells it, when I started, I was a lousy refugee with this Hungarian accent. After a while, I was the gentleman with this charming Hungarian accent. He said when you owe the bank 1,000, they want to kill you if it's not on time. If you owe them a million and you get a heart attack, the bank manager send you flowers and come to see you at the hospital.

You're so right. He was so right, yes.

And that's how it came about. And with one bank manager and another, I could go there and go with him to the bank. Hi, Miss Flesser. How do you do, Miss Flesser. Oh, you're his daughter? How good to see you again.

So dad built up a relationship with bank managers who were the real sharks.

Yeah.

And next thing you know this guy has a whole thing going in Vancouver. He then came-- there was no good contact to get from the old crummy airport to the city. I don't know how he got-- he met somebody who introduced-- he worked with the Vancouver authorities.

Next thing you know, dad manages to find a building which becomes a little terminal at the time. He helps negotiate with them for Greyhound-- no Trailways, and next thing you know there's Trailways bringing people from the airport to the center of the city. I have a picture of my dad. He hated the publicity with those big scissors to cut the ribbon.

Then a guy has a taxi business. He wants to have another. Next thing you know, this guy has multiple taxis to drive. So on and on it went, but dad sweated all these out. Cigarettes and black coffee and holes in the carpet, walking up and down and pacing the floor because it's easy to tell the story of afterwards how it turned out.

That's right.

But while you're hanging in the balance--

A lot of nerves.

It took a lot of nerves. But that's how his heart attacks happened. But anyway, that's how his-- so back to the dates. When father remarried, his wife was 10 years younger, very active, very meeting the girls for lunch, and so forth. And I have to say she took care of my father, these heart attacks and others.

I once told her haven't you ever heard of women's lib. Yeah, I-- yeah, I had heard about women's lib. She spoiled my father. She laid out his clothes so he'd know what to wear for that day. She laid out his shaving stuff in the bathroom so he'd know what to pick up and what to do. She prepared everything.

That was her life. She just-- that's-- she said, yeah, but that's your father. I said I know it's my dad. That was-- we called her Minky, but her name was Dina Ravve Flesser.

So she-- we were happy, my brother and I, because all through this time, I had introduced him to a young lady from Kansas. My brother-- I'm doing a very slight detour-- but we're living off Union Square, and we're there. And my

brother goes to Columbia at that point, and he then needs a job.

And he has met this young lady, whom I introduced him to. She lived illegally as a tenant upstairs but my niece. So the lady upstairs asked my mother-- who knew-- she said, look, I know-- you know and I know this not my niece, but she's such a lovely girl and she's all alone. Can Susie come up and at least invite her for a cup of coffee or something?

All right. I had an idea. My brother was home. Peter, I'm going to go upstairs and see if Virginia is there. I'm going to invite her down here. You mean I have to shave? Yes, you have to shave to meet a young lady.

He met a young lady. I had to come watch it when I came home from a date because they might be sitting on the steps up there. You've never been to the opera? Not in Kansas. You've never been to the museum? Mmm mmm.

Anyway, long story short-- I won't go into it-- she goes, well, Peter sends out resumes. She goes I remember my math professor was close to retirement. Maybe he retired. Let's send one to Kansas. Well, that's where he got the job.

So my brother Peter, who's somewhat cosmopolitan ends up in Kansas. She's from Wichita, they ended up in Ottawa, Kansas. I've had more trips to Kansas than any New Yorker would wish to have. And so he is there. I'm at Columbia. And mother and Luichi were invited to move. Luichi dies. Mother is here, and she dies in '75. And at the age of 78.

Then we're happy that my stepmother's 10 years younger than my dad and she'll take care of him no matter what happens. She is taking care of him. She's practically carrying him on her little body, this big guy.

Well, to make it short, I go with her-- I'm in Vancouver. I go with her for a checkup. They find something. They call me. They think it's just a scar from old bronchitis. They do a biopsy. It's malignant.

So at that point, I'm back here. Peter is we-- he was up with dad for his summer holidays and so forth. And they joke. Oh, this lady, she's so active. This thing, we'll get it out. You stay home. You don't even bother coming to the hospital. You take care of your father, and we'll be in touch.

My brother says he sees dad's doctor, who at this point is the cardiologist but became his doctor, come driving up and coming up the steps of the house. He says his heart goes into his stomach. The doctor comes in to report. They called him, of course.

This was not the first spot. It was as they thought. It was a cancerous spot, a secondary spot. The main spot was along the pericardium. They opened her up. They closed her up. You can't operate when it's around the heart.

So they close her up, then I fly into Vancouver. I now know the doctor takes me aside. And while the-- while we're go in for a checkup and the nurse is busy with my stepmother, he takes me into another room. He says I give her three to six months. This is inoperable. It's a very-- we took a whatever-- biopsy of that. It is a very-- what do you call--

Aggressive.

A very aggressive form of cancer. So here I was. When we came home, I said explaining to her, I know you've got the housekeeper coming twice a week, but I think you should have somebody. Come on, you can-- you guys are well off. I don't know anybody here.

So nobody told her?

No. I like to prepare dinner for your father. I do it just right. I know you do it just right. But, look, you've just had some surgery, and you're a little weaker. Ahh, do I keep talking and talking and talk-- look, you're still weak. You don't want me to worry, then I worry I'll get fired. I won't do a good job at the office.

I played every card I could for her to agree to at least interview somebody to be a housekeeper to come in. I don't need anyone. Well, obviously, she got a little weaker. So at that point, my brother came. I came back more often.

My brother is there. Or no one is there at the moment. I get a call from my father. He's half hysterical. He's at the office. He maintained an office. He had to get out and--

Do things.

And do things even if it was just gossiping with his secretary about things. And he is there, and the housekeeper called him. I can't wake Mrs. Flesser.

So he high tails at home, and my stepmother at the age of 68, the young spring chicken-- she was bouncier than all of us. She-- there was blood on the pillow. Something burst, and she is gone.

So I turn myself around, and I fly out to Vancouver, help my dad. We had to teach him how to turn on the self-turning on oven because unless you set it, I don't know how far in advance, we wanted to make sure it would turn itself on when the housekeeper would put some food in there. He knew nothing about running the house. He could start businesses, real estate, warehouses. Yeah, that's a good location for this kind of warehouse, yeah. The guy did well who used it and could then have some more.

So he needed help.

Excuse me, what year did she pass?

She died in 1981, January.

So he needed help.

So now this man who's had three heart attacks, who I knew-- my brother, I had to tell him later. My dad after one of those episodes with a full check up told-- was found to have some lung cancer. No surprise after all this chain smoking. And my stepmother talks to the doctor and says please, please don't tell my husband. I implore you. He is the kind of person when you tell him something needs to be done, he's going to go and get it done.

And if you tell him that there is something in the lung that should really be operated out, he'll insist on doing it. Why not? But please talk to his cardiologist to immediately agree. He said that man has had three massive heart attacks. He cannot survive the surgery, period.

So they didn't tell him anything. I knew she told-- confided in me, and that lasted-- he survived that early detection for eight years.

Wow.

And to shortcut it, ultimately he didn't die of another heart attack but of cancer. And my brother and I agreed we'll honor our stepmother's wishes. We will not tell Dad anything that's wrong. But if it ever comes up, we will not lie.

So as you would have it, in 1981-- a year I won't forget because I helped pay for a lot of air fares. My professor brother didn't have much money. There was a young man who started on the East Coast of Canada who became quite a phenomenon. He lost his leg to cancer or something. He was a cancer victim.

And this young boy-- young man was going to walk to the West Coast to raise money for cancer research. So, of course, everywhere he went, people came out to meet and stay here and stay there. But he walked, and he became-- it-- I guess you can look it up. I don't remember his name, but it can be found. He became more and more of a celebrity. The more he could do, the more he broke down and had a problem and picked himself up and walked again.

It reached the point that it was the prime minister knew about this boy. So he made it to some part and had a incident, comes a point he needed a break. And my brother tells me-- and you-- that they were watching the news together, and

you know how it is with the news. If there's one air crash, they talk about it and then tell you all the air crashes of the past five years.

That's right.

If there's one thing-- and this happened. Well, when this boy-- he was just a very young man or boy-- had whatever he collapsed wherever he did, they mentioned all the symptoms he had from the beginning and what he did. And my dad turns to my brother, who told me about it, he says what's going on there. This sounds like what I've been going through here.

I'm eating. Everybody's bringing food to the house. The housekeeper's cooking. All my friends are bringing food. They're fattening me up. All my life, I've tried not to gain weight.

And now I'm losing my pants, and this and that. He said could it be. And I haven't had a heart attack, and I'm getting weak. Could it be that I have cancer? Yes, father, you do.

Cat's out of the bag.

That was the cat out of the bag. So dad knew, and that was in to June, July. My father died in August. I had just been there. I had just flown back. My brother was there when dad died. I turned around and flew back to Vancouver.

This is 1989?

'81.

Oh, your dad dies in '81.

So they both died. My stepmother dies in January. My dad dies in August. In between, he survived with all the help and whatnot, and he dies ultimately of Kansas-- cancer. He was in the hospital. They decided it was spreading. There's nothing they can do.

I got a hospital bed. I hired around the clock nurses. It's his money. We need the best of care.

His cardiologist was wonderful. One day I met-- he came up at the door. He said I see you're doing all right for your father. I'll do my share.

There was one nurse who didn't give him the morphine shot on time. She was promptly fired. I said so let him die a drug addict. Help the pain for heaven's sakes. Sometimes people don't think, and it scares me now what's going on with the opioid epidemic. The doctors are scared to prescribe what's needed.

Anyway, the doctor prescribed what's needed. Dad was coping pretty well. At times into pain, got another shot that helped. He played the piano. Some nurses didn't expect him to be alive the next morning for the next shift, and he would welcome them. He feel-- he felt better. He was at the piano. That was his hobby.

So he was at home.

Played the piano. He was home. I got him home. The last few months-- several months, he was home with nurses and my brother and I and my sister-in-law. We took turns. I had a list. When are you on-- you got vacation days. You got vacation days.

Coordinated who goes where when. Got my cousin to come, the adult cousin whose daughter just left here. Ilus, please go. Stay a week with your uncle. So she came. So we had people there with him up until the end. And he passed away then in August '81 at the age of 78.

All of them died fairly young.

So the youngest at 68, the oldest two at 78. My stepfather, a year after he officially became 76 from 65 to 76 in that period of time. So just to tell you because it's the Holocaust museum, I with my quote, mixed background, Jewish, Protestant, whatever, Chinese from my friends, I'm in Vancouver. My dad was totally assimilated, but it's a small community. You contribute.

So, of course, he contributed to a local temple because whoever told him that's the one to give to. So he gave. I go-- first my stepmother died. I go to that temple to that rabbi. Oh, I'm so sorry. How can I help you? But of course. And what cemetery will I hold the second service? And I said you won't. My stepmother, according to her will, which was my father's-- in my father's will and his wish, she is going to be cremated.

Suddenly, the back stiffened. This is now not an Orthodox rabbi. I don't know-- not quite reform. It's what he said. It's a small community, and I don't think so.

The funeral home sends me to somebody who is an ecumenical like we have here so that I write eulogies to do that because it's a small community and they cannot deal with somebody who's going to be cremated and my father wanted to be cremated. He didn't-- and whatever he wants, she wants.

He didn't talk about it too, much but I know that he wanted to be cremated because he had no feelings otherwise one way or the other. He said when you're dead, you're dead. Was-- here was feeling some sense of what happened to his family.

They got burned in the gas chambers. He's going to be cremated.

Oh, dear.

And after he died a few months later and I'm back again-- I must have talked to a cantor or somebody. I had talked to that rabbi. I'm sorry. Your father's also being cremated. There's one relative who was-- had gotten so important in the community, he wouldn't come to the service because there was going to be a cremation. And how would he look if he attended? And I want you son of a gun, you're a cousin.

Anyway, my feelings about religion-- practicing religion got colored by some of these episodes, but that was a final straw. You are asked to preside over just the service for heaven's sakes. I'm not asking you to go do anything else. And you won't agree to do that. You took his money all right. Well, you didn't know what he wanted.

I-- sorry. These were assimilated people that were part of my life. I respected all religions from my friends. Here were my Chinese friends with their Confucian and Taoist beliefs. Here was my best friend in school who was raised Catholic. My other friend, she was part of the Lutheran community.

I respect your beliefs. But you are so buried in your rituals that you don't see the humanity of things? I'm sorry. So I'm afraid even if it goes on the internet or wherever, people know I am now member of the Jewish JCC, a Jewish community group here. I love those people. They couldn't have been more supportive to me now as anybody while I was going through what I'm going through.

But I cannot in good conscience go and join with the prayers and the hullabaloo of what goes on. Some of them don't even understand the rabbi, what he's saying, but they go because holidays, you have to go to synagogue. And they don't understand everything that's being said. And some of my Catholic friends, they certainly don't understand the Latin mass. But it's the incense, and it's so forth.

So I will go. I have gone with friends, and I admire their-- the sincerity of their beliefs to practice it. Unfortunately, I cannot get myself into any organized religion. Faith is something very personal to me like my Chinese friends see religion as something personal. But anyway, end of sermon about what happened in Vancouver, both my parents there were cremated. He did not agree to an urn even.

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My mother and stepfather wanted to be cremated, but they are in an urn here at Ferncliff cemetery. I've never gone there, I don't have to look at a marble wall with their dates on it to remember my mother and stepfather, the kind of wonderful people they were. And in Vancouver, he didn't even want an urn.

I know it hurts some of the others who are there. They like to go to a cemetery at holiday time, put down some flowers, and pay their respects. I'm sorry that was his wish. It was written into his will. I was the executor of the will. I have to follow the wishes.

Well, that's a very bitter pill. It's a heartbreak to hear that that's the experience that you had. And I thank you that you shared that with us.

Maybe it doesn't cast the nicest light on things, but there were so many people who helped. As I told you earlier, the Protestant minister who's running to meet the American chaplain to meet the surgeon to get the medicine to the hospital and the young rabbi on whose shoulder as I sat who helps me-- tutors me after my illness so to catch up in school, there were these wonderful people no matter what their religious beliefs were. They were human beings who offered empathy, sympathy, empathy. And then there are those who don't. So that was that experience.

Anyway, I'm in New York. Time passes. I work here. I finish graduate school. I'm graduate from Columbia. I go to Hunter College. I graduate school is Columbia. I then-- my first job out of Colum-- out of school was at the UN, so I worked for a couple of years at the United Nations.

What did you graduate as?

Hunter was 1957-- '57.

Bachelors?

Bachelors.

And Columbia was--

In sociology. I then go back to graduate school.

Sociology.

Sociology, I get my master's in sociology. Actually I continued with courses so I could possibly go on for my PhD, but I decided I was going to work and enough of work and study and everything else. So I did a lot-- I did all the coursework for my PhD but I decided no more. And continued my life.

Then from after the UN, I got to work in-- what did I do? Oh, well, I was at graduate school, so I was a-- I worked with my professor, and I became his teaching assistant and his graduate assistant. And one day, a young man during office hours that I held showed up, and I help him with his problem. And then he turns around to me says, Miss Flesser, can I ask you a personal question?

I thought, oh, boy, what's happening now. He said I spent a few months in Israel at the University of Jerusalem, and I met a Professor David Flesser. Is there any connection that you know? I go I don't know, but I'll let you know.

Dad, I met a student. What's the story with the David Flesser. Oh, yes, [INAUDIBLE] he knew how he might be related, and there is the professor who is professor of historical whatever. He with the Dead Sea Scrolls and all that.

Anyway, my brother couldn't resist. Writes to him. That man writes a long letter back about how we are all related. And I never talk to him, but I know that if Flesser ended up in Israel way back when to become an honored professor of whatever-- and I looked him up on the internet [VOCALIZING] all that about him-- and so there was one relative. And

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then finally I go, I see students coming in, and I see Richard Flesser entering Columbia.

Dad, what's a Richard Flesser doing here at Columbia? Let me think. Oh, yes. There was- you know how it was in Europe. The eldest inherits everything. So what does a younger son do?

He said there was a whatever Flesser. He had to get out of whatever, out of the country or find his way wherever he could. One somehow went to sea, and he ended up on some merch-- whatever ship way back when. The bottom line is there was one man on an SS Flesser in the civil war.

Oh, you hear the sound.

I go back to the student who enters, and I find out that there was, in fact, a younger son. I don't know, a grandfather or something. My father had her tell about him, the young man who went to sea. And thank goodness he shuffled things around on the Union side, not on the Confederate side. And he settled when he retired in Newark or someplace what is now New Jersey. That was before.

And therefore anybody-- and sure enough Richard Flesser comes from somewhere in New Jersey. So, yes there were Flessers in New Jersey, and there was an Alan Flesser who competed unsuccessfully with Hilfiger who became better known as a fashion. But Alan Flesser had some men's clothing, and I know nothing about any other Flessers. So the one on the Civil War and the professor in Israel.

But I finished at Columbia, worked there for a while. When you work there, you're always under grants that they get grants and so forth. And as one grant was expiring and they were writing for another looking where could I work and they found another grant. And that one meant studying the impact of environment and poverty and so forth.

And my mother got hysterical, and Henry went you can't take that. Knowing you, you're not just going to get the reports. You're gonna go into Harlem at all hours, and you're going to go look for yourself how these poor people live and how their health is. I don't think we would like you to accept that grant.

I say, yeah, but I am going to keep working at Columbia. And the professor I'm with reaches into his back pocket. He says there was a guy who graduated here about two, three years ago. He now works at a place called Grey Advertising.

And it's spelled e-y not a-y. Why don't you go talk to him, see what market research is like? Just go interview him. Yes, sir. I will go interview Mr. Weiss at Grey Advertising.

That was a very interesting meeting. And next thing I know, I get a call would you mind coming back. There's some more things I have to tell you. More things I have to tell you. Would you be interested in working here?

And so--

That's your market research--

That was my first marketing research job at Grey Advertising.

And how long did you work in market research?

For the rest of my working life. Not that Grey. He went somewhere to a research company. He got me to follow him. And then from there, I got stolen away to Interpublic, one of their agencies. And that's from where I officially retired, and then I still kept on working on a consulting basis. Somebody I had worked with there who had her own company come now and work with me.

So I worked up until I was 73, so that's eight years ago. There were no more projects, and we weren't going to go try and sell more projects. So I've been retired.

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You have laid out such a world of people, such a panoply of the people in your life and painted such a vivid picture of them all. I really, really thank you.

You're very welcome there. This is-- I don't-- I didn't put on my watch, so I don't know what time it is. I'm sure this has gone past many of your interviews, and there are-- it's like trying to barrel through the core of something where there are so many--

We'll never catch it all.

Tendrils. Can't catch it all. When I think of what my mother went through of coming there and going through a divorce and finding someone who's taking care of her and then the house-- and then I get sick with their meningitis in the epidemic-- oh, and I got encephalitis while being sick with meningitis. So I had a double whammy, so that's why I was so sick.

And then pulling me through at the cost of most of her jewels that she had to sell and then the house gets bombed. And we lived in smaller temporary quarters because we were always told the communists are coming and we'll try and get you out, and you couldn't really settle in.

And then was a year of DP camps and then coming here and my stepfather, God bless him, working away at his age with emphysema because he had, of course, smoked and taking care of us with such a full heart. And what she must have come through and her son lying in the hospital there in Shanghai dying of sepsis and this last minute save of the penicillin injections that pulled him through, unfortunately not early enough that his leg could be saved.

And so what she suffered and still was smiling and enjoying her opera, she lived in this building with all the refugee friends. And it was-- it reached the point where I'd go to work and she'd go-- I'm-- I said, mom, just tell me what apartment do I find you in. Well, Mrs. Reich in this one and Mrs. Somebody Else and that when. The building had about a dozen people who knew each other, played canasta and bridge together, or went out together, and my mother was the kind, gee, I want to see you all. I don't feel right. Everybody come to my place. You play cards. I'll kibbutz. If I feel better, I'll step in, but I'll kibbutz.

Or with the famous aunt who introduced-- Henry's aunt, she'd go I really went to that opera but I don't-- I feel a little weak. She dressed all day so she could go to the opera at night with her friend, her new friend from Shanghai who was my husband's aunt.

Well, you're describing in many ways what people would say are true survivors. They live with insecurity for such a long time. They escape with their lives by the hair-- we're using these phrases-- the hair of their-- by a hair's breath, the skin of their teeth.

Oh, yeah, when the bomb, hit it was less than a hair's breath.

And your mother having that sense to leave Prague early enough, early enough.

Yeah.

And then also have that sense to say Shanghai is no longer as secure as it should be. Time to move on. All of that speaks to survival and then to still enjoy life.

She did. God bless her, she did. And she was in that sense an amazing lady. All four of my parents were amazing people in their own right. I had the best relationship with all four of them I guess by virtue of being so little when they came in-- when I came into their lives.

Well, I'll say this that I think you have paid an enormous tribute to them today in telling us about them.

Well, they were wonderful people. They were survivors in their own right. But it was-- there were many good times. I

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tried to-- I was reluctant to talk about all this because their memoirs that I have read or I even recognized some of the names, that wrote about the experience in Shanghai, they are the pictures of the horrible things that happened to some people in Shanghai.

There's one lady at the JCC that somebody said, oh, you must meet Helga. She comes to the same classes that I do, but now she knows that we both share the Shanghai experience. But I could tell she was one of those who lived in the building where the bed sheets separated families, and she doesn't really want to talk about it.

And I had this-- mixed or different experience of, yeah, nothing more horrible can happen to you than your house falling around you.

Yeah.

But earlier, my stepfather was able to have a house where there was music in the house, where there were chamber music was happening every Sunday afternoon, where there were, in spite of problems, things were all right. And then right after the war that my father did well and certainly my stepmother's parents were extremely well off, so, yes, so my life was this was tough but this was amazing. And not everybody could have had this duality, so I guess that made my story a little different. But I empathize with the ones who really suffered during these times, who got slapped by Mr. Goya just to-- and if they don't get that permit, they can't go to work.

Well, that's what the magic is of individual stories is individual stories let us in and give us a glimpse into the destinies of specific people. And they're as valid as the next person's. And so I'm very glad that you overcame whatever reserve--

I thought I didn't have a concentration camp story.

But you had a story.

I had a ghetto story.

Well, and you also had a story of several lives being affected by the policies of the Holocaust, which were upended for a good decade and longer. So between--

A lifetime really.

A lifetime. Yeah.

Otherwise, they would all have lived happily forever in Vienna and gone about their middle class lives and continue with their families. This way different things happen.

Well, we've come to the end.

Thank you. You must be exhausted listening to that. He must barely be awake back there.

No, no, no, thank you. You are, as I said earlier, a wonderful storyteller. And it was a fascinating, fascinating journey that you took us on. So I really, really appreciate it. Before I--

I thank you.

You are welcome. And before I send-- say the final ending, is there any final thoughts, anything you would want people to take away from all of this that you would want to share?

Regardless of your background and how you were raised and your own beliefs, be kind to each other. Don't prejudge people by something you've heard about them or so forth. As I think I said in somewhere along the line, I did not know of Jew-- being Jewish being an ethnicity 'til I came to America because my Chinese friends couldn't fathom-- religion is

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personal. So you're a religion.

You're Jewish, but Jewish what? And here very often I heard this one is Italian American and this one's Jewish even when it was mentioned in a kind way. And it made my hair stand on end. How can you judge someone overall by what their religion might be, and especially they might be a very active believer or more assimilated and really just go to synagogue, keep Yom Kippur and nothing else or go to mass on Christmas Eve and do nothing else.

And it took me a while to internalize that and to know that what is going on in the world today, what the Muslims are fighting each other based on something that happened 500 years ago when you're both in the same faith and in Africa when in Rwanda the Hutu and the Tutsis were slaughtering each other and you're both from the same ethnic heritage or racial heritage, it took me a long time to understand it and to be horrified that it still continues today. And unfortunately, anti-Semitism is alive and well and growing, and Jews are such a tiny minority of any country's population, and how can you abide that? How can you have people in Charlottesville saying no Jew is going to take my place and have these Ku Klux Klanners and these racists even in our own country being tolerated in the name of free speech? Hate speech should not be free speech.

I couldn't have said that better. Thank you.

Thank you.

And I will say this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Susan Flesser Talsik on April 26, 2018 in Manhattan, New York.

Now would you like something to drink?

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