https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Maria Weissenberg Barrows on June 7, 2018, in San Luis Obispo, California. Thank you very, very much, Mrs. Barrows, for agreeing to speak with us today to share your story and to let us in on a little bit about how historical events impacted your life and that of your family. I'm going to start with very basic questions, and we'll develop our conversation and your story from there.

OK. I'm honored, and I'm grateful.

So are we. And the first question is, could you tell me the date of your birth?

I was born April 8, 1925 in Vienna, Austria, and my father was a physician who practiced everything from dentistry to obstetrics and surgery in a suburb of Vienna called Voslau.

Voslau?

Yes, V-O-E-S-L-A-U. And he had been in the Austrian Navy as a physician lieutenant in the First World War when Austria still had a Navy out of Trieste that later became Italian or nowadays is part of Italy.

Next question is, what was your name at birth?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

OK, hang on a second. Let me take that, yeah. What was your name at birth?

Maria Weissenberg.

And what was your father's first name?

Eugene and middle name Henry Weissenberg, and my mother was Olga Walicek Weissenberg.

Walicek?

Her family were-- father was from Vienna. Mother was from the Sudetenland that changed sometimes being Polish, sometimes being Czech, and sometimes being German.

Well, it is part of the Central European area and geography where a person could be born in one place, grow up there, spend their entire life and not moved, and yet have lived in three countries.

Right, I hadn't thought about that, yes.

So she was from Sudetenland?

Yes.

And her last name was Walicek, which sounds more Czech than German?

Right.

And was her background more Czech than German?

Probably. My maternal grandmother spoke with a little accent and was a loving person, raised three daughters, lost two of them to cancer, and lived in Vienna until 80-something in a urban setting and yet feeling very close to animals and nature.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
That's your maternal grandmother?

And that's my Aryan side.

So we'll establish this, then, right away. Were your parents-- you're not completely Jewish?

No. My mother's family were Christian, and in fact, my father and his father had been baptized as children but were considered Jews by race. And I don't know what motivated grandfather, the Jewish grandfather, to be part of the Roman Catholic tradition.

That was one of my questions, into which Christian denomination-- so it was Roman Catholic that they were baptized into?

Yes. Let me focus a little bit then at the beginning on your mother's side of the family because you started to tell me about it. You say that she was not native to Vienna, she had come from Sudetenland, north of--

The grandmother, yes.

The grandmother had. Were there still relatives in Sudetenland?

Not to my knowledge. She had a tragic experience of losing her first husband in maneuvers and was then a very young widow with an infant--

During World War I?

Before-- no, I'm sorry. This would be-- her date of birth would be around 1860-something, and she came to Vienna with her infant daughter, remarried, and had two other daughters, my mother being the youngest.

And about when was your mother born?

1896, and my father, 1892.

So remind me again. Your grandmother's name was? First name.

The--

--maternal--

--maternal grandmother was Hedwig, H-E-D-W-I-G, Walicek.

Walicek-- and that would have been V-A-L--

No, W-A-L-I-S-C-E-K.

And did you know of your grandfather, your maternal grandfather?

We did not have any close relationship to him, but we did have a much closer relationship to the paternal grandparents, Heinrich and Irma Weissenberg.

We'll come to them in a minute. Focusing still on your mother's side, her mother, Hedwig, your mother, Olga, her mother, Hedwig-- did you not have contact with both grandparents on that side or just the grandfather?

Just the maternal grandmother. I didn't have-- I don't remember meeting the grandfather on my--

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

--mother's side.

--mother's side, and my mother was very close to her in-laws.

So had he passed away, do you think, by the time you are born?

No. By the time I was born, probably. I don't have his death certificate.

What was his name?

I'm trying to remember his first name. The last name was K-O-W-A-R-Z-- Kowarz.

Kowarz-- again, that sounds more--

Slavic, a Slavic name.

--more Slavic than Austrian. But that was-- so how did they become Walicek?

Walicek was the maiden name of my maternal grandmother.

But your mother's maiden name would have been Kowarz, or would have that been the name of the first husband?

No. It was Walicek. I think that they were not married.

I see. I see.

At least I found no certificate. They were poor, and in order to be married, you had to have money.

Well, you had to pay the priest for the ceremony. Did you know any of-- your mother had only one full older sister and one half-sister?

Yes, the half-sister married and was 10 years older, and we met her family occasionally. But we were not close, and she would have died long before the Second World War.

Do you remember her name?

I can't say it right now.

That's OK. If it comes to you later, then we'll just say it later.

Her first name was Angela.

Angela?

And I don't know her married name.

But she would have-- she would have been on Angela Walicek?

Yes.

She would have been Angela Walicek at birth, and your mother's full sister-- what was her name?

Rosa Walicek, and she later married Berkowitz. She was very gifted and had a modeling career, married a fashion designer, but died in her middle 30s from colon cancer. And it was my mother who took care of her and was very much

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
impacted by that tragic early death.

Were you already born when that happened?

Yes, I was about three years old or four years old when Aunt Rosa died.

Do you have any memories of her?

Yes, she was beautiful and kind, and in her illness that lasted several years, she shared home with her mother and in a way that precipitated along with the death of my Jewish grandfather, very unexpected, from a heart attack in his middle 60s or early 60s. This precipitated a family dissolution because the Jewish widow did not want to live alone, and she had only two sons. One son became a professor and was at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute as a peer and colleague of Einstein when Hitler first came to power--

That would have been in Berlin.

--in Berlin in 1933.

So this is an uncle of yours?

This is my uncle, and my father, Eugene, had a younger brother, Karl.

And that's Karl.

And Eugene became a physician, and Karl became a mathematician and professor. My father was fortunate in that when Hitler took over Austria in March 1938, his brother was already established at the University of Southampton, having left Berlin five years earlier.

We'll come to this. I want us to still focus on some of the people--

--the other generation, yes.

--and the other side of the family a little bit because I want to make clear, if this is true, that your aunt Rosa's death did not precipitate the dissolution of the family.

No.

No. It was it was your grandfather on your father's side?

Yes.

You mentioned that Aunt Rosa was married to-- her married name was Berkowitz?

Yes.

Did she also marry somebody who was Jewish?

Yes, I assume that her husband-- and I don't remember his first name. I never met him, but he was successful and affluent. And they had no children, and their marriage was relatively brief because of the premature death.

And the other aunt whose name now I forgot, the older one--

Angela. Angela married and had a restaurant in Vienna for many years and died of liver cancer. We were not close to them.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

Did you have siblings?

I have one older sister, Liselotte.

Liselotte.

Yes, who was an exchange student when she was 15.

When was she born?

She was born August 30, 1922 in Voslau, and she and I had boarding school experiences because my Jewish grandmother was very much into education. And she wanted to make sure that we were well-educated, and she chose a Catholic convent boarding school that I loved and my sister despised.

That may be not-- Let's not be gentle about it. She hated it.

Yes, because the nuns somehow enthralled me, and I was going to be a nun. And my sister wanted to be a dancer and an actress, and that was a little bit frowned upon in those days. So when an opportunity came as a result of close relations with American friends that date back to 1927, my sister lived with the Reese family in Torrington, Connecticut and had a student visa, which meant that she--

Could we cut for-- excuse me. Can we cook for a second?

We had a break because we have a kitty in the room, so occasionally if we'll hear a meow, that's because there is Christa on the mics. We were talking a little bit about your family background, and your sister, and your own experiences in Catholic school, which were quite divergent, and the older generation.

I'd like to ask something. When you say that you weren't particularly close to your aunt, Angela, or other members, or, let's say, the grandfather you would have had, Mr. Kowarz, is it for-- what were the reasons for that? Were there reasons for that?

Well, I think that my maternal grandmother was focusing on her children, animals, and plants and, for whatever reason, was separated from that grandfather, so he really wasn't actively--

Involved.

--involved with our upbringing.

And was your maternal grandfather-- grandmother, excuse me-- a part of your early years?

Yes.

She was?

Yes.

Did she live close by?

The closeness increased as she lost her husband because at that point, instead of she living in Vienna and we in a suburb, she persuaded my father to move into her spacious apartment. She did not want to live alone.

This is your maternal grandmother or paternal?

Paternal, father's family.

Your maternal grandmother-- was she part of your daily life?

Yes, after the separation because we lived in her apartment where she had nursed and lost her daughter.

Rosa?

Rosa.

And by the time you were born, was she no longer poor?

She had supported herself for some 20 years. When she came to Vienna, she came with her infant daughter and worked as a wet nurse in Weissenberg family, and the Weissenberg family was a large clan with two brothers and seven sisters.

That is, your father had seven sisters, or was this another part of the family?

Paternal grandfather had seven sisters and two brothers.

Wow, that is large.

And that set up the possibility of becoming acquainted for my mother Olga and Eugene because of Hedwig's involvement in his aunts and uncles.

OK, because you anticipated another question that I had, which was, how did your parents meet? How was it that they came together?

Yes, it was through the maternal grandmothers role as a in the Jewish clan, and also, my father was a physician and aware of the advantages of not marrying into close families because of the recognition of inherited disease, both physical and mental. And so whereas his Jewish mother might have chosen a well-to-do Jewish lady as a daughter-in-law, my father chose Olga, not only because she was beautiful, and simple, and bright, and gifted, but because she represented desirable genes, so to speak.

Did he say that?

Yes.

And did your mother concur?

My mother was in love with him, so she was very happy to be married. But she recognized that sharing the household of her mother-in-law would have squelched her. The mother-in-law was a leading, powerful, influential person, and Mutti was vivacious, and into music, and very interested in learning everything and anything and teaching. I remember her teaching other people how to write and read.

Did she go through higher education?

No.

No?

Not to higher education, but she just continued to learn all her life. She died relatively early, at age 67, and loved to travel and was very focused on my sister and myself. She did not remarry after the divorce.

Oh, your parents did eventually divorce? We'll get to that.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Yes.

So when your parents married, was this after World War I?

Yes, the war was over in 1918, and my parents married December 20, 1920.

And by that point, was your paternal side of your family-- were they converted into Catholicism? Had they converted, or was this a Schein kind of conversion?

I have a feeling that it was a Schein because none of the family members attended church, and my Jewish grandmother was very supportive of the Jewish community, yet she did not attend a synagogue or kept a kosher kitchen.

I see.

But later on she was very loyal to the Jewish community and refused to leave them. She remained in Vienna until her death.

OK, let's turn now to your father's side of the family. He had one brother?

Yes.

Karl?

Karl.

And Karl was younger?

Yes.

And what was your grandfather on your paternal family-- what was his name?

Heinrich Weissenberg, and he was involved in trading-- not trading, but importing furniture from the Balkans. And that is how it happened that my father was actually born in Romania while they were on-- while they were traveling on business, and that became a problem for him. The Romanian quota for immigration to the United States was one of the problematic ones.

So he was not an Austrian citizen?

Yes, he was an Austrian citizen, but when it comes-- later in life, you want to escape Germany and you want to immigrate to the United States, it depends on where you are born as to what--

--quota--

--immigration quota you fall under. He did eventually succeed in 1944. By then he had re-married.

So he was born in Romania. What year?

1892, January 16.

And his younger brother was born-- do you know? Karl?

I don't know Karl's birthday, but it was close. It was within a couple of years, and the boys were fun-loving. And in their upbringing I think they had a very happy childhood, but their education was actually instigated by their progressive

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

mother in Germany.

Oh, really?

They had their undergraduate work in Jena, Germany, however, my father's medical studies were in Vienna. And Vienna was a hub for medicine in that era, so much so that a lot of people from other countries came to Vienna to be treated for various ailments. And that is how we had this personal connection to the Reese family that--

The American Reese family?

The American Reese family that later adopted me for the duration of the Second World War.

What was your maternal grandmother's name? Excuse me, my mistake, paternal, your Jewish grandma.

Irma Wiener Weissenberg.

Ilma Wiener?

Wiener, W-I-E, as the city, N-E-R, was her father's name, and her father was a temperamental financier. I never heard her speak of her mother, so I assume she died very young. Grandmother was the youngest of three daughters, and her oldest daughter is the one who built or had a business of providing dairy products to Vienna coffee houses, which were famous and numerous.

And this was Aunt Ginny Wiener, and she built up this business. And when she died, she passed it on to my grandmother. So Irma became a business woman and was able to subsidize her physician's son's interest in research of neurologic disorders and physical medicine, the precursors of physical medicine.

Wow, that's quite impressive. She sounds like she was quite a powerful force.

She was very strong and bright. I don't know about her education, but she was interested in social reforms. She applauded the Montessori educational beginnings and did everything she could to help people with whom she had contact, particularly in the Jewish community as the politics became more and more problematic.

You're talking the overall nationwide politics and the European-wide politics?

Yes.

Let's turn a little bit to your early years. Do you have any early first memories of growing up in episodic, maybe, events?

Yes, I remember that our house-- the decade that my father was in solo medical practice in Voslau, our house was large and had two or three stories so that patients could stay overnight or even longer periods of time, and my mother was able to assist my father. He did not have any nurses or other assistance, and again, Olga was energetic, and willing, and interested in her husband's career.

But after the death of his father, he, I think, rather welcomed going back into the city with an appointment at the Allgemeines Krankenhaus-- that's the main hospital in Vienna-- and specializing in neurology and physical medicine because it wasn't nearly as demanding as having assisting babies brought into the world or surgical removal of appendices, or tonsils, or whatever the case may be.

So there was this decade of childhood in Voslau, and then when the transition came to be in Vienna, there was the division of the family with the death or the illness of Tante Rosa. And my sister and I then associated more closely with my mother and the Aryan side of the family.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
Really? Because when-- so when you say the dissolution of the family, does that mean your mother and your father split?

Yes.

That was the point?

Yes. I think my age-- about three or four years old. They were separated, and it was precipitated by the death of the paternal grandfather.

So this would have been late 20s, early 30s?

1928.

Is when Grandfather died?

Yes.

Did you have any memories of him at all?

Yes, I do have memories of him. In general terms, he was soft-spoken. He was always welcoming. You could sit on his lap. And we were never chastised. It was a happy childhood. My memories include the fact that my sister was the graceful one who took such good care of her toys while I was a little more of a tomboy and somehow or other whatever I touched I dropped and I ruined. So that was kind of a hard beginning.

Did your mother and her mother-in-law-- had they had friction all the time, or--

I think it was more the fact that Irma, my Jewish grandmother-- she was such a persona and such a leader. She organized everything, and she held the purse strings. And of course, that was intimidating to Olga, and I think the separation was good in the sense that there was no enmity between my parents. I never heard them speak ill of each other.

And Olga came into her own. She then was independent and pursued her own education, later on worked for an attorney, remained in Vienna throughout the war, and immigrated in the later 40s to the United States. All my family were able to become citizens.

US citizens?

US citizens, yes, and it was my mother who arranged or managed to let me leave Europe in the middle of the war in 1940 in order for me to further by education, which was not permitted for people of mixed parentage.

Wow. So that I understand clearly, the separation of your parents happened when you were three or four years old?

Yes, and the divorce followed, I think, a couple of years later.

So you continue to live in-- what's it called, the residential area? We were in the ninth district of Vienna, and my father, then living with his mother, were in the 18th.

Were they far apart?

If you walked it, it would be 45 minutes approximately, and there was good public transportation.

And did you see him often?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
Often-- I would say several times a month, and occasionally we would stay overnight at my paternal grandfather's spacious home. But we felt much closer to my mother and her mother. We had pets, and we had a simple household with plenty of challenges. They were enhanced by periodic separations from my mother arranged by my Jewish grandmother to expose us to educational opportunities.

So you mean your Jewish grandmother insisted that you go to boarding school?

Right, and she paid for, and arranged, and chose the schools as early as five, I think, or six, it was. Before I entered school, we had a six-month period in Tyrol ostensibly for health reasons. I think we had whooping cough, and immunizations were not so available in my generation as they are now.

Let's talk a little bit about your parents' personalities. You gave me a certain insight into your mother, that she was very bright, loved learning, loved your father, was very interested in his career, and also continued to work after the separation and the divorce, and found a job with an attorney and your powerful paternal grandmother, Irma. What was your father like? What kind of a personality did he have?

He was gentle, and I never saw him in a confrontational mood. He was a good peacemaker. On the other hand, he did not stand up to his mother when it came to supporting his wife, and I think, in part, that was the reason for the separation and the later divorce. But throughout it all, my parents spoke well of one another and were supportive. In fact, going ahead, when there were separation during the war, my mother would inquire, how is your father doing, even to include his second wife.

And it is my mother who cared for her Jewish grandmother, fought the Nazis, was not intimidated by them because Grandmother didn't want to leave Vienna. Both of her sons, by then, were in England, and everybody wanted her to come to England. She didn't know English. She didn't particularly like her German daughter-in-law, and she wanted to staying with her peers.

Did your grandmother like your mother?

Yes, I'm sure she liked her, but she was possessive and controlling. And that was her nature. She meant well. I can recall when it came to shopping or buying clothes, my grandmother would always choose quality, but she had no understanding of fashions at that point or the preferences of my mother. Later on--

She chose your mother's clothes?

She would often just bring clothes. This is for you, this is for you, this is for you. And then we would look, and there were dark colors and heavy materials and coats, and what we wanted was fashionable, light. And my mother taught herself how to make clothes, and when my sister had her exchange student years, my mother sewed a hole. I can't think of the right word, but various outfits for her to travel to the United States, and she did the same for me before she put my name into a program that the Quakers brought to Vienna to help children of mixed parentage pursue their education. So my mother was very productive alone, and she thrived. But she would not have thrived in the same household with my mother-in-law--

--because there could be only one queen.

Right.

Your aunt, Angela-- and what was the reason there was no real communication there?

I think the fact that Angela was 10 years older, had married, and had an established restaurant business-- so she was very occupied-- and distances, and time constraints, certainly not dislike. It just didn't happen because life was busy with other things.

Do you remember the name of her restaurant?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

No.

Do you remember the name of the home that you had with-- the address of the home you had when your parents were still together?

Yes.

What was the address?

That was Hochstrasse 20 in Voslau. There was this decade of their marriage from 1920 to-- not quite a decade. '28, I think, is when we came to Vienna, and then the address for my maternal grandmother was in the ninth district, Nussdorferstrasse fÃ¼nf, five.

Nussdorferstrasse?

Mm-hm. That actually means a village where you grow nuts, nÃ¼sse.

Nussdorfer, that's right.

Yeah, and we had-- although it was an apartment on the fourth floor, it had two balconies, and my grandmother had a garden of plants on the balcony that would attract birds. She loved birds, and we dubbed her [GERMAN], which means someone who mothers birds. She's the one that did the cooking and the shopping, and that freed up my mother to do sewing and work outside or bring people into--

Was it a comfortable home?

It had nice furniture from my aunt, Rosa, and yes, it was comfortable. And when money was tight-- because there were years when my mother just had the child support-- she would rent out one room to-- Vienna always had a lot of foreign students, and I remember living in the presence of university students that were our renters.

How large was the apartment?

In square footage?

No, I mean how many rooms?

It was a large living room, a large bedroom, a smaller room that was my grandmother's, and half of that was dedicated to live plants. And then there was the kitchen, and the kitchen was the center of the apartment because all food was prepared with a cooking stove. And my grandmother's kitchen had space for eight or 10 bird cages.

Oh my goodness.

And she raised canaries or tended to any injured or ailing birds that neighbors or people would bring her, and she went out twice a day, taking her dog. She always had a dog because she was hard of hearing, and the dog would bark if someone was at the door. Otherwise, she wouldn't know that the bell had rung, and she would do marketing on-- buying things on the open market, bring it home, and doing the cooking.

Well, it sounds like a happy home.

It was.

Did you have modern conveniences, electricity, indoor plumbing, things like that?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Yes, but no telephone.

No telephone?

And no refrigerator.

Did you have a radio?

Not until later.

Not until later? And you say it was on the fourth floor?

Yes.

Fourth floor European? That is, it would be fifth floor for the American understanding?

Yes.

Was there an elevator?

No.

So it was a walk-up?

Yes.

It was a walk-up.

And I remember my grandmother-- I'm sure she had congestive heart failure because of her swollen legs and her difficulty in breathing, but she had her routine of walking with the dog, and doing the shopping, and keeping the household. My mother did the cleaning, and the sewing, and, of course, was focused on my sister and I in terms of what opportunities for education and travel and promoted that.

Your paternal grandmother arranged that you two-- oh, let me back up. I was going to ask about school, but I want to ask this. Was your mother a practicing Catholic? Or your grandmother?

No.

So you don't go to church.

No, no. Nobody went to church until the Jewish grandmother selected this convent in a suburb of Vienna, and for me, it was actually quite a conflicting experience but while I loved being there, it was very hard to grow up with an intolerant belief system that condemned divorce. And where did that leave me as a second-grader? My parents don't get to go to heaven because they're divorced?

You anticipated another question that I was going to ask, which was, what was your experience in that school? And of course, divorce is not allowed within the Catholic church, and certainly in those years there would have been-- it would have been far more orthodox than even today.

Yes, yes. It was a grave burden that I carried with me for a long, long time, even past medical school.

Can you tell-- can you articulate that burden?

The Catholic Church is, on the one hand, forgiving but on the other hand, very intolerant, and the dogma was so-- it was

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
a heavy burden. On the other hand, as a second-grader-- I still recall to this day the first homily I heard. It was given by a Franciscan Pater Franz Bollinger who was then close to 80 years old, and he spoke about the reason for discipline. And he said that if you don't stake a young tree, it will be blown over by the wind, and it will not grow straight. So the discipline of no talking for a little chatterbox like myself unless it was recess, just across the board no talking, not in the hall, and not on the staircase, and not in the dormitory, and not in the dining room unless the bell rang and it was Thursday or Sunday, at which time you could have conversation--

Still, the attention from the sister that was in charge of the sacristy-- the chapel was such an attractive, quiet place. The fact that I was allowed to help change the altar cloths and bring the holy water and all these things, that just was such a magnet for me. I took to it like a duck to water, whereas my sister, who was there and two and a half years older-- we were not even supposed to talk to each other.

We had separate dormitories for age-related. We each had cubby holes of a bed, a chair surrounded by a curtain so we had our privacy, and up at 6:15, cold water to wash our face and brush our teeth, ready for mass at quarter to 7:00, breakfast at 7:30, 10 minutes recess before our 8:00 class, and then a break at 10:00 where we would get either a piece of bread or some chocolate, and then a short recess, and class until noon, main meal at noon, and daily walks. But on the walk you were talking only in French.

Really?

On the way, the half-hour walk, you had to try to find French words to talk. On the way back, you were allowed to chat and speak your own mother's tongue. And I would say that the classes were very small.

Let's cut for a second.

So you were describing school and the daily routine. Were there any of the teachers-- were all your teachers nuns?

Yes.

Were any of them warmer or cooler? What was their manner towards the children?

I remember three of them in particular, and Sister Imelda, or Soeur Imelda, as we used the French term, was very warm. And she was our dormitory person, so she would help us with clothing. And we made our own beds. I liked her very much.

And then there was the sacristan, Sister Jan, who, for some reason, took a liking to me, and she allowed me to follow her and be involved in the chapel. And that was just-- for me, that was mesmerizing. I loved the quiet. I loved the music, and I loved the stories about the saints. So that was, I think, for whatever reason--

And then there was Sister Ignazia, and she was very strict. And I remember her chastising me because I used-- all our little cubicles had a name tag attached to the curtain, and at some point I needed a safety pin. Something had broken in my clothes, and I needed the safety pin. And it had-- it was the only access I had, so I used the safety pin and ingeniously made a hole in the curtain, drawing the thread through with cotton. And when she discovered that, oh, she said I had no business doing that. That was just wrong, as if I had stolen something or whatever. And that was a harsh chastisement, but then you just come to accept the various personalities of different people.

And overall, the Mother Superior was the benevolent, quiet, loving peacemaker, and even though we had only one visitation a month--

That was my next question.

--and once a month we were allowed to go home. So during the five years, from the second grade to the seventh grade, that was my education, lots of separations from parents and other family members, and in 1938 when Hitler took over, private schools were closed.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

Even Catholic schools?

Even Catholic schools, yes.

I see.

And I then transferred to public school, and then is the first time that I realized that I was part Jewish. I had no idea. I had enrolled in the public school, and it was in the fall of 1938 when the change of-- youth organizations was rapidly taking hold, and while we had uniforms in the convent, public schools didn't have uniforms.

However, Hitler Youth had uniforms and not only uniforms, but programs and challenging programs, so the second week, I think, that I was in public school, I came home, and I told my mother, I would like to join the Hitler Youth because they have meetings. And during vacation time, they get to go and help in the country. They actually get jobs, and I wanted to be part of that. And my mother said, I have news for you. You are not eligible because you're part Jewish. This is the first time that religion had even been raised.

Let me pause here because I wanted to know whether or not the fact that one parent was Jewish when the other parent was not had ever, within your family, caused any issues.

Not that I was aware of because nobody was practicing rigid rules of religious-- we didn't. In the convent, of course, we never had meat on Friday, but at home nobody really paid attention to it. Come Sunday, nobody went to church, but once I was in the convent, that all changed. So anyway, it was at that time that I realized, oh, I'm not going to be able to continue school beyond the eighth grade.

How did you realize that? Was that a rule?

Yes.

Was that something that was said?

Yes, that was made known. I don't know who told me, probably my mother, but she said, I can let you go to a private school. And she paid for me to go to a private school, which I absolutely loved.

But if all-- convent schools were closed?

Yes.

But private schools were still able to operate?

Yes, to some degree. There were the prep-- what you call preparation for Matura in Europe is the equivalent of graduating.

Like an Abitur? Like an Abitur in Germany?

Yes, yes. And so my mother paid for me to go to a very informal school where people studied Latin, and mathematics, and science, and in preparation of the national Matura, we used to call it. And during that time, my mother began to search for ways of letting me emigrate to the United States, and fortunately, she found the help of the Quakers and a program that provided an immigration visa for me. And then I left in 1940.

OK, we'll come to that. I want to back up a little bit. It's interesting that, A, your Jewish grandmother finds a convent school. That is truly a totally different religion, even if she is not particularly practicing, if she's prominent within the Jewish community. It's an interesting choice. And two, that she liked Montessori education-- if she was somebody who was much more progressive in her thoughts, that she would have chosen a school system that is truly traditional, and

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
orthodox, and far more rigid, what does that say?

I think she was very progressive. She liked the fact that this convent was bilingual, that French was taught with some success, and when she actually chose a very liberal school after the convent was closed that my sister was in for a while, again, with-- she was ahead of her times. The school that made the biggest impression on my sister was a boarding school that allowed us to mingle with royalty.

No kidding?

In 1933 or so, I think-- yes, before 1933, there was the Tausend-Mark-Sperre. That meant that Austria and Germany were not able to travel back and forth freely. Each time you went, you had to pay 1,000 marks.

That's a lot of money.

That's a lot of money, and prior to 1933, the granddaughter of Kaiser Wilhelm-- her name was Princess Frederica. She later became the queen of Greece. She had four brothers. Two were already adults, and two were my sister's age. And they wanted their children to grow up not just by being taught in private as-- tutored one on one, they wanted them to mingle with other children.

So there was a castle in Gmunden, which is in the rural part of Salzburg or Upper Austria, and then that schloss, that--

--castle--

--castle was converted into a private school. And my sister was in the fifth grade, and I was in the second grade, and we traveled to some distance and enrolled in February of-- I think it was, yeah, '32. It was before the Germans had to have this expense back and forth. So we were there only for six months, and my sister was in second heaven. She absolutely loved it. Her class had five students in it as well.

But I was only second grade, and they didn't have instruction for second-graders. So I went with the Gardener's little girl to the village school, which meant that I had to get up a half hour earlier, and during the winter time, there was snow. And we could take a sled to go downhill to the village school, and then we had to kind of walk up together.

But I was very intimidated in those surroundings because for the first time I was in the dark at night, except for moonlight, and I'd always remembered the street light coming in and the traffic noise of the city. And then all of a sudden then you're someplace where it's really, really dark, no night lights, and all these strange noises that you're trying to figure out, creaky floors, or windows, or doors that were not securely shut. Oh, I had lot of--

Scary.

--nightmares, particularly so because this castle was really a castle rather than a school. The school just happens to be there. For instance, to get from the sleeping area to the eating area, it not only meant that I had to go down two flights, but there was a long hall, totally empty, parquet floors, and the middle-aged suits of armors lined up in the periphery. So in order to get to the dining room, I had to go through this dark hall, and if I ran, then it would rattle. And I wasn't sure if there was anybody hiding inside the full suits of armor. It was really intimidating.

It could be really spooky.

Yes, spooky is the word. And the night did we arrived to start the school, it was wintery, and there was a funeral ongoing. I don't know who died, but the burial was in the crypts of the castle, so here was live music, somber. I still remember the tune of what was being played, and we arrived, and we were sort of in the way. So we just stayed at the back until the end of this service. I guess it was maybe 5:00 or 6:00, and then we had supper. And my mother stayed overnight the first night.

Did your mother have any say into whether or not you got to this school or you didn't?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

No, no, because grandmother was domineering, and she held the purse strings. And we made the best of it. We--

Did you miss your mother during these times?

Very much so, very much so. And that was not the first separation. The first separation I wasn't even six years old. I was five years old, and we went to a-- it's a combination, sanatorium and school because of illness, and the country was supposed to be healthier than the city. My sister always had trouble gaining weight, and I was the opposite during those-- I don't know how many months we were there, but the dining room had white tablecloths. And you either had a brown, kugel is a--

A cake?

No, it's a round sign. It was just a piece of polished wood that-- if you had a brown sign, then you got meat, and if you had a green one, then you got vegetables. So my sister was always getting meat, and I was always getting vegetables. And I'm the one that gained weight, and she didn't. And she had-- I think she increased by half a pound all the time that we were there.

The funny thing that metabolism is. Outline, then, for me a little bit in chronology because I've gotten a bit confused. Your first separation from home was to the sanatorium, yes? Separation from your mother.

Yes.

Then came the convent or then came the castle?

Then came the convent, and the castle was just in 1932. I was a-- wait a minute. No, the castle-- I'm not sure. I'll have to look at my diary to sort that out.

OK, but the convent, at any rate-- how many years you went to school at the convent?

Almost five years.

Almost five years?

Yeah, from second grade to seventh grade.

And did you recall that the nuns ever talking about what's going on in contemporary life, or was this pretty much sequestered and secluded?

I think they were focusing on religion and subject matter. I don't remember any-- and language to try to encourage us to progress in French. And we had music, as well.

Did the Mother Superior know that your father was Jewish?

Probably.

Do if there were any other Jewish children in the--

There were children who were not Catholic, but they participated in-- they didn't go to communion, but they otherwise were included in all activities.

When you were taught religion and Bible stories, do you remember how the story of Jesus Christ was handled?

No. In fact, I think the focus was on catechism. Those Ten Commandments and what is right and what is wrong was the

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
focus more so than the story of Christ's passion, although we had lots of celebrations that involved processions. And we had a large, beautiful compound that included a grotto, and during certain times of the summer, we would have a procession and mass in the grotto. And then the children would be given petals, and we would have flower petals marking the road.

So those were very appealing to be. Anything that had to do with flowers and animals, although we were not allowed to have pets. My grandmother had a dog, as I said, because the maternal one, because of her hearing, but as a youngster, I was given a live Easter bunny for one year. And I had an Easter birthday, and this little white rabbit and the little doxie dogs made friends instead of-- they're supposed to hunt hares, but I had the white rabbit in my hands and let the dogs sniff it. And I would stroke both of them, and I have a picture where they shared-- the dogs' bed was largely occupied by the bunny, and then the dog would form a little rim.

--a circle.

--a circle around it.

How sweet. How sweet.

Yeah, animals were always-- when I think of animals and my grandmother's care for the live and sick birds, in the communications during the war, we only had the Red Cross messages, which was 25 words, once a month. So you developed a telegraphic style, and yet, in the communication from my mother, she mentioned that the Nightingale had escaped. The Nightingale was one of the many birds that my grandmother had, and evidently she got out one day. And she also mentioned when our dog died.

What was the dog's name?

Waldi.

Waldi-- did your parents, either mother or father, come visit you at school, or did you go to visit them at home?

Once a month from the convent, on a Sunday, we were allowed to go home, and once a month, they could come and visit. If they came and visit, we usually stayed there, or went for a walk, or maybe got some ice cream. When we came home, we usually stayed with my mother, but my father might take us to a movie or have an outing with him. He would take us to his office, and I remember he had this elaborate examination table that allows the head to come up and the feet to go down. And that was a wonderful thing to climb on, and so we would have-- he would let us climb and help us [INAUDIBLE]. And I had a good time in his office.

Did the divorce impact you much? Did you feel it emotionally between your parents?

I felt it because of the Catholic dogma. Otherwise, it would have been much, much easier.

Much milder?

Yes.

How sad. Did the outside world in these years-- and I'm thinking mostly the political world. Did it intrude itself into your world?

Yes, it did because I was happy to follow in my sister's footsteps when my mother arranged for me to emigrate to the United States. I couldn't wait because my sister's experience had been so positive, and she loved everything that had to do with America because, of course, that's where Hollywood was. And yeah, and she had her own little dream world.

She was in the convent for four years or five years, too, but it did not nearly influence her as much as it influenced me. She remained in her dream world, and she was going to be the dancer. And she did. Even though she was not permitted

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
to perform under her own name, she managed to dance in public without being known, surreptitiously.

Where was this? In Vienna?

In Vienna.

And she did this in what year, and how old was she?

She came back from the United States as 17-year-old, and she attended private ballet and dancing classes. And then her class would be performing in various places, and she would substitute when somebody else couldn't go and take the name of that person. She couldn't go to all the functions.

And this was because?

Because she was part Jewish.

So now let's come to something that you mentioned earlier, and that is the Reese family. You started to mention to me earlier how your parents came to know them, and it was through your father's practice?

Yes.

And detail that for me a little bit.

While Papa was in practice, he tended to foreign visitors who came to Vienna to be treated.

This is after your parents split?

Yes, yes. And there were Americans, and there were Filipinos. There were two Filipino-- Barredo and Lichauco were the families that were my father's patients, and for the Americans, it was the Haus family and the Reese family. And the Haus family and Reese family worked in Greece, associated with the YMCA, and right after my aunt died--

Rosa?

When Rosa died, Mutti was very distraught because both grandfather and Rosa had died in the same year, and it was 1928, a particularly harsh winter. The Danube froze over so that you could walk across. That was a very rare occurrence.

Anyway, after this bad winter, my father contacted his American families in Greece to see if my mother could vacation and recover, and so he sent her for-- it would have been maybe six or eight weeks to stay during this harsh winter time. And while there--

--in Greece--

--in Greece, in Thessaloniki, my mother not only recovered, but she became very close to the oldest daughter of the Reese family, my foster sister called Lois. Thessaloniki did not have a good school for Lois, so her mother, Dorothy, and my mother, Olga, decided that-- my mother offered to take Lois with her back to Vienna, arranged for her to go to a boarding school. Vacation and weekends she would be staying with us. Actually, I think we were already-- no, we weren't in boarding school yet. Anyway, that's how the friendship began.

And Lois became fluent in German. Nobody ever could tell that she was not Austrian, and as a thank-you, she said, when Lisi is ready, I will bring her to the United States. By then, the Reese family were living in Connecticut. So that's how my sister got to go to the United States and be part of the Reese family.

What year was this?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

That was 1937 and '38.

And the reason for her going at that time?

Was just because she wanted to learn English. She wanted to know the culture, and it was a thank-you from the Reese family for having brought Lois to Vienna. But with a student visa, she could not remain in the United States. Although Hitler had come during that year--

1938.

--1938, in the summer Lisi returned and was reunited with us in Vienna. And then she remained there for the duration of the war while I was able to leave two years later and emigrate.

Wow. So at first she goes to this school, which by that point-- where she studies dance and there are performances, and she then surreptitiously will perform but not under her own name because of, again, now anti-Jewish laws.

Weissenberg was a Jewish name. Now, I believe Weissenberger is not Jewish.

And you, at that point, when your sister returns, we're still in the convent school? Or had you--

No, because the six months I left-- let's see. Right, the convent was closed at the end-- in June 1938. The takeover was March, and the Catholic schools were closed at the end. And then and the textbooks were changed. There was a lot of-- our direction of driving used to be left side. Germany was on the right side. Overnight the transition came, and Austria was now on par with German driving on the right side of the road.

That must have caused a few accidents in the beginning.

They actually-- it was quite amazing because the street car traffic-- I don't quite remember how come it worked, but the Nazis were efficient. They had a way of bringing change.

Well, by the time these things happened, your sister is 15 or 16. You were 13 at that time?

Yes.

Had Hitler come in-- had you heard his name before he marched into Austria?

No, we were not-- we were very isolated from politics. Now, my father would have because of his brother.

So did you follow-- did you know your uncle, Karl?

Yes, he would come and visit, and he was very beloved and never wanted to have children because he felt the world after the First World War was such a bad place. And he was quite critical of my parents for having children. He said, how can you bring children into this world? But once we were here, he was very loving and supporting, and it was always a delight when he came to visit.

But he never stayed with his wife, only a few weeks, and then there was-- he wanted that independence from his mother. He did not want to be tied.

So her reach could go quite far?

Yes.

And he had to put some physical distance between him and her. So he was married as you were growing up? It wasn't

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

that he was a single uncle.

Right.

And what was your aunt's name by marriage?

Lina.

Lina--

She was from Berlin, had a strong Prussian accent, and we didn't see her for very long. And she had a good marriage. The end was tragic because of her prolonged illness and Karli cared for her. And he also had a second marriage after that experience to a lady from-- and they lived in Holland.

I see. Well, describe for me what you know about his career in Berlin at the Institute.

His interest in physics involved quite a bit of research, and I recently read some of his papers. There is something called reology, R-E-O-L-O-G-Y, and it has to do with the character of matter in fluid. And it has many applications, and Karli actually developed or invented a goniometer that carries his name. Both my father and my uncle had patents that were quite expensive to maintain, and it has to do which country your idea is protected.

But his applied interest encompassed the production of rayon, as it is the artificial cloth of rayon, and also we were just learning about the complex mechanisms of clotting blood outside the body and not wanting blood to clot inside the body.

--in the 30s. In other words, that was that what was being--

--ongoing research. And I don't know if he and Einstein had any common projects, but I do know that their appointments at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute were terminated at the same time because Jews were not allowed to hold academic positions or public positions. And more and more aggressive confiscations were carried out as Hitler advanced in his plan of taking over the world.

But to my personal experience, it was so particularly shocking when I came to the United States to hear about the concentration camps because nobody talked about it in front of me, and the packet that I prepared for you of my father's cousin-- I had no knowledge. I only came to it in retrospect many, many years later because people who experienced usually didn't want to remember, and my father-- once he left, he never stepped foot again into Germany, and he would not buy any German goods. But his life became very productive in Puerto Rico, where he spent the last 10 years of his medical practice, and overall, his retirement in Santa Barbara before his death.

What I'd like to do-- and we may not do all of this before having a break, but I'd like to take the trajectory of each of your family members and talk about that until we come to 1945 and then come back to your own story. So at this point, we were talking about your uncle, Karl, and then we'll talk about your sister, and your father, and his second wife, what happened to your paternal grandmother, what happened to your mother and your maternal grandmother, and then what will happened to you when you leave. But let's now finish with Karl, so I have a few questions here. First of all, you called him Karli ?

Yes.

His nickname was--

Karli, the diminutive--

--for Karl?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

--for Karl.

K-A-R--

--R-L-I.

Karli, OK. Now, you say he and Einstein were dismissed at the same time?

Yes.

So that would have been in 1933?

Yes.

What does he do after he is dismissed? What does Karli do?

He escaped by way of France but didn't stay in Paris long and settled in South Hampton. He was able to get an appointment at that university, and so he re-established himself, became a British citizen.

And this is with his wife Lina?

Yes.

And I don't remember the year that Lina died, but it would have been much later.

We can cut.

Well, before our short break, we were talking about where your uncle, Karl, ended up after being dismissed from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin.

And that was to Southampton.

Where he went with his wife Lina?

Yes.

And was she a Jewish background?

No, no.

No?

I don't think so. I don't remember her name, but her appearance was very blonde and very slender. And I'm quite sure that she would not have been Jewish.

So their journey there-- he did escape, you say?

Yes.

And was it 1933 or later?

Yes.

So '33 through France and then eventually to Southampton?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Yes.

Did they visit you in Vienna before leaving?

No.

So you were about eight years old at this time, and you recall that happening?

Yes.

Now let's talk about your father a little bit, and that will be-- his difficulties begin when the Nazis march into and take over Austria in March 1938. By that point, was he already married again?

No, no. He lived with his mother and housekeeper who became his second wife but not until after they went to England. And as I said, everybody tried to persuade grandmother to join them, and she would not. But my-- I lost my train of thought. My uncle's career was quite successful both in research, and he came to lecture in different places in the United States later in the 40s and 50s.

He remained a British citizen, but he was able to help his brother by immediately sending a telegram with a ruse. You are requested to participate as a lecturer on Monday. So that would have been the first weekend.

First weekend after--

--after March 13 in 1938, and Papa, who at that time had a private office, fully equipped. He had his personal car, and he shared the very spacious apartment with his mother and her housekeeper, Francis, who became Papa's second wife. So Karl sent this ruse, and Papa left with one suitcase and one briefcase, left his office, left his car, left his home, left his mother, left us, never to return.

Did you have a chance to say goodbye to him?

Yes, we would have been-- well, let's see. We were in the convent. We may not even have said goodbye. I don't recall because it wasn't publicized. The idea was the less said, the better, and to all intents and purposes, he just went for the weekend. He just never came back.

So it wasn't even that he experiences his practice being closed down, or losing his license, or something like that?

All of that-- once he left, I don't know how quickly the Nazis confiscated, but in effect, they did. And they notified his mother that she has to give up her apartment, and once Francis left, it's my mother who took over, and went ahead, and found a suitable lodging and a-- the German way of pension was more than a hotel. It was more home-like, but meals were provided. And in the eighth district there was a popular pension that later became a refuge for Jewish elders, and to my knowledge, we helped Grandmother move. And I remember her room very well on the second floor, and she was quite happy there in terms of being with her peers and being supportive.

And by that point, your father's second wife, soon-to-be or not yet, had already left?

She did not leave immediately, and I don't-- I should look at her passport to see exactly when she left, but it probably was-- she was still there when I left, and that was a year and a half later. All the while we were trying to persuade grandmother, but she was determined to stay. And then it was my mother who took over and became her defender because my mother was the Aryan one. She was not intimidated by the Nazis.

Francis was not Jewish?

No.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Or Francis was Jewish?

No.

But she left? Eventually she leaves?

Yes.

Eventually she leaves. And did you know that she and your father had this close--

--relationship? I didn't. I was pretty naive. I loved Francis because she had been my nanny when my mother was recuperating in Greece and developing her relationship to the American family. It was Francis who was looking after me, and she was a lovable person, positive despite her own tragic first marriage-- she had married an Italian rebel who was jailed for his political aspirations-- and she had a loving mother-in-law who lived in northern Italy, not Genoa but near that part of Italy. And she had a beautiful son, lost him at age two or three to diphtheria. I don't remember his name, but she was then encouraged by her mother-in-law--

Once that husband got out of jail, it took all of six months before he was dead. He was killed in a motorcycle accident, and so there she was, a young widow and having lost a child. I never saw her sad. She was very loving and transferred her maternal feelings to my sister and I, and it wasn't until-- actually, it was Uncle Karl who said to my father, you bring Francis, you marry her, is how he put it.

Really?

Because they hadn't married in Vienna, and yet they then had very many happy years together. She was instrumental in supporting him during the years that he needed to be qualified to practice medicine in the United States, which happens--

It takes a while.

Yeah, happened after 1944.

So at first your uncle is able to get your father out in March 1938 through this ruse of a telegram that-- and your father already had a passport?

Oh, yes.

And he wouldn't have had a J in it because it still would have been the old Austrian passport?

Yes.

So he is safely in Southampton with your uncle. Is that the case?

Until-- I don't know exactly how much later. When the British islands interned refugees-- and Karl and Eugene both lived on the Isle of Wight, Isle of Wight or Isle of Man for several years.

For several years, even?

Yes. Yeah, the British stand for how to care for refugees, and evidently Karl had not reached citizenship by that time. But they were very constructive in the refugee camp because they were capable and were able to help a lot of other people. By 1944, my father had qualified to get an immigration visa for himself and Francis, and they came with the zigzag ships to avoid the U-boats and landed in New York.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

And they married in Britain?

Yes, they married in Britain. I came across their certificate. And at that time Francis was able to support Papa. They had help, also, from one of my grandmother's close American friends, a Mr. Mayer, M-A-Y-E-R. I'm not sure if there was a blood relationship or just a friendship, but for years. I remember the visits of [? Itti Tante ?] and [? Sippy Tante. ?] Those were American spinster ladies who visited Vienna almost every year and would be hosted at our home and were somehow related to this Mr. Mayer, who was then able to provide the guarantee of--

--of course, the affidavits.

--of the affidavits. And Papa and Francis had a small one-bedroom apartment at 1022 Park Avenue, and there is when I really admired my stepmother for transforming this little place into a welcoming home, not just for paper but for other refugees who were in their circle. And she was able to prepare the best Wiener schnitzel and other delicacies in the kitchen that was within a closet, a two-burner stove within a closet. And my father had a ironed white shirt every day, and Francis did the laundry in the bath tub. She was an inspiration in her own right. And as I said, despite the personal tragedies, she seldom spoke of it and just seemed to have this strength of character and goodwill.

Well, it's interesting that in both cases your father marries people who have become part of the household, that at first it's through your grandmother, Hedwig, in that family and not go outside that and seemingly happy both times.

Yes, and I remember when we had a discussion with my father. My sister and I-- we were standing outside of my grandmother's apartment. We had come to visit from the convent, and Papa was telling us-- he was trying to reassure us that he loved our mother, he respected our mother, but that it was better to be separate at that point. And having never seen enmity and having never experienced rejection, I've often contemplated my good fortune. How did I deserve that?

It's the luck of the draw. It's amazing what kind of models and lessons we see from those in another generation of how they handle these deeply personal ties and when they go wrong, how they then behave with that. It makes a huge difference for the children.

Yes, yes. Certainly if there is anger or regret, the negative feelings become dominant, and they rob you of happiness.

But you were able to be both loyal to your mother and still appreciate your stepmother?

Yes.

And they sound like all of them were people with moral character, that she would love, of course, her husband's children but also accept them as her own. Did she come from-- was she Austrian?

No. Remember, she came from the Sudeten area.

Francis did?

Yes.

Oh, I didn't know that.

Yes, her father was a forester, and she and my maternal grandmother actually came from the Sudetenland part of Europe. And she was sent, as a young person, to a relative in Berlin to learn German, so she was fluent in German and then learned Italian during the brief time that she was married. And when she returned to Vienna, she was fully able to communicate, and she liked to live in Vienna. But late in life, both she and my father loved Puerto Rico and chose to communicate more often than not with a Spanish and German mixture.

Was your father as multilingual as she was?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
Papa was good in German, English, and French, and Italian. Yeah, he was quite good, and of course, Latin and Greek was mandatory in those days.

Of course, for studies and particularly the profession that he chose. So we know your father's trajectory. We know your uncle Karl's trajectory. They make it out. But your grandmother wants to stay because of the community? Is this the reason why she wanted to stay?

The community and her reticence. She didn't like English, and she really didn't like her German daughter-in-law enough to be living together. Two of her sister-in-laws were in England at that time. They chose to emigrate, Aunt Mimi and Aunt Ida, and Aunt Ida is the mother of Friedel Pisco, the cousin that really experienced the Holocaust himself.

And these were the wives of your grandmother's brothers?

Yes, Grandfather's sisters because the Weissenberg clan had the two brothers and the seven sisters.

And your grandmother marries into this family, and so it is her sisters-in-law?

Yes.

I see.

And even with them as an example, we still couldn't budge her.

Really?

Because I remember talking about it, of her options.

With her, or with your mother, or the three of you together?

Individually, either with her or with my mother.

Can we cut, please?

Pretty, very nice.

OK, rolling.

Before the break, we were talking about-- hello, kitty. We were talking about your uncle Karl's journey westwards to Southampton, your father's ability to join him immediately after the Nazi takeover of Austria, the subsequent, after some time, internment that both of them experienced in Britain. Do for how long they were interned?

I don't, but it would have been probably between one and two years--

That's quite a bit.

--because there was a period when early on in the war when they were still free, as far as I know. And then in '44 when the visa was available for my father, I'm not sure if he had been previously released or whether he went from the internment directly to the United States. And I don't know-- I think it's maybe seven years to become a British subject, so that might explain why Uncle Karly did not already have citizenship.

And were there letters that your parent-- were you able to get any communication from your father and your uncle during the time that they were in Britain?

Yes, and I probably still have them. They would have ended before my father immigrated in 1944, and I think that was

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

in the spring.

Did he write to you and your sister, or did he also write to your mother?

He couldn't write to my mother because once war was declared-- unless he used Red Cross between Britain and Austria. I don't know how that worked.

So it was when you were in the States.

It was via-- my mother would inquire, how is Papa and Francis? And then I would try-- I mentioned in those letters that they are well or they are able to emigrate and kept her informed.

So let's now go back to Vienna. We have a number of people that we still need to find out what happened to them. Your grandmother stays in Vienna, and she then is told she has to-- did she rent her apartment or own her apartment?

She rented, and my mother is the one who found this pension that kept her comfortable, provided meals. And did we touch on her demise? Did we--

So this is what I want to come to now. Your grandmother is in the pension, and your mother is the one who arranged that. And it was closer to where you lived, wasn't it?

Yes, it was probably a half-hour walk.

And you visited her there?

Yes, before I left.

And you so I left comfortable?

Yes.

So tell me, what then happened with your grandmother? She stayed in this pension? Was she disturbed there at all?

I think early on she was quite happily situated. I only know from the Red Cross messages that my mother stated she died suddenly from a stroke, and she didn't elaborate. However, when my mother came to the States, she explained the circumstances that the whole community was to be transported to Theresienstadt. They were told the day before.

Do you remember what year this would have been?

This was 1942, and at least I found out about it through this message in 1942 that's it's dated. It's a bit confusing because it has the date of one message followed by the date of the message that was received several months later. And she had a second-story apartment with the French windows that open outwards, and somehow she managed to climb out the window, either jumped or fell. And below was concrete sidewalk. The injuries that she sustained at that time are the cause of her death. I don't know how long she lived with the injuries, but obviously she escaped being exterminated in Theresienstadt because she wasn't well enough to be taken there.

Well, was she admitted to a hospital?

I have no knowledge of it because my mother and sister had fled to the country and were not in Vienna at that time.

So what they found out was probably already-- it wasn't that your mother was on the scene within an hour or two or could see it?

No. I don't know how they found out. I have one childhood friend who was in Vienna at that time. She now lives in

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Chicago, and I have not been able to reach her recently. She was my only hope if she could recollect because she was the business partner-- her family were the business partner in the dairy, and they continued to live on the side even though the diary had been shut down, was no longer a business.

Were they Aryan?

No.

They were Jewish as well?

They were mixed as we were, and Mitzi Bressler was my baptismal sponsor. And she was the Christian part of that family, but her two children were raised in the Jewish tradition. So their passports were stamped with a J even though they were of mixed parentage, so that was determined by religious affiliation.

And they would have been the ones who would have known more closely what had happened to your grandmother, that is, how much time elapsed between the time she fell and the time she passed.

Or where she might be buried. The burial plot for my grandfather I visited quite often with my grandmother, but I kind of doubt that she would have had that kind of a burial at the time that she passed away. And I was wondering if, through the Nuremberg trials, they followed any of these details, if they might be available. Do you possibly know?

Personally, no, but it could be that there would be some records in Vienna that would have been kept at that time, though I couldn't guarantee it. It could be that the Jewish community in Vienna was able to find some documents that the Nazis would have left. It's a question to explore.

I did not come across any death certificates for my paternal grandmother.

You did not?

No.

And had you approached-- had you already inquired?

No, I have not. I do have one form that I was given to do my friend in Chicago that is a possibility, or maybe now there are ways to do this online.

But what it means is, to this date, you don't have details?

Right.

You don't know-- do you know whether the stroke played any role, or that was just an excuse to write in a letter?

I believe that was just an excuse because my mother didn't want to upset me, but she did subsequently tell me. I'm wondering if that's--

--the phone?

--my alarm.

Can we cut for a minute?

So up until now your grandmother's death is just very fragmentary--

Yes--

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

--from what you were able to find out?

--because my mother wasn't there. My sister wasn't there, and communications were poor. And I thought that it was towards the end of the war, but in fact, by the dates of the Red Cross messages, I know that it was in 1942.

Now, you mentioned somebody off-camera and maybe a little bit even on-camera whose connection to your family we hadn't yet explored, and that was a cousin of one of the sisters-in-law of your paternal grandmother or the nephew.

Alfred Pisco-- he was related, and the reason I have a lot of documents of his stay in Vienna and then later immigration is because my sister was executor of his estate. His wife preceded him in death by a number of years, but they had immigrated in the early 40s and were happily naturalized and assimilated in the United States. That's Alfred Pisco and his wife, Emma.

And his mother's name was?

Ida or Ida Pisco, and she, with her--

But she was born Weissenberg?

She was born Weissenberg, and she emigrated and spent her last years in England with one sister whose name was Mimi. And I don't remember her married name, and those two ladies also lived in Southampton.

And that's what you mentioned earlier is that even their presence being in England wasn't enough to convince your grandmother to join them.

Right, and it was an enigma of sorts because we really expected life being so miserable, but Grandmother was a strong person. And she was also a bit-- she could be theatrical. She could exaggerate things, and I know that there were a couple of episodes when she threatened suicide. But this was long before Hitler and unrelated, and since I was not present, it's murky.

Well, it could be a feature of someone's controlling-- sort of like, if you do this, then watch out. What did I want to ask now? So we know at least that her story ends in 1942, and the documents you have from her nephew, who would be your second cousin, third cousin, something like that-- did you have a relative or any relatives who actually were arrested, and deported, and--

I believe Alfred spend some time in one of the concentration camps, but he never spoke of it.

When did he leave Austria then?

I don't know. Well, let's see. I would have to research that. In the years between '38 and into the early 40s, Jews could leave the country but had to pay an exit tax, and that kept going up and up and up. So people who didn't have money were left behind, and they were the ones who were sent to concentration camps. Friedel had another brother, Alfred, who might have been able to pay for him to get out. I know they stayed in contact, and there are still some relatives around Liverpool. But I am not in contact with them at this point.

So that leaves, at this point, your sister, who comes back after her year in the United States in 1938, and she starts going to ballet school.

No, she had some private instructions, but she was mischling and therefore not eligible for any public education.

But the dance classes-- were these private, the private one?

Yes, and as I said, her performances always had to be in lieu of someone else and using a fictitious name.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

So what happened with her? Did her life continue this way?

She was able to find work during the war years. Both she and my mother worked in legal offices doing clerical work, and when the end of the war neared and the American occupation happened, we were fortunate that their residence was within the American sector. And because both my mother and my sister were fluent in English, they could find work easily, as a lot of translators were needed, and they benefited from working for the Americans because they had access to food.

And I remember them talking about the American coffee, which-- coffee, for several years, was just not to be had, and Vienna was such a coffee center. And that German word, ersatz-- instead of coffee they had this brown barley mixture. And of course, it doesn't have caffeine in it, and it doesn't have the aroma of coffee. But that's what people drank during the war.

In that time, was your sister discriminated against?

Yes, she tried to-- she did not have to wear a star because she was not raised Jewish, but there were a lot of obstacles just as there would have been for me, had I stayed.

What are some of those obstacles?

Obstacles primarily to employment, and to marriage, and to education. I don't know. I think the rationing was across the board. Everybody had to use rations, so that may not have been very different. But Lisi had a good temperament. We called her Lisi for Lisilote. During the bombing raids, people would take a metal kettle as a protection for their head, and everybody would head for the cellars that were arranged to keep people during air raids until the sirens went off and you could return to your home.

She used that time to study, and she earned a living by doing legal secretarial work. And they invested in postage stamps, which was one of the ways that you could transfer some value out of the country because by then, not only was there inflation, but you weren't allowed to take money out of the country.

You're talking after the war or during the war?

During the war.

During the war-- were there people leaving the country during the war?

I would think so. Anybody who-- in fact, my mother corresponded with an American friend who was interned along with her husband, and she would send them food packages because the sustenance was so bad in the internment camps. And eventually they were transferred to France, but I have many postage thank-you notes from while they were in detention for whatever food my mother was able to send them.

So did your-- I've heard the story of some other children of mixed marriages who were ordered to work in one place or another, and this order would come from the authorities. Was your sister under that kind of control or not so much?

Not to my knowledge. She kept a pretty low profile, but the Nazis conscripted. And they duped a lot of Jewish population of Poland, particularly. I read one book on the Holocaust that describes the technique that-- the Nazis said, if you are willing to work for us, we will look after you. We will not harm you. That was, of course, a deception, but they did get a lot of labor from Jewish people, slave labor, in munitions factories and-- I don't know-- mines, wherever.

Well, specifically there were some such factories around Vienna as well, and so there would be people assigned, mischling, young women assigned.

That's interesting. I hadn't heard of that. But there was a lot of intermarriage, so we were not such a small group.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Now, your mother, you said, stood up to the Nazis, or she wasn't afraid of them. Can you give me examples of what that meant, how that played out?

Well, during the time when my grandmother was notified that she had to vacate her apartment and there were the [GERMAN], the officials that were in charge of this and in charge of that.

The agencies.

Yes, and my mother would go, and she said, you want my mother-in-law to leave her apartment? Well, you have to give her a place to live. She hounded them until she found this pension, and then she helped my grandmother move. But she was not afraid or intimidated to go.

And why is it that your sister was not able to leave for the United States again?

Well, she would have needed an immigration visa, and that comes with a monetary guarantee that someone is promising, should you become ill or otherwise disabled, you will not become a ward of the state, you will not be a financial burden, and I believe it was $500. This amount of money the Quakers paid for me, and subsequently they turned me over to social services that then looked to religious persuasion to find a foster home to place us before I was able to contact our personal friends, the Reeses. As soon as I was able to be in touch with them without censorship to explain what had happened, the daughter and that family rescued me from New York City, and the agreement was they would look after me for the duration of the war.

So let's come to this point now. Your sister has returned from the Reeses. Hitler has marched in. Your father has left, and you are not allowed to go to school anymore. The convent school has been closed. The public school is where you learn that you're Jewish. You know you're Jewish, but that it means something, that it has a difference. Do you remember being treated any differently in class?

I don't because you didn't necessarily broadcast that. You kept that more or less secret and tried to blend in with activities as they were. When I found out that I could not participate in the activities of the Hitler Youth, I focused on other things, particularly with my mother's help, looking for an opportunity to leave the country and emigrate. And the Quakers--

Excuse me. Was she looking that for both of you or just for you?

Primarily for me because she didn't want to be separated from both of us, and she was focusing on letting me have the opportunity to live in America but with an eye to future immigration for the family.

For herself, and for her mother, and for Lisi?

Yes, yes.

So tell me, how did her intersection and her contact with the Quakers come about?

I have no idea except it's a small miracle. Somehow she heard that there was a list you could sign up if you were interested in studying in the United States. She put my name on the list, and lo and behold, a year later we were notified that there is a visa available, do I still want it?

I see. So she put your name on the list in 1939?

I don't remember the exact date, but there was quite a delay from the time that she said, well, this is a program you might be able to go. And I was enthusiastic, so we considered ourselves fortunate that it came to reality. It actually happened.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
Describe for me those two years that you're still in Vienna after Hitler takes over. How does public life change? What did you see when you went out on the streets? How did people behave to one another?

The big propaganda machine that blared Hitler's lengthy speeches from loudspeakers in public intersections in the city-- so there was no way of really escaping those news, the propaganda, and he spoke frequently and at length. And you've seen it in newsreels. He was always ranting and raving, and you sort of had to listen.

People at home-- we didn't even have a radio, so that was our means of being informed. Plus they organized districts and appointed people. You are in charge of these many blocks. And they came, for instance, to tell us that-- just into September when Britain declared war, the announcement was made that all attics have to be cleared and totally empty except for sand to be prepared for incendiary bombs, and I participated in the training of how to put out incendiary bombs.

They were not necessarily the big explosions that would level half a block. They started almost as small fires, and it was a matter of trying not to let them spread. And most of the roofs in Vienna were not flammable, if I remember, so the order came that the spaces had to be cleared of all materials. And my maternal grandmother and I embarked on this arduous task. I took her two canvas shopping bags, and she had the key. And her little dog came up with us to inspect the situation, and the only thing that was in our attic was a disassembled tile heating stove.

Oh, so one of those Kohleofen or something like that? They were the coal ovens that had these fancy tiles.

Yes, right, people heated their apartments with coals in tile stoves or ovens, and my Aunt Rosa-- when she moved into that apartment, she renovated, took one of these large tile stoves, and replaced it with a style that had a visible flame behind this special glass that doesn't burn. And the pieces of the old stove were the only things that were up in the attic.

Well, I could lift about one in each of these sacks, and I think I counted 15 trips up and down. And the dog went with me each time. Grandmother only came the first time to open it up. And the next day, my thighs were just solid or frozen. I could hardly move, but we had complied with the order.

Were there are a lot of apartments in your stairwell?

There were three on each level, so there would have been three, six, nine, 12, 25 apartments or 24 apartments with the caregiver at the very bottom. And all the debris or whatever was emptied was put in the courtyard, and we waited to be collected. I'm trying to remember the garbage collection. We must have had it, but it was also centralized in the courtyard on the bottom floor.

And what were relations with the neighbors like?

It depended. We had several people on our side that we were acquainted with on our floor, and not direct neighbors but with one apartment in between was a very sad story of a middle-aged woman who lived alone. And she must have been mentally ill. She was not Jewish, but she attempted suicide time and time again. And the only way she had was-- we had gas stoves, and she would turn on the gas and try to breathe this toxic-- but the neighbors above her, or below her, or somewhere would smell and call for help, and she would be rescued time again.

And I felt so badly because her problems were not solved, but she was prevented from taking her own life. This attitude towards suicide stayed with me long before we voted for medically assisted suicide in some of the states as we now have it. When I was in practice, I also felt that we were forever rescuing, but we were not giving the support that these people needed, hence many tried again. And it's so obvious to me that this is a call for help that society is not yet addressing appropriately.

And was this lady your first introduction to this kind of suffering?

Yes, but it became more and more common for Jews to commit suicide because-- for instance, the father of Lore, the girl that was one of the four children who came to the States at the same time in the same program-- this was also a

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
mixed marriage with a successful Jewish business man, his wife and four daughters. He felt that if he were to commit suicide, that his money would be going over legally to his family, and therefore they would not be destitute. They wouldn't have to deal with him being persecuted.

He succeeded in suiciding. He'd shot himself. But the Nazis paid no attention to his intentions, and eventually the daughters and also the mother were able to emigrate to the United States. And the youngest daughter is the one that came in my program, and we were very good friends and very supportive of each other in the few months that we lived together in New York.

Can you tell me, then, when you get that permission from the Quaker organization, was this the first time you actually have contact with them?

I did not personally have contact, but they made this-- somehow, whether it's in the newspaper or-- how my mother found out I'm not sure. It was low-key. It did not have-- it was a pilot project. There were only four children, and we waited for confirmation of where we would be going and who we would be living with. Instead, the Quakers managed to give us only the papers and the permission to emigrate, and then they turned over to social services in New York City on our arrival.

But I want to talk about your departure. When you leave Austria, do you leave with somebody accompanying you from there?

No. These four children-- we all met at the train station. We had our tickets on the Conte di Savoia out of Genoa, and we traveled together. But we had no adult chaperone. There were just four of us, and we had met just a few days before the departure. So in effect, we were certainly interested and supportive of each other, but we didn't have any adults with us.

Was there still a US embassy in Vienna at that time? This was 1940.

Yeah, I doubt it because I think-- how did we get the visa?

Exactly, because--

There must have been-- I assume my mother would have done the leg work. I don't remember.

So you don't remember going to a US embassy, or a US consulate, or any kind of official visit?

No, none, not in my memory.

And you said goodbye to your mother at the train station?

Yes.

And with Lisi as well?

Yes.

And your maternal grandmother, or was she at home?

No, the grandmothers did not come to the train. They were not that mobile at that time. They were distinctly elderly, walking slowly, using canes, that sort of thing.

Did you think this was a temporary separation?

Yes. It was all "until the end of the war" and an opportunity to study. I think we were quite optimistic, and there were no tears. Like when my sister left, the excitement of going, the fact that you just had your 15th birthday but you're an adult,

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
you have your own passport, and you get to go on your own, and that was a big deal.

It is. Yeah, I can imagine. It still would be a big deal. And were all of the four of you who were chosen for the pilot program mischling children?

Yes.

So this was not for full-blooded Jewish children?

Right, and two of us had been raised Christian, and two had been raised in the Jewish tradition.

And you are one of those who was raised Christian?

Yes.

Because you weren't very religious, you said? You didn't go to mass. You didn't--

Right. By that time, I was because after the convent, I sought out my religion. I had a father confessor, and I really had a strong faith. And it gave me-- it gave me quite a lot of confidence.

I can also see, then, why it was such a heartache when the nuns told you when you were in second grade about divorced people because only if you then become close to the faith does that matter, what would have been said. Did your grandmother ever visit you, your paternal Jewish grandmother? Did she ever visit you at the convent school?

She must have. I don't recollect, but after all, she's the one that found it and that chose it and felt that the-- she was intrigued because of the two languages. She thought languages were very important in Europe, and the sooner you learn, the better.

Well, she was right. She war right in that. So you have said goodbye to all the ladies in the family, to your two grandmothers, to your mother, to your sister, and you're on the train with three other girls or--

One another girl and two boys.

And you go to Genoa?

Yes.

And is it an immediate transfer to a boat, or do you wait there for a while?

We had an overnight, and I don't really remember. We must have had tickets, and when we embarked on this huge ship, it was very exciting. And the weather was good enough. It was April, so it was a bit on the chilly side. But I remember loving wind in that time of my life, and Lore and I ran to the very front of the ship. And we loved to have the wind just blow us all the way.

And there were-- the ship was-- Italy had not yet entered the war, so this was the only way that people left Europe at that point. And we had-- it took about a day to go from Genoa to Naples, and then we stayed in Naples for a day-- and I don't think we did any sightseeing, but it was just beautiful to see the vistas from the ship-- and took on more passengers.

And until we got through the Straits of Gibraltar, all was well, but as soon as we were out in the Atlantic, the waves became turbulent. And I got not only seasick, but I also must have had the flu because I never surfaced the 10 days that we crossed. I had a lot of trouble. I had some medicine, but it didn't really work.

But the others had a good time on the ship, and the cabins were certainly adequate. We were third class, but the dining rooms were elegant, and when we arrived about a week later, I was quite weak. I had to sit on my suitcase. We were

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

standing to wait as the immigration people had come on board and were checking passports. I remember sitting there forever, and we did not have to go through Ellis Island.

But at no point there is somebody who accompanies you? Excuse us. Let's cut for a second.

Rolling.

OK. Tell me, you were all about the same age?

Yes, we all had our 15th birthday right around that because that's eight years. Eight years of education usually is six to 14, and then you're on your own.

Do you remember the names of the other three?

Not the last names. Lore Thorne was the girl, and I stayed in touch with her. But Erich and maybe Leo were-- as soon as we were out of the hotel, they were placed in another family, and we lost track. We did not keep in touch with them.

So their names were Leo and Erich?

Yes.

Also from Vienna?

Yes.

And you still don't find somebody from the Quakers who's a representative who comes on board, who says, hello, I'm here to kind of--

No, the only thing that I remember is that we were interviewed by a social worker who spoke good German because we did not speak English. We had been-- none of us had English instructions before we left, strange. But anyway, we were interviewed by this lady social worker, and the first thing she did is she offered us cigarettes. And none of us had ever smoked, and in those days it was not only fashionable, but I'm sure she thought that she would put us at ease and she would make us feel grown-up. I remember [COUGHS]. Needless to say, that pack of cigarettes didn't get any help. However, Lore became a smoker and sadly died of lung cancer before she was 50.

Young, very young. And so you are altogether. You don't have to go through Ellis Island, but you do have-- do you have immigration interviews? Do you have--

The interview that I remember was in the Pennsylvania Hotel, and it was largely to find out if we had particular likes or problems. And Lore and I were first placed with an Irish family in the Bronx, and it was a rough entry because we arrived in the afternoon. And the family hadn't had supper yet, but the two little dogs were eating when we came into their kitchen.

And we were welcomed, and the first thing I did was focus on one of the dogs and petted it. It turned around and bit me, and it with me so that there was blood. So there was this commotion. Now what do we do? So they took me to a physician, I guess, in the neighborhood, and he cleaned the wound. But it was pretty sore, and they only had one bed for us.

For the two of you?

For the two of us. So with my sore arm, we didn't have a good night. However, the next day, we ventured out and into the neighborhood, went around the block, and found a grocery store that had fruit out on the sidewalk. And there was this sign, a big barrel of oranges, 25-- Oranges is the same word in German and in English, and then there was 25 and the C with a line through it. Well, we didn't really know money, but Lisi had told me about dollars, and 100 cents, and a

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
quarter. And she had somehow brought-- I had $1, and this dollar was, of course illegal, but I had smuggled it in my prayer book between the cloth cover and the leather cover.

And so we had a whole dollar between us, and we bought 25 oranges, and we got three quarters back. And we came home, and we sat down. And between the two of us, we polished off 25 oranges. And the next day we went to buy another 25.

We didn't get sick. Oh, those oranges were so good. The lemons, by the way, I gave away, and I could not escape the smell until we get on the ship. And it was awful because I was so motion sick.

Well, what about the lemons? This was--

My classmates had come to say goodbye at the train station, and they brought the gift of one month's food ration, going-away present. Here's a lemon, and there is a lemon, and there's-- three of them brought me lemons, and I stuck them by my suitcase. And the whole suitcase was fragrant with this lemon.

Tell me, though. Your schooling-- did you continue that public school?

We were now at the Bronx.

No, no. Excuse me, before you leave Vienna because you say your classmates came to say goodbye.

This was this very informal, private "prep" for Matura instruction, and it was--

The castle?

No, no, no, no, no. This was just a private enterprise, no certification. You would just get instruction, and then you would go to wherever the exams were held. And I wouldn't have been given permission, probably, to-- but nevertheless, if was instruction. It was good.

So that means that truly-- this is something I forgot to ask before. You said that the convent school had been closed down, then you went to a public school. Did there come a time when you were not allowed to go to school anymore?

Yes, by the summer of 1930-- sorry, by the summer of 1939. So that fall, my mother arranged for me to attend this informal, private instruction that she paid for.

And so you attend that for about half a year?

Yes, and I did not mention the fact that I was Jewish or part Jewish.

In that? OK, OK. And did you finish your school year at the public school?

The eighth grade, yes.

And then it was simply that you got a notice that don't come back, or--

Well, the eighth grade was separate, and then there was the middle school. And I would have had to apply, and I would not have been admitted. So I didn't bother to apply.

That's now clear. And one other thing that I forgot to ask is, did someone actually meet you at the boat when you came over?

Must have. I just don't seem to have any recollection. After you're gone, I'll try to search my diary and see if there's any entry.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

It often happens, and in one interview we will never catch everything. So don't-- not to worry. Not to worry. I simply ask it so that, as much as possible, we have a full picture, but it's impossible to get everything. So it's all right.

So at any rate, you are with Lore in the Bronx with this Irish family, and you have this drama happen right away when you get in there, that the dog, while he's eating, turns around and bites. Did anything happen health-wise, or did your arm heal?

My arm healed. It took several weeks, but I did not have general infection. And the instructions were to watch the dog. If he showed any sign of illness, then there's the quarantine. And you would have to get anti-rabies shots, but I did not.

And then the school began to come into the picture. We went to a local high school, and the teachers, especially one teacher who was able to speak German, immediately got interested in us. And she understood the situation that we were facing, and she lobbied for us to be moved.

She didn't think that this was a good fit because we didn't speak English. The family didn't speak German. They had two younger children, and there were some mix-up with laundry. And yeah, she just felt it wasn't a good fit, and she evidently knew the social services system. And they found another home in Manhattan where it was actually a refugee family with a pair of twin girls that had room, an extra room for two other girls, and that was a better fit. And so we were transferred there.

Was she right?

Yes. And we then changed schools. This home was on 148th Street West, very close to the Hudson River, but the nearest high school was 186th Street West--

40 blocks.

--a long way. And believe it or not, we walked it, not every day, but they interviewed us and put us in an English class, a German class, a math class, and a civics class. And I couldn't for the life of me figure out what civics was all about.

Anyway, those two months-- because this was the end of April-- May, June, end of school, we then had the summer more or less to ourselves. We became acclimated, and the best thing that ever happened to both of us was the fact that Lore had an aunt who had emigrated a few years earlier, lived within walking distance of the 148th Street in a tiny one-room apartment, worked hard in the factory, and became our mother on the scene. Her name was Hani Melchior, and she is one of my many mothers.

Anyway, I then had another four months in New York City, and this summer we spent largely in movie houses because they were air-conditioned. And you could see the same movie over and over again, double feature. Nobody cared. $0.10 was all you had to pay, and I think it was probably Honey who gave us our pocket money. What little we had we put to good use, and actually, that's not a bad way to learn the language, to be immersed.

And it's fun.

Yes, it is, and this was the beginning when I then was able to communicate by letter with the Reese family, although they currently lived in Hawaii. And so from New York to Hawaii-- I think the letters took about a week.

So they no longer were in Connecticut where your sister had been with them?

Right, they were transferred to work in Hawaii. Uncle Lou was in charge of the Army Navy YMCA, and Lois was in her first year as a linguistic teacher at Punahou, the now-famous school because Obama went there. Anyway, Punahou was within easy walking distance of the Reese's home, and Lois, as soon as she found out that I was in New York came that summer to--

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
Teachers are forever spending time learning more, so she went to summer school in Quebec to, I think, enhance her French capabilities, French language, and then she came and picked me up and brought her saved money. She was living at home. It was $100 on the cross country for about four and a half days, Pullman sleeping cars, and then another four and a half days on the Lurline to get to Honolulu. And it was 1940 with two worlds exhibits in New York and in San Francisco, and she took me to see both of them.

What a treat. In the middle of all of these things happening in Europe, in this dark place, and then coming here--

And this was so exciting, and America was not in the war. And the propaganda hadn't quite reached me yet. I called it propaganda because as the United States got closer to war, the stories I just didn't want to believe. So I said to myself, this can't be. The Germans can't be that bad.

What are those stories? What were those stories?

The extermination, the killing of Jews. Of course, I had been sheltered, didn't see, and I didn't want to believe it. But it was the reality, and, interesting, 1940 and 41, until the Japanese attacked, I just had this mentality, OK, I'm homesick, but I'm glad to be here because I can go to school. And when the war is over, I will go home and be forever grateful.

But when the Japanese attacked and all of a sudden-- I wasn't particularly worried because in Europe there were so many borders, and it was not that uncommon that people were caught in a conflict behind the wrong border. And so you were labeled, and you were interned for a period of time. And the day after Pearl Harbor I was interned of for seven weeks.

How did that happen? Did they come to the Reese's home?

They came to the Reese's home the day after, and that first day-- first when we woke up to all this noisy overhead roar of airplanes and distant-- it was like maneuvers, and I remember Lois and I shared a room, and she said, you'd think they'd pick some other time to do their maneuvers. The only day we can sleep in we were woken up at 6:00 or 6:30.

Well, as there was more noise and commotion, we got up, and I remember a small yellow plane overhead and looking up. Of course, I didn't know what airplanes of war looked like, and I didn't recognize that the red spot was Japanese. But then there was a big explosion, and we looked out the window. And there was a lot of dust across the street and a big crater and no fire.

And we ran downstairs, and other people came out. And some had the radio on, and then we knew that this was not maneuvers. And we did not have a fire, and fortunately, it landed on an empty lot across the street. So then announced--

Excuse me. You're in Honolulu, yes?

Yes, downtown Honolulu.

And Pearl Harbor is at the corner?

Pearl Harbor is about 7 miles away. But the noise-- and before long, I think we could see some distant smoke, too. And then came the announcements that all military personnel needed to go to their duty stations, and all civilians were asked to donate blood. And I was all set to go, and the age limit was 18. And I was only 16, so I couldn't donate blood. But I felt very useful because the island was going to be blacked out as of that night, and I knew all about covering windows or finding a way to close off your house. You couldn't even smoke outside. It was very strict curfew.

So I went around the neighborhood, and for the first day I really felt that I could be helpful. And that made me feel good. I had a babysitting job at that time, and the family of this little Elizabeth, who was four years old, asked me if I would sleep at their house in the room with the baby because she was frightened. And so I did that on Sunday night, and Monday morning an official came to the house and said I needed to come down to the immigration station and bring my papers.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

And in Hawaii everybody went barefoot, so I was all set to walk out. And Aunt Dorothy said, Maria, I think you better put on shoes. So I went with my shoes, my passport, my purse. That was it, no toothbrush. And I didn't come back for seven weeks, and they couldn't visit. And it was during those seven weeks that I said to myself, a country that can treat their enemy aliens in such a civil away-- we were under guard, but we were not abused in any way. And we were fed, and we were not given any information.

And there might have been some spies among us because there were some Italians, and some Germans. And I was the only one from Austria, and there were not many Japanese because the Japanese are such a large segment of the population. They couldn't intern all the Japanese. Anyway, it was during that time that I thought maybe I would like to become a citizen.

Isn't that interesting?

And eventually I did, but I had to wait until-- you have to be at least 18 to-- when you're not with parents to signify your intent, and then you have to be 21. And you go through civics exam.

Did you figure out what that was all about?

Eventually, but it was a strange concept because I was just so totally unaware of these necessities. So the downtown Honolulu immigration station is where I was interned, and we weren't allowed to telephone. But the Reeses knew because announcements had been made online, and there was one other German detainee. And she was going to be a nun. She was a postulant in one of the Kaimuki convents that had a boarding school, and eventually when things kind of settled down the captain who was in charge of permanently placing the detainees-- he thought to himself, well, Gertrude's got a place to go. She gets to go back to the convent. I can't let Maria go to the Reeses because there is all this military personnel, and you can't have enemy aliens fraternizing with servicemen. And that's a no-no.

So he talked Reverend Mother into accepting the guardianship for me, and nobody paid any money. Reverend Mother agreed, but nobody told me. So seven weeks later, after some interesting experiences, comes the announcement, Gertrude and Maria, get your things. You're released. Big excitement.

So we got our things together and were transported in the Jeep, and we went out to Kaimuki, to this convent. And Gertrude jumped off the Jeep, and ran into the arms of a Reverend Mother. And I sat in the Jeep waiting to be taken home to the Reeses. And the driver said, what are you waiting for? And I said, I don't live here. And his answer was, you do know.

So big tears, and the Reverend Mother promised that she would call the Reeses and let them know that I was fine and I was there. And I then became part of their boarding students, and not only did I have regular high school instructions, but one of the nuns was teaching piano. And I got to take piano lessons.

Did you like it there?

Not as much as being with the Reeses, but I was appreciative of being there. And this was my senior year in high school. I actually didn't have a junior year as such because when I enrolled in Punahou-- the fall usually has a physical exam for students, and the doctor discovered that I had a thyroid condition, and it was affecting my heart. And she said that I would need treatment, and no exertion, no swimming, no running. And so I prepared-- it was difficult because in those days they treated hyperthyroid with surgery, and in order to have surgery on a minor you have to have permission. And so the Reeses tried to communicate with my mother, and since we were--

Austria is goiter belt country because our water comes from snow, and it is deficient in iodine. If you're are not close to the ocean, you lack that. And a lot of people have enlarged thyroid my mother had my grandmother had, I had, but the toxic condition needs to be treated. So I was out of school that year, and again, my wonderful foster family arranged for me to have typing lessons, and piano lessons, and voice lessons and tried to make it as good as you can.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

This is the school year of 1940-1941?

Yes, yeah.

Let's step back a little bit. When you're taken and you're held in this internment place, where did you say it was?

In the downtown-- it was called immigration station. And it had limited facilities, so initially we were all in this huge hall.

About how many of you were there?

Between 40 and 60 people. And there wasn't any place to sit, so we sat on the floor. And we thought we were going to be questioned, but nobody had time to question the day after the attack. They were too busy doing other things. However, they arranged for army cots to be set up. And if I remember correctly, the men were in one area, and the women were in another. And by nightfall pretty much cots had been set up with a blanket, and it's warm year-round. You don't really need much.

And actually there were also smaller rooms, and there were three cots in the room that I was in. And we were next to a bathroom, and we just slept on the cot. And there was a shower and adequate toilets. And our room had a screen door, no air conditioning. And then there was a screen window at the opposite end, so there was some breeze, no fans. It got pretty warm.

And when we went to the mess hall three times a day to be fed, we went single-file, and we were encouraged to be quiet. But it wasn't as though you were browbeaten into not being able to talk. You were allowed to converse.

It wasn't convent school.

It wasn't as strict as the convent school. And we ate on the military utensils or trays, if I remember correctly, and we could choose. We could say, I want some of this or not too much of that, unlike the convent. Everybody was served the same way, and you sat at that table until everything on that place was clean, even if your missed recess. I can remember canned peas. That kept me forever at that.

It's very interesting and quite significant that it is during the time that you innocently are in detention as an enemy alien that you start thinking, maybe this is a good country to become a citizen of. It is a very ironic situation.

But that's exactly what happened, and the people who were there, by and large, were grateful immigrants. And after the first week, we were allowed to have things dropped off, and so Aunt Dorothy brought change of clothes, and books, and some stationery, things to read and write. And one of the ladies who was there asked for a complete book of Shakespeare, and you wouldn't think that you'd be interested in 17 or 16th century tales from another country. But there wasn't much else to read, and this lady whose book it was so avid about learning and teaching. I remember being quite mesmerized and interested in listening to the works of Shakespeare. So I got to be there, no spiritual opportunity except for personal prayer.

What about-- you said there could have been some spies amongst the group?

Mm-hm.

What makes you say that?

Because it's a reality. I didn't get to know the people, but some of them were kept for the duration of the conflict and were sent to other camps.

Really? Did you ever have any kind of formal interview?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Yes, I had an interrogation after maybe two weeks or so, and that was quite intimidating. There was a long table and maybe five interrogators, all men, some in uniform, and by then my English was pretty good because I had had a year and a half of being immersed in it. And there were many questions. One of them was, do you listen to short-- do you listen to German radio, or do you listen to shortwave radio, either one or the other? And I said, you can't get reception. So you tried?

And of course, I had tried, but except for that one statement, it was pretty straightforward with the questions that they asked and they answered. But I did have that same passport, and I had the Japanese visa.

And did they ask you about it?

Yes, and I said I was homesick and I couldn't go home over the Atlantic. So I was planning to go home by way of Japan. This, of course, was before there was any attack, and then I would have gone by the Siberian rail road, and at that time the Russians were allies.

And did you explain about your mixed parentage?

Yes, but I had no proof. Except when I had first arrived a year and a half earlier, there was-- if I had my scrapbook with me, I could have showed them that "Refugee Child Joining the Reese Family," and it had an article about my being there and that the Reeses opened their--

But I didn't have it with me, and I just told them about it.

So there would have been a newspaper article about you?

Yes.

In the Honolulu paper?

Yes. I think I still have it somewhere.

And another irony is that, as you were there, chances are your father was in an internment camp at the same time in Britain.

Yes, yes, but of course, there was no communication then at that point, although we had had communications right up regularly. And I would then convey what's happening in England to my mother by way of these Red Cross messages.

Did your mother know at any point, until she came to the States herself, that you had been interned?

She wouldn't have known at the time. She had to give permission for this operation, which was traumatic because in Vienna they wouldn't have operated. I had it from birth. Why do they want to operate? Well, she wasn't given the information in a telegram. It's hard to say. But it was necessary because it was toxic condition, and it was affecting my heart.

And then the following year, between the first Christmas and the second Christmas, is when I did have a reasonable recovery and learned how to type and learned how to sew through the auspices of the Salvation Army, which I still always support because they had some wonderful programs. They were free. You didn't have to pay, and they had sewing machines that you could use. I got to make my very first dress.

Well, it's quite impressive, particularly when you think that your mother had done that for both you and your sister.

Yes, yes, of course, she didn't find out for a number of years, but then I still showed it off with great fright.

Did you communicate with your sister as well during these years, ever since you left, or was everything through your

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
mother?

Well, my mother and sister--

--lived together.

--were sharing house, and the messages are always signed Mutti, and Lisi, and Oma [GERMAN] because the three of them were living together as long as my grandmother was alive. But 25 words don't go very far.

No, they don't. They don't.

And yet we were very grateful to have them. But they came at-- they were meant to come once a month, but oftentimes you got two or three at a time, and then there was nothing for a long time.

I hadn't even been aware that the Red Cross was able to maintain such a thing between warring countries, that there is this possibility that civilians would have a way to communicate.

--way to communicate, yeah.

I always thought that it was just broken, completely broken.

Yeah. Well, even before the America entered the war, we had censorship, so all the letters that came in the first year were censored. And we were pretty careful what we wrote about.

Was there a time-- and I'm talking right around Pearl Harbor, after Pearl Harbor-- when you came to believe the US propaganda, as you put it, about what was going on?

Yes, yes. It was a very hard time. It was a very hard time to believe the-- of course, I was too young to have studied history. Anybody who studies history-- there are these horrendous, horrendous behaviors of humans against humans that are really, really hard to believe. And yet they did occur, and they still do occur.

When you did-- when you were able to internalize this, who were your fears for, or did you have any fears about those you left behind?

Well, only dead the general threat of war, famine, and bombings. You read about casualties. How the British ever lived through that blitzkrieg, the courage that they showed-- yeah, you wonder how people can survive, but then there are these incredible leaders. Still, when you remember Churchill, he's not really an inspiring person, let's say, from a pacifist side, and yet he was so courageous.

But the number of casualties-- I just read in the encyclopedia recently the Second World War killed more people than umpteen wars altogether. How we ever recovered is really astonishing, and the whole fabric of society was primarily-- well, towards the end of the war, everybody had huge casualties, but the number of lives of young men snuffed out or irreversibly damaged in one way or another-- that whole generation-- I still can't really grasp it, and it's not publicized enough to prevent us from repeating. The only way is we do it in a less personal way, no longer hand-to-hand fighting a lot of times.

Did you become a pacifist?

I always was, and I had trouble when I actually went through my application to the citizenship because there's one phrase, will you bear arms in defense of this country? And when I went to get what they call the first papers, I went alone, and I was 18 in Walla Walla, Washington. And when that question came, I couldn't answer it because I had focused on, I don't want to kill anybody. So I dissolved in tears and left, and Dorothy came to my rescue, as she often did.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

And she said, Maria, that's a figure of speech. It doesn't mean that you have to kill somebody. You could be a nurse, or a ambulance driver, or something, but you would support the defense of this country. And so then that was enough rationalization. The second time around, she came with me, and I answered in the affirmative. And then I got my first papers, and it was in 1947 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, during medical school, that I finally got my citizenship.

So tell me, how did your life progress from Hawaii? How did you end up in Walla Walla?

Again, my affiliation with the Reeses. Uncle Lou had been in charge of the USO and was transferred, of all places, to San Luis Obispo first, and from Fort-- he served at Fort Roberts, and then he was transferred to Walla Walla, Washington. And I followed, and I was in my last year of high school, graduated. And then I was all set to work full-time. Jobs were so easy to get. I had two at the time. I went to college. I had a teaching assistantship in German, which paid for my tuition, and I worked in a grocery store after school. That's actually were my later husband also worked.

At a grocery store?

In a grocery store, the Green Park Grocery. And it was across the street from the campus in Walla, Walla. Whitman was originally-- I don't know. One of the Protestant sects were the founders, and it was a liberal arts college. And during the war it had a big V12 program, so the language department, the German language department, was handled by Her Santler, who was Austrian and happened to live across the street from the Reese's home. And he needed help with correcting papers, and that was a wonderful opportunity.

I had another offer of a scholarship from a family that I was babysitting for, and the grandmother was very domineering, like my own. And she said, now, Maria, this is a college town. You should go to college, and I will get a scholarship for you. And I thought, well, with the scholarship will come all kinds of strings attached. And I came home to Aunt Dorothy and said, I don't want a scholarship from Mrs. Kelly. She'll choose my husband next.

You were sensitive to these things.

I was. She just reminded me of my own grandmother. And so Aunt Dorothy introduced me to the head of the German department, and so that problem was solved. And my college was-- during the war, it was quite short. I was there are only two and a half years but could go around trimesters, and the same was true for my medical school.

Well, what did you major in for your undergraduate?

Premed, chemistry.

And why did you choose those? Was this Papa?

Yes, Papa encouraged me. I just loved to go to school, and my best subjects were not science. By best subjects were philosophy, and religion, and geography. I loved all those things, but the draw of being able to help people was very strong. And my father had taken us to visit hospitals, and come Christmas time, Lisi and I got to go to the flower shop. And he would pick up flowers, and then we could visit his patients and bring flowers because it was another era of medicine, by far.

And other relationship between doctors and patients.

Yes, yes. But Papa said, if you enjoy your studies, go as far as you can. And he knew me, and so he said, try to get into medical school because it is more difficult to be a nurse than it is to be a physician. And he is right. Emotionally, the nurse is closer to the patient, and when she disagrees with the physician, she is supposed to follow orders. When you're a physician, you don't have those qualms.

You're the decision-maker.

You're the decision-maker. So anyway, I was in premed, and I had these jobs after school and was able to save money. I

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
can remember the first time I said to Aunt Dorothy, I now can pay you some rent. And their household was not affluent by any means because they were on a single salary, much like-- YMCA people are almost like pastors. They are never overpaid.

And Aunt Dorothy-- she was my idol in terms of-- she lived her faith. She had faith, and she lived it. And she took in-- there was a family where there was mental illness and a very disturbed little boy. Both parents needed to be hospitalized. Guess where he ended up. With us, and she was able to promote education. She herself did not have a college degree, but she was a writer. She submitted pieces of editorials and travel pieces for the Christian Science Monitor for years. And although she wasn't Christian science, she was just-- she was just such a good person and very encouraging to all her children and anybody else to get as much education as possible and be channeled into the right way when--

During those years, you never heard of anybody misusing drugs. Of course, alcoholism was around, but it wasn't in the family. Both my sister and I-- as much as we loved her own mother and loved our stepmother, Aunt Dorothy had great influence on us. She saw the world through pink-colored glasses, and she would tell you, if you give people the benefit of the doubt and expect the best from them, you will get the best from them, nine times out of 10 anyway. And that's how she lived.

Very wise words because it speaks to faith in people.

There was such a contrast from my European experience where religion is your very private domain. You don't never ask anybody, whereas in America, what's with this religion? It's all about social activities, meeting for women, meeting for young men, discussions. And then before long started my speaking career. Aunt Dorothy-- I don't think she advertised me in any way, but because I was a foreign student and I was willing to share, people asked me to come and talk to them.

About what?

About what I knew. Well, what did I know? I knew Austria, and I talked about my schooling, my experience in Europe, and I talked about the war. And then later on I talked about the Japanese attack, and it was in small communities, be it women's, group or Rotarian dinners, or Kiwanis clubs. And I got to know a lot of people, and I was always so well-treated. And I don't know how I deserved that. It was enjoyable to share my experiences and to be appreciated. I don't think I ever earned any money that way, but I earned money in other ways, either by babysitting or with the scholarship. I even tried factory work. Walla Walla has big canneries, particularly for harvesting peas.

Which you like so much.

I didn't like, but I thought, oh, this is good money. Instead of $0.40 an hour, I might have earned $0.60 an hour. Anyway, I got a bright uniform, showed up for the night shift, and the heat, and the steaming caldrons, no air-conditioning, and the smell of the peas-- and then my job was to be sitting next to a conveyor belt, and you have to pick out the bad ones. And as this moves past you, my queasy stomach was getting sicker and sicker. I didn't last but three nights. So that good money in the pea factory was for somebody else, not for me.

And I learned how to ride a bike and get around from my classes to home or to my jobs. The town was small, so rarely was I longer en route than 15 minutes. And the winters we had snow, but they weren't all that severe, not like Milwaukee winters.

Well, it also sounds like this was quite-- from your telling I don't sense that there is a war going on.

We were more distant, yes. We were more distant.

Did you have rationing there in Walla Walla?

Yes, we did, rationing for only a few things. Meat was rationed. I believe butter was rationed. We rarely used butter

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
anyway because it was too expensive, and we would use the equivalent of trans fats and then put dye in it with a mixer so it was more like regular margarine. Aunt Dorothy was a good cook, and during the war we raised rabbits.

It was hard to have them for food for me, but Gordon, my younger brother, who had the little hatchery in the backyard-- he was good with the animals, and he would dispatch them quite humanely. There was only one bump, and that was it.

We didn't have chickens, but later on in life I came to appreciate chickens, too, in third-world countries. My husband, who was my brother's best friend--

Your adopted-- the Reese family's.

The Reese family. They met in Walla Walla at the high school, and his mother had also gone through a divorce earlier on and was about to move into another town with the stepfather. And it was Frank's senior year, and the family was moving. And had he moved with them, he couldn't graduate with his--

--friends?

--with his friends and his class. So guess what. He talked his brother into asking Aunt Dorothy, could Frank move in with us? And Aunt Dorothy said, well, your room is large enough and has two beds in it, so if you want to share your room, that's fine with us. And that's how I met my later husband.

She really seems to have taken care of so many people who crossed her path, and as you were speaking earlier, I also thought of this, how this one relationship of doctor to patient in Vienna in the 1920s evolved into something that saved people's lives.

Yes, and that brought, almost, clans together in mutually supportive manner. I often think about the children that are born in to dysfunctional families and never feel wanted. It must be dreadful to grow up that way, and it's no surprise that many of our criminals have such early experiences, not all, but many.

Yeah, yeah. It sounds like you are surrounded by people who were caring about each other.

And then also there is the attitude, you have certain amount of choice. You can look at this. Is it half-empty, or is it half-full? Aunt Dorothy chose to think it's half-full, and her outlook was always, how can this be turned into something positive? And there are many, many inspirational people, and you can pick who you want to follow.

You don't have to-- and you can learn as much from despicable people as from good people because you say to yourself, oh, I don't ever want to act like that. I don't ever want to be like that. I don't ever want to feel like that, or I don't ever want to talk like that. But I don't know what's happened to our media. The prevailing winds, the culture for the last, I'd say, two or maybe even three generations-- it's going down. It's not going up.

I don't have an answer. I don't know what to respond to that because the basis of comparison for me is different, but I can see what you're saying in our public spaces.

Well, I blame it on one topic that is not mentioned often enough, and that is overpopulation. If you learn arithmetic, you know that if you start with one acre of land and you have six children, they're only going to have one sixth of an acre. And I think ignoring the needs of children is contributing so much, and the people who rescue, who adopt children that have been either abused or just neglected-- it's such an uphill road to rescue them and to reassure them and turn their lives around.

But in America today, if we are honest and ask ourselves, how many minutes a day am I productive, and how many minutes a day am I allowing myself to just be distracted-- to make believe is fun, but to make believe 50% of the time is ruinous. We can't afford to devote that much time to pretend, and fantasy, and fairy tales.

The people who are-- my sign says, no farms, no food. Who is supporting the farms? The people who have the land

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
usually are the hardest working, and I think this inequality that is getting worse and worse where we don't concern ourselves with many, many things and we only focus on some-- it's dangerous.

Well, it reminds me of what you were saying earlier in civics lessons. It's the sense of, do we get engaged and involved in a society? Do we get engaged and involved in things that are beyond our own immediate circles, our own immediate families? How do we participate? What do we do?

And how do we get the motivation that you want to be helpful, you want to be involved? Some of the quoted politicians-- I think it was J.F. Kennedy who said, "Ask Not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." That teaching or the joy of introducing little ones to the care of animals and plants instead of the mechanized racing and competition-- I have to be better than you. I have to be richer than you. I have to be more beautiful than you.

I have this funny saying that a lady from Eastern Europe once told me. I thought it was really cute. She says, picture two old ladies. They're sitting together on a bench. One looks at the other and says, you know, there aren't any pretty girls in the village anymore, just me, and maybe you a little. It sounds like you had-- I'm sorry to interrupt myself, but you had people show you the fun in these things through the nun who helped you or who allowed you to be her helper when you were in the convent school, through your father who would gather flowers, and you're able to distribute them to the patients that he sees at the hospital during these holidays. Those were those kinds of examples that both show you to get engaged and show that it's enjoyable to do.

Yes, I think my own mother is the one-- one proverb that she quoted time and time again is, teach by example, and learn from good example. It is very helpful, and that's why the social conditions of infancy and childhood, whatever we promote or contribute-- and even the first lady now, Melania Trump, is trying to pick that as a worthy topic to bring up and to devote ourselves as against the overcompetitive--

Tell me-- I'm going to change the subject a little bit. What did you specialize in medical school?

In medical school I chose to be a general physician, but once I was in my internship, my father made the suggestion, and I agreed. Actually, when I looked at my worst grades, they were in anatomy and pathology, so I said to myself, Maria, you need to learn more. So I signed up for a residency in pathology that would fill those voids, and it was a good choice because once removed from the patient, you are then a doctor's resource. And you have more regular hours. If you are going to have a family yourself, it will not be as chaotic as if you have to choose between the sick patient or the sick child.

And I became very interested and became board certified in pathology, and in 1955, when I finished, there were not many pathologists around. So no matter where we went, I could find work, and there was always work as a general practitioner. But it allowed us to-- my husband wanted to raise children who were aware of the world rather than just Daly City. And so when opportunity came to him to change careers-- his first career was as a merchant mariner, and that meant long weeks of separation as he would have to go wherever the cargo ship went. And that depends on where the cargo is.

So I am a good rationalizer, and I said, if he happens to have that profession and I love him, I'd rather have him part of the time than not have them at all. So I didn't feel badly about the separations because I knew they would be part of that life. However, a few years later, there was a typhoon, and Frank's sister ship was on its way to Japan when his ship returned. And the sister ship went down with all hands in a typhoon. That was really--

That was close.

That was close, and that was-- it made us think that maybe there is another way. And if you had told Frank that he would be a teacher, never, because his mother was a teacher, and he wasn't about to follow his mother. Nevertheless, he had good talent for teaching, and when he went for a veterans interview, they suggested that he should get teaching credentials and go into industrial technology. And that's what brought us to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, and it allowed him the freedom of taking on new challenges. He was invigorated by new situations, new places, and he felt that that was good for the children. They wouldn't grow up to think the whole world was like Daly City.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

So how many children do you have?

We raised two, a son and a daughter, and they're just a year apart.

Their names are?

Lou and Anne, and now they're the Globetrotters. My son is a research pharmacologist at the University of Utah that, for the last 15 years, has had a reciprocal relationship with the University of Papua New Guinea. And now they exchanged professorships, and he has about three trips a year. And now the island states, like the Solomons, and Fiji-- they all have their own universities, and as they proliferate, Lou's affiliation has changed from Papua New Guinea to, presently, the Solomons. And his expertise is in testing materials from marine resources or plant sources to develop new pharmaceuticals with-- and he tests for anti-cancer or anti-viral properties.

Both interesting and necessary.

Yes and he's very challenged in his work, and his wife-- Andrea is a wonderful daughter-in-law. She has a doctorate in pharmacy and is a retail pharmacist, and that part of the family is medically devoted. I have a granddaughter who is in her third year of medical school at the University of Utah, and their middle son is in a dual doctoral program in Chicago. He is going to devote his life to research, a little bit like my uncle, Karl, in physics, probably applied physics as used in diagnostic PET scans or-- there's so many new developments down the line, but he's got several years to go. And I was delighted to have communication from the grandchildren because their lives are so packed full, not just with so many more things to learn than we had to learn years ago because so much more is known at this point--

But he also has a tradition. Look at what started with your parents.

Yes, except that they add the physical challenges, and Frank is a runner. Both of his grandfathers are called Frank. And he was born on St. Patrick's Day, so he's Frank Patrick. Anyway, this weekend he and his brother-in-law are running 50 miles somewhere on the trail, and hopefully they'll not get dehydrated.

I want to touch on travel but, again, in a different way and kind of circling back. Did you ever go back to Vienna?

Yes. My father never did, and I had three trips to Vienna since I left in 1940. After spending two years in Africa, we took a month or six weeks to-- the children were nine and 10.

So this was about what year?

1966, the summer.

This was 26 years after you left?

Yes. And we took them to Vienna. Unfortunately, during that trip my daughter was quite ill with a febrile illness of, probably, typhus, and I was worried they were going to quarantine her. But they were not that strict, and so Frank took our son. And for the second year in Africa, since there was no television, the children were lonely for one of their American friends. And my husband and I, having been foster children, said, if you write to Rick and he wants to come and stay with us for a year, we'll write to his parents and promise to give him back after the year. And sure enough, Rick was 12 and a half, the youngest of four. His parents agreed and let him travel from San Francisco to Malawi, where we were then spending a couple of years.

And Rick is a practicing physician, became a Mormon, raised a family of six, and I just saw him and his wife for Mother's Day. Yeah, that was a very influential year for him and for us because, as the youngest of four, you are treated differently than if you're the oldest of three.

That's true.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

So anyway, I was delighted. I'm very proud of him because he is not only a cancer survivor himself, but their first born, who was named after our son-- while Rick was in medical school, their first baby developed hydrocephalus, which is water on the brain. And if it hadn't been treated in that first year, it could have led to grave disability. Happily, his first son is totally recovered, notwithstanding the battles that it took in his first year of life, and is a computer engineer.

That was your first trip back to Vienna, in 1966. Then any time after that?

Yes. When my daughter and her husband were stationed in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, their first son, our first grandson, was born, and I went to be with her at that time and took her, before she had the baby, on a trip to Vienna and showed her our home and showed her our school. It was an introduction for her to see what I grew up with.

And the third time I went to attend a medical conference in Vienna and-- that was in 1976-- arranged to meet my mother-in-law, and my sister, and my niece, and my foster sister. We had a big reunion in Vienna, and that was a little bit of the modern life. And of course, times have changed in Europe as they have in the United States, so life is very different today as it was when I was there.

And of all the places we have lived, I've always been able to feel at home wherever-- Aunt Dorothy used to say, blossom where you're planted, wherever you're planted, and so I have very fond memories of places like Dhaka in Bangladesh, which other people would consider not a choice, not a-- but the greater the need, the greater the satisfaction.

We need to be needed. As people, we need to be needed.

And my husband's job there was very challenging, and it was during the Iron Curtain days, lots of politics with-- we used to call Bangladesh the basket case because it really needed help. And yet my job was to set up a clinic as an outpatient clinic for the United Nations staff, local and expatriate, and, hands down, it was the most challenging job as far as variation of patients, and type of diseases, and personal satisfaction.

A huge thing. That's a huge thing to have done.

And those threads stay with you. The nurse that was trained by American nuns in a little hospital, Holy Cross Hospital, in Dhaka-- when the country secularized, the nuns were sent home, but what they had taught stayed behind. And my nurse was Teresa Rebeiro who was not only a capable nurse but had enough faith to carry us over some hurdles that I don't think I could have faced alone. I'll share only one.

There was a Peace Corps couple that had been out in the bush over the weekend and found an abandoned infant. They brought the infant to the clinic. It was a little girl, probably weighed 2 and 1/2 pounds. And when they brought her in, I looked at her, and I thought, she is moribund. She'll live maybe today.

She was covered with scabby sores, and she couldn't have been more than a couple of weeks, if that. Well, Theresa was there with me, and she said, she'll be all right. She'll be all right. We have penicillin. And she said dead with such confidence, and I said to myself, where are you going to-- how are you going to give this child penicillin? Oh, yes, I know how. I know how. And then she brought the smallest needle, and she picked up what little skin there was.

Anyway, we fixed a suitable formula, a very weak formula, and encouraged the couple to bring the baby every day. And every day we gave her penicillin, and little by little, the scabs dried up, fell off. The skin gradually peeled. She began to gain weight, and by the time she was a year old-- I'm sorry. I've been searching for her picture and haven't found it. She was the picture of health, and the couple adopted her and hopefully-- I don't know. I lost track. She would now be in her 50s.

Anyway, that was the story of this little infant, and I have stayed in touch with this wonderful nurse who is also a cancer survivor and who now has a son who is a permanent resident in on the East Coast. And she spends half her time in one place or another.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

I wonder what your father would have said, had he known that from him to you, through you, to your children, and your grandchildren, and the people that you met--

He was still alive when I was in Bangladesh.

It must have been unbelievably satisfying for him.

I think so, and when we were in Africa, he and his second wife went to Puerto Rico, and he became the director. He had befriended a colleague through the national annual meetings of specialists in physical medicine and rehabilitation, which became his chosen field. This friend of his developed terminal cancer and could no longer carry on his position, so Papa took over and spent his last 10 years in Puerto Rico. He had worked for the VA in different places before then and utilizing the many things that he did learn during the Second World War in England because they were leading as far as rehabilitation and physical medicine is concerned. So I lost my train of thought a little bit.

We were talking about-- I was saying how your father is the first example of someone in the medical field in your family story that you shared with us today, and then you enter it. And then you have experiences, and you have younger generations who also enter one or another part of the field which all comes from their own interests, but of course, there is something that came before.

And when we can build on other people's-- we are that much farther ahead. And when my daughter married, she pursued international relations in college and thought she might go in to banking. But she became disillusioned with the banking industry and for a while was searching for a career, searching for a career. Well, she devoted herself to motherhood for her two sons but always was interested in languages and travel, and she had joined us-- she had, actually, her high school year in the two years that we spent in Taiwan. From that time on she pursued Mandarin, and it became her major language so that when she and William were stationed in Beijing, she was able to make good use of that language and eventually pursued a career in the diplomatic Corps.

When her husband retired, she became active, and she is currently-- her first assignment-- well, they were in Bavaria early in their marriage. I mentioned that. But having served in Saudi, and in Korea, and in Beijing twice, and-- I'm trying to think of where else. Well, they were in Germany, and they were in California at the language institute. They did their share of traveling, but nearing the end of her career she has ended up in Norway, and she absolutely loves it because it's such a culture difference between her last assignment, the three years in Dhaka, in Bangladesh, and prior to that she spent four years into Japan.

The world is so amazingly different, and you can learn so much at each place. So the big difference between our overseas experiences and today's travel is communication. When you can FaceTime with the push of one button-- and there she is.

I know. It's a miracle, isn't it?

It is a miracle, indeed, instead of having to wait two weeks, or three weeks, or, as it happened during the war, sometimes months before you had news. So that's a big plus.

Well, we're coming to the end of our interview, and I am so grateful that you have shared such stories with us today and have painted a picture of so many amazing people who were in your life and who you then gave life to and have shared with us and showing us the generations and the main central purpose that had been our interview, of how these policies that were the Nazi policies during World War II can wreck havoc and upheaval and how people land from that and go on and rebuild their lives. it sounds like, in your family's case, aside from your grandmother, that they had a chance-- the Jewish side had a chance of an opportunity and was able to take that and then still be productive after they reinvent themselves.

I think that's a good way to put it. I would like to close with this awareness of time. The only thing that we all have in equal amounts is the 24 hours of the day, and if we consider this equality, it's our choice how we want to spend them. I

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
would like to encourage people to be aware that time is perhaps the number one resource and to devote it along with all the like-minded people-- there are so many good people in this world-- and to align themselves, and to kind of let the water shed like it does off a duck's back when it comes to the things that other people choose.

That's their choice, but I don't have to devote myself to those things. And I can find solace in like-minded people and go to sleep with the thought, tomorrow brings another 24 hours. Let me spend it happily and in the service of our planet in some form, whether it is to water the plants, or feed the kitty, or pet the kitty, or--

These days, if you adopt a parrot, you need to put it in your will because the parrots and the turtles are likely to outlive you. So just put in your will a designated care, and then there are all these wonderful rescue operations. My debt of gratitude-- the Salvation Army in Hawaii, the Quakers to bring me to the United States, the American Red Cross for the communication during the war, and there's one more, the American Friends Service--

--Committee?

It was started after the First World War to bring peace by introducing young people to one another, American Field Service, AFS.

AFS?

Mm-hm.

OK. Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Barrows.

You're very, very welcome. And I will say that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Dr. Maria Weissenberg Barrows on June 7, 2018 in San Luis Obispo, California.

Thank you, and God bless you.

Thank you. We will now cut for a minute and then--

Tell me when you're going.

I'm going.

OK. So, Dr. Barrows, who is this a photograph of?

This is my mother, Olga Maria Walicek Weissenberg Miller. When she became a citizen, she chose a name that everyone could spell, whether German or English. Didn't have to--

And about how old was she when this picture was taken? It's a lovely, lovely photograph.

I think it's in her later 30s.

So were you already born by that point?

Yes.

And was she still married to your father at this point?

Yes.

So this would have been in the 1920s.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Yes, yeah. I would say maybe '29 or '30.

OK, thank you. And now we'll get-- OK, Dr. Barrows-- whoops, excuse me. Keep on holding the picture, yes. Can you tell me, who is that a photograph of? This is my paternal grandfather, Heinrich Weissenberg with his two sons, Eugene-- oh, I'm sorry, Eugen-- and Karl. And then when they adopted the English language, it became Eugene, and Karl, and Henry.

And this would have been before your grandfather's death, clearly, in 1928 or something?

He died in 1928. I would think that this might have been '26 or so.

OK, 1926 with the both of them. Thank you. We'll cut that.

Are we rolling?

Yes.

OK. Can you tell me some of the people who are in this photograph?

This is a family picture--

The Weissenbergs?

--of the Weissenbergs with Grandfather and Grandmother.

Your grandmother is wearing the high-necked--

She's the dark one. Let's see. If we go left to right, it's Eugene Henry Weissenberg, and in the back is Professor Karl Weissenberg and his brother, the physician, Eugene or Eugen. And in the middle is Grandfather with two friends of Papa and Karl's that were their peers from the college days. And in the front row is the oldest sister, Jenny Vina, with the white hair-- and she's Irma's sister-- with Olga in front--

--of Grandfather? Is Olga in the middle in front?

Yes, she is next to the dark Irma.

So Irma is in the dark dress?

Yes, and Jenny is in the light dress. And my mother, Olga, is in the center, and the others-- in the second row there are some friends with grandfather in the very middle.

And about when do you think this photograph would have been taken?

I would think it might be as early as '21 or 2, maybe in the very early marriage before my sister and I were born.

And so Jenny with the white hair and the light dress, except for the bodice, which has a bit of a dark knee. She is the one who had the dairy?

Right, and she never married. She was very successful but had diabetes, and I think that was her cause of death.

Thank you. Thank you.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.