

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Susan Stahl on January 17, 2019, in Delray Beach, Florida. Thank you very, very much, Mrs. Stahl--

Oh, my pleasure.

--for agreeing to speak with us. I'm going to start at the very beginning, and we'll develop things from there. OK? So my very first question is, what is the date of your birth?

November 14, 1925.

And where were you born?

In a hospital in WÃ¼rzburg, but we lived in Burgsinn.

Burgsinn. And WÃ¼rzburg and Burgsinn, in what part of Germany are they?

Bavaria.

In Bavaria, OK. What was your name at birth?

Suse, S-U-S-E.

S-U-S-E.

Stein.

Stein.

OK, Suse Stein. Did you have brothers and sisters?

I have a brother. I had two brothers, but one passed away at the age of 10.

Ah. When was he born?

He was born two years after I was born, so it's '27.

1927.

And my other brother was born in '29. He's four years younger than I am.

You're the oldest of the family.

Yes.

What was the name of the brother who passed away?

Werner.

Werner.

And your youngest brother?

Henry.

Henry.

Is your youngest brother still alive?

Oh, yes.

OK.

Has he ever given his testimony?

No.

OK. Your parents, what were your parents' names? From your father, what was his name?

Louis.

Louis. And your mother?

Erna.

With her maiden name.

Katz. Erna Katz Stein and Louis Stein. And were they both from Burgsinn?

No.

Where were they from?

My father, yes. My mother came from a town called Bibra.

Bibra.

In Meiningen.

And where is Meiningen?

I really don't know exactly.

OK. Was it also in Bavaria?

No.

It was in another part of Germany.

Yes.

And did you know her side of the family?

Oh, yes.

So did they move to Burgsinn, or did you visit them?

No, we spent our vacations there with my grandfather and my aunt, my mother's sister.

And that was in Bibra?

Yeah.

So tell me a little bit about your maternal side of the family. Your mother had one sister.

Yes.

Any brothers?

No.

So what was her sister's name?

Rosa.

And your grandfather, does that mean you didn't have a grandmother by the time you were born and grew up?

I had a grandmother from my father's mother.

I see.

But not your mother's mother.

No.

She had died earlier?

Yes.

OK.

During the plague.

The flu?

The flu in the '18.

In 1918.

'18, yes.

And so many people don't know about that, what a worldwide disaster that was--

Yes.

--that flu. So she was one of the victims, your maternal grandmother.

Grandmother.

Do you know what her name was?

I should know. I can't think of it right now.

That's OK. These things come to you long after the camera stops rolling.

I'm sure.

Yeah. What about your maternal grandfather? Did you know him?

Yes.

What was his name?

Oh, you mean from my father's side?

Mother's.

From my mother's, Joseph.

Joseph Katz, OK. How had he made a living, Joseph Katz?

He was a cattle-- he was in the cattle business.

OK. So he was-- OK. So that was a common business for many people to be in. I have interviewed some others who were involved in that. And was your maternal side of the family well-to-do or not so much, would you say?

Average.

OK, OK. What do you remember of your visits to your mother's side of the family in Bibra?

Oh, we always had a wonderful time.

Did you?

My aunt was just a lovely, lovely lady.

Mhm.

We used to bake together, and she was able to stir with one hand and beat with the other. That's not easy to do.

No it isn't. No, it isn't.

And she was just wonderful. We loved spending time with her.

And when you would go to visit her, would it just be the children, or would it just be you, or would it be the whole family?

No, it would just be me.

Well, that's very special.

Yes.

So you're the only girl, and you get to go there and have one-on-one time.

Yes.

What kind of a place did they live in, did your aunt live in?

It's a small town, not many Jewish families. Their are relatives that lived in that town that had a butcher shop.

And the house, was it an an apartment, or was it a house?

No, it was a house.

And was it your grandfather's house?

Yes.

So Aunt Rosa was not married.

No.

OK.

And why do you think that was?

I have no idea.

OK. Was she older or younger than your mother?

Younger.

OK. Do you have memories of the house?

Yes.

Tell me about it.

Well, not specific.

No, but in general--

Yes.

--so that I'd get a picture of it.

It was right across from the synagogue, and--

Was it two-story or three-story?

No, it was a two-story.

Did it have land around it?

Not really.

OK, was it in the center of Bibra?

Yes.

OK. Was it connected to other buildings?

No.

OK, so it was a standalone.

Yes.

OK, was there a garden of any kind?

No.

No? OK.

Not that I recall.

OK.

And a couple of questions, and I'll ask this about your own home in Burgsinn. But what level of modernity did it have? Did it have electricity?

Oh, yes.

Did it have indoor plumbing?

The toilet facility was separate, outdoors.

Ah, it was. There a bathroom in the house?

No.

No. So where did-- was there like a town, common baths that people would go to? Or how did people take care of those sorts of things? Did you heat water and fill up a tub?

I really don't recall.

It's OK. That's OK. Was there a telephone?

Yes.

OK. And did your grandfather have an automobile?

No.

OK.

And when you would visit them, would you spend time with him as well?

Yes.

Was he retired?

No.

Oh, so he continued to work while you were growing up? OK. Do you know how your parents met?

Through an aunt that I had that lived in Burgsinn.

OK.

And I think she invited my mother to come down, and that's how they met.

So was it an arranged marriage?

No.

OK.

Did your parents ever talk about how they met and how they got to know each other?

Not really.

OK, OK. Do you know the year they married?

I was born in '25-- around 1900 and 1902.

They married, or they were born in 1902?

Well, I was born in '25.

OK. And so you think they were married a few years before then?

Not that long. So it was my mistake.

OK, so it's like 1923 or 1924.

Right.

But that brings me to another question. Do you know about how old your parents were when they married or when you were born? Were they young parents? Or were they older?

They were young.

OK. So your father's date of birth, do you know when it would have been?

My father was born August 4. I don't know the-- I forgot the--

That's OK.

18--

But still in the 1800s.

Yes.

And your mother?

About a couple of years later.

OK, OK. Was your father old enough to have served in any armed forces during World War I?

Yes. My father won the Iron Cross First Class, which was very unusual for a Jew to get. He served through the whole war. He was a spy in the-- behind the lines in the French part of--

Wow. Wow. Did he ever tell you what that involved, being a spy behind those lines?

No, he never talked about it.

Never, huh? But he did tell you that he had served.

Yes.

And--

My brother recently got a letter from Germany saying that they have the record and what a brilliant soldier he was.

Wow. I've just never heard of somebody-- well, I've heard of people who have gotten the Iron Cross. But that they got it for such purposes, you had to be pretty smart and have your wits about you.

Oh, yes.

So he would have been feeding back intelligence to his own side.

Yes.

Tell me a little bit about his personality, what kind of a person he was.

He was wonderful. He was kind, caring. And he had a business. He was in the-- he was supplying shoemakers with all their needs. And at that time, they not only repaired shoes. They made shoes.

So he would supply shoemakers with the raw materials? Do you know what that consisted of? What were those raw materials?

Leather.

OK.

And anything else?

Well, all of the things that you need to produce a shoe.

And did you ever see those items as you were--

Yes. Because my father had a storage in the lower part of our house.

OK. So you would see things like heels, and shoelaces, and leather bits. And I'm just curious. I wonder what a sole was made out of, whether it was made out of some kind of wood or--

No. They had-- these were big leather pieces that were cut out from there.

Interesting, interesting. Did he make shoes for you?



No.

OK. So would you say he was a wholesaler?

He was a retailer supplying shoe manufacturers.

OK, OK.

He did a lot of traveling. He got a car very early on when very few people had a car.

Was Burgsinn a large place?

No.

About how many families-- well, how large would it have been as a town?

That I don't know. But there were about 20 Jewish families.

So that's not much.

No.

And did you all know one another?

Oh, yes.

And how had your father's family come to be there? Do you know?

His family had lived there. My grandmother was still alive. My grandfather had passed away. And we had two houses that were attached and the two stories. And there was stairs going up at a second house, and we could access them from the first house. So my grandmother lived on the first floor of the second house. And the bedrooms for my family were upstairs.

In her house.

In that house.

Yeah.

Yes. And in our house, my father had his business on the first floor, and our living quarters were on the second floor.

And had he inherited this business from his own father?

No.

He started it on his own.

Yes.

What was the name of the business?

It was just under his name.

So it would have been Stein [GERMAN] or something like that?

Yes.

OK. It wasn't like Schuhhaus Stein.

I don't think so, no.

Did he have a storefront?

No.

OK, OK. And did any customers ever come to his-- to where those parts of your home where he had his supplies?

Yes.

So people would come to pick them up. It's not just that he would deliver them.

He delivered most of them. But once in a while, a customer came. And even when he was out of town, my mother would take care of that.

Well, that was one of my questions too is, did she help her in the business?

Yes.

Help him in the business.

Yes.

Yeah. Was it just the two of them together?

Yes.

There was nobody else that he hired for it?

No.

And then who took care of you and your brothers most of the time?

My mother and father.

What about if your father was on business and your mother was helping him, does that mean that your grandmother would sometimes step in, or not so much?

Not so much.

OK. Did you have a nanny?

No. Did you have any other help?

Yes.

OK. What kind?

From what I remember, we had somebody come in once a week, I believe, to do laundry.

OK, but nobody who was like a regular, almost live-in kind of help situation.

I don't recall that there was.

OK.

Could have been, but I don't remember.

OK. Do you have any earliest memories?

Well, it's a long time ago, but some.

What kind? Could you share some of them?

Well, I enjoyed visiting my grandfather and my aunt during vacation. And we had friends that we got together with, but mostly only the Jewish children.

OK. Did you have any pets?

No. My grandfather had a dog.

Did you like animals?

No. I must have stepped on him once, that dog.

Ah.

And ever since then, I don't like dogs.

Did he bark or bite?

No. He barked, but he didn't bite.

OK, at least that much. And describe your own home that you shared with your father's mother, so those two buildings. Did they have electricity? Was there--

Oh, yes.

OK. And what about indoor plumbing, was there indoor--

Yes.

OK. So they were a little bit more modern than what your mother's father lived in.

Right.

OK. How was the place heated, your mother's and father's home?

Oh, we had an oven in each room.

Was it with coal, or was it with wood?

With wood.

OK, OK. So each room would be heated separately.

From what I remember, yes.

OK. How did she bake?

We had an oven that worked.

Also wood-fired?

Yes.

OK. Was your mother a baker, a cook?

Very much so.

Yeah? Were there any favorite dishes that you had?

Yes.

What were they?

Well, every Thursday night, we had soup, and meat in the soup, and potato. And then for lunch the next day, we had-- and sauerkraut. And for lunch next day, we had this all mixed together into a soup that was delicious.

Also healthy.

Yes.

And did your parents keep to Jewish traditions?

Absolutely.

Were they religious people?

I wouldn't say orthodox, but religious.

Was there a synagogue?

Yes.

In Burgsinn, yeah?

Yes.

And but only 20 families?

Yes.

And there was already-- so does that mean there had been a Jewish community in Burgsinn for 100, 200 years?

I'm sure.

Was there a cemetery, a Jewish cemetery?

Not in Burgsinn. And that was in WÃ¼rzburg.

In WÃ¼rzburg, OK.

And about how much distance was there between Burgsinn and WÃ¼rzburg?

I imagine it was about an hour's drive, hour and a half.

OK. But you wouldn't know kilometer-wise?

No.

OK. We can find out today. I mean, we could look on the map and see. I just wanted to know if you remembered.

No.

OK. Did your father have a car?

Yes.

OK, yes. You said he did. And do you remember what kind it was?

I think it was an Opel.

Did he take you for rides?

Yeah.

Yeah? Did you go on vacation with your family? Was there ever an opportunity for that?

Sometimes. Well, most of my longer vacations I spent with my grandfather and aunt. But there were times when we just had a couple of days, and we would go to a nearby spa.

Oh, do you remember the town?

No.

OK. But Bavaria is known for such places.

Yes.

Would you say that your town was a pretty town? Was it a medieval town, or was it fairly new?

I think it was a pretty town.

Yeah?

Our house was right next to a river.

What was the river name?

I think it was Sinn.

Sinn. Well, Burgsinn, it would make sense.

Was there a castle?

Yes.

OK. And what did it look like?

Well, I never went inside.

OK.

I don't even know if it was inhabited. But it had a moat around it. And--

Did you live in the center of town?

Yes.

And the other Jewish families, did they also live in the same area?

Yes.

So could you say there was like a neighborhood?

Well, no. They were not all in exactly the same area, but it was a small town. So nothing was very far.

How did most-- OK, let's start with the Jewish families. How did most of the other people who were Jewish make a living?

Well, there was one next to us that had a clothing shop, and they had a lot of bolts of material where people could buy and make their own clothes.

OK.

And then there's another family who had the kosher butcher shop, and another family who had a haberdashery, and one who had a hardware store. That's about the only one I remember.

Were there were also any doctors, or lawyers, or professions, other professions within the 20 Jewish families?

No.

OK. Had your father gone to higher education? That is, did he go to university?

No.

Your mother?

No.

Do you know the level of education they finished, the highest level they finished?

I imagine it was what we would call high school.

OK, OK. I asked you earlier about your father's personality. And you said he was a very kind and a very good man and a good father. What was his personality like as far as his nature, in the sense of, was he a quiet man? Or was he somebody who was an extrovert?

He wasn't that much of an extrovert.

Was he more reserved?

Yes.

OK.

But not to the extent that you would call him reserved.

OK, OK. So he was not out there. He was not loud. But he also wasn't somebody who you never knew who he was.

Exactly.

OK. And your mother, what kind of a personality did she have?

Very outgoing.

Very outgoing, OK. Which was the stronger of the two?

I think my mother.

Yeah? Did she have more of an influence on you than your father?

Yes.

OK. Was she strict?

At times.

OK. What would you describe as your home life and the atmosphere in your home? Was it a quiet atmosphere? Was it a cold atmosphere? Was it a warm one? How would you describe it?

It was a warm one.

It was warm, yeah? Your parents got along.

Oh, yes.

OK. And you mentioned earlier also that you played with other Jewish children. Who were some of your friends?

There was the children of the people who had the-- a clothing store. Their name was Hamburger.

Hamburger, mhm.

And the butcher, he had two girls that we were friendly with. And we even saw each other yet here in America.

Do you remember his name, the butcher's name?

I know the daughter was Renata.

Uh-huh.

I don't remember his name.

OK. Was there a rabbi in town?

No.

So how would services be held at the synagogue?

The men performed it.

OK.

The women sat upstairs.

Do you remember that?

Oh, yes.

And did your parents go every week?

Yes.

So they were observant in that way.

Yes.

OK.

We made kiddush every Friday night. We did the benschen every Friday night. And we observed all the holidays.

Did you ever go to another synagogue in a larger town?

No.

Only your own, only here in Burgsinn. Aside from Bibra and the occasional time when you would go to a spa with your family, did you travel much outside of Burgsinn?

No.

But your father did.

Yes.

What kind of radius, I mean, what kind of places would he be going to?

Oh, anywheres between Burgsinn, WÃ¼rzburg, and that whole vicinity.

So it still was within Bavaria.

Yes.



He would not go to Frankfurt, or to Stuttgart, or--

He would go to Frankfurt to buy his-- some of his supplies.

Mhm. Did he ever go to Berlin?

No.

OK. So it would be nobody ever went outside the country, or did they?

No, not that I know of.

OK. If you were born in 1925, when did you start school?

I must have been five years later, 19-- about 1930.

But you started school before Hitler came to power.

Yes.

Do you remember anything of your first school years?

I don't remember anything of my first school years, but I do remember after Hitler came into power.

We'll come to that in a minute. You said that most of the children that you played with were other Jewish children. Did you have any friends who were not Jewish your age?

I don't think so.

And what about from your-- from the adults in the family, was there much contact with non-Jewish either people, or customers, or--

Customers, yes.

Customers, yes, but not in a social way.

No.

OK. OK. And most of the town, what other relig-- what religion predominated in Burgsinn?

Oh, Catholicism.

OK, it was a Catholic town.

Yes.

All right. Do you have a sense of whether it was 1,000 people, more than 1,000 people, less?

I couldn't judge.

OK, OK. Now, when Hitler came to power in 1933, you were how old, seven, eight?

Right.

OK. Did your parents have a radio?

Yes.

Do you remember hearing his voice over the radio?

I remember visiting my uncle in Berlin. And there was a parade with him at the head of the parade.

So you actually saw Hitler.

Yes. Can you describe to me what it is that you saw?

A scary man.

Was he small? Was he tall? Was he-- yeah, did he look-- what-- yeah, I guess I'm asking for, in the circumstances, did you-- was he far away from you, close to you when you saw him?

Well, he was in a car standing up. And we were on the street with lots of other people.

Did he have his arm up in the Hitler salute?

Yes.

OK. About how old were you at that time?

About 11.

OK. Now, you say you had an uncle. Does that mean he was your mother's brother?

My father's brother.

Your father's brother, that's right, because your mother had only one sister. I'd forgot to ask you about your father's siblings. How many did he have?

Just the one brother.

And what was his name?

Arnold.

Arnold Stein. OK, and how did he come to live in Berlin?

That I don't know.

Do you know how he made a living there?

Yes. He had a printing business.

Ah, OK. And--

He printed advertisements for a lot of movies.

Oh, that sounds like fun.

So you would see the posters?

Yes.

Oh, wow.

My cousin still has some here.

Really? Do you remember any of the movies that you saw posters for in the shop?

No.

No?

They were all in German.

Did you go to the cinema when you were a girl?

Not frequently.

Do you remember anything that you saw there?

No.

OK, OK. So do you recall what it was like when Hitler came to power, for your family, how your family reacted?

I remember the Hitler Youth having a parade down Main Street. And my brother couldn't understand why he couldn't be part of it.

The youngest brother?

My younger brother, yes.

Henry.

Yes.

Yeah. Yeah, well, parades are fascinating for kids. And had you seen the Hitler Youth parade before then or only after he came to power?

After.

Only after. Did people change in their behavior towards you?

Not at first. But later on, they were afraid to have any contact with us.

How did that show itself?

Like I had a toothache, and the dentist we always went to wouldn't see us. So my mother said, what should she do? He says, OK, come at night. I'll see her this time, but it has to be at night so nobody else knows that I treated you.

Hm. And was this a gentleman or a lady?

A gentleman.

Older man?

No.

A young man. What about clients for your father's products, did fewer of them come? How was his business affected?

I don't think it really was after-- in the beginning.

OK. So things continued normally for a while. What was life like at school?

Well, after Hitler came into power, our teacher was a real anti-Semite. And he would take all the Jewish children and put them in the front row of the school, of the room. And the town was in two, except one was the upper, and one was the lower.

We lived on the lower, and the school was on the upper section. So there were a great deal of stairs. And he would dismiss us a minute earlier than all the others so they could chase us down those stairs. And that went on on a daily basis.

That's terrifying for a kid.

Yes. And then also when we sitting in the front of the school--

Of the room.

--of the room, they would pinch us in the back, badly sometimes.

Would these be other girls, or boys as well, or mostly boys?

I don't even recall that.

OK.

I think it was both.

OK. Before that happened, had you had any classmates that were not Jewish that you were friendly with?

No.

OK, so it never happened there. There was no friend that you lost because you never had one.

Right.

How many Jewish kids were in the class?

Hm. I think about eight.

And the class would have been about how many kids?

15, 20.

Not so large.

No.

And had there been any teachers who were kind and who were nice despite these changes?

No.

Really? Really? Did you have one teacher all the time, or did you have several teachers for different courses?

It was one different teacher, from what I remember, one teacher all the time.

A man or a woman?

Man.

What was his name?

I don't recall.

But he was cruel.

Yes. And one day, he picked on me. I don't know why. And he hit me so hard on-- with a stick on my hand that it was so swollen. And my father tried to-- various ways of getting it recognized that this is wrong, but he did not succeed. So then he took us out of the school.

How old were you at that point?

I must've been about 12.

So if you were 12 years old, that means it was-- you had already been from age eight, seven or eight, until age 12. Those four years, you had gone to school under these conditions. Was it always with that same teacher, or were there different teachers that you had?

From what I call, it was the same teacher.

Because I get the sense it was a small school.

Yes.

If you had a small town, you had a small school.

Right.

OK, OK. So there was no escape from him.

No.

OK. Did your brothers also go to school? And were they in the same class or in different classes?

In different classes.

Different teachers.

Yes.

Did they have a different experience?

Yes.

Oh, really?

Did they have teachers who were kinder?

Yes.

Ah. So it was that you ended up in that particular class with somebody who was an anti-Semite and now could show it.

Right.

Mhm. But your brothers didn't have the same issues.

Not that I recall.

OK. Did your father take you all out of the school or just you?

All.

All. What about the other Jewish kids? Did they leave that school, or did they stay?

They left the school too. And then there was a-- we had a teacher coming to our town every twice or three times a week and give us Hebrew lessons in the afternoon.

OK, religious classes.

Beg your pardon?

Religious classes.

Yes.

OK.

And he had a schoolroom in the following-- in the next town. So we went to school there.

Ah.

Either one of the fathers would drive us or we would take the train.

Oh. And do you know the name of that next town?

Mittelsinn.

Mittelsinn, OK. And what was the name of your-- the first school that you went to?

I have no idea.

OK, OK. But it was the public school for Burgsinn.

Right.

OK. What were the kinds of conversations going on at home during these years between 1933 and 1937?

My father tried to leave Germany because he saw the handwriting on the wall as early as '36. And he was going to go anywheres, but nobody would take you unless you had someone backing you and guaranteeing that you won't become a burden of the state.

That's true, yeah.

So my uncle from Berlin--

Arnold.

Yes. He went to England, and he waited there to either go to Australia or to America, whatever came first. And he went to America, and then he was able to sponsor us.

So was your uncle better off?

Yes.

OK. Did he have his own family?

Yes.

So you had cousins?

Yes.

And you had an aunt, his wife.

Right.

Can you tell me their names?

My aunt's name was Truda.

Truda, OK.

And his name was Arnold.

And the children.

Werner and Marianne.

Were they about your age?

Werner was. Marianne was a little older.

OK, OK. And how was it that he was able to go to England and then the United States? Was he well-off enough he could support himself?

I believe so.

OK. Because he would have needed someone to give him an affidavit.

Right.

OK. So it's through Uncle Arnold that you eventually are able to leave. OK, and when did he leave Germany? What year did they leave Germany?

I think '39.

OK, so it nevertheless took a while for him to be able to establish himself. When you had seen Hitler, you said you were about 12 years old. It was 1937. He was still with his family in Berlin.

Right.

What part of Berlin did they live in?

Oh, I don't remember what it was called.

Was it the center of town?

Yes. It was near Kurfürstendamm.

Charlottenburg?

No. I don't recall.

OK. Do you remember the street the parade was on where you saw Hitler?

In Burgsinn?

No, no. You saw Hitler in Berlin, you said.

Oh, yeah. Whatever that main thoroughfare was.

So would it have been Kurfürstendamm?

Yes, probably.

OK, OK. And were you there just with your uncle or with your cousins and your aunt?

Yes.

All of them?

Yes.

And why? Was it something that was forced, or you wanted to see what was happening?

I guess my uncle wanted to see what was happening.

OK.

And wanted us to see what was happening too.

OK. And the conversations in your uncle's home in 1937 when you were there, what were they about?



I don't think they were anything out of the ordinary.

Were they mostly about how to leave or they mostly about what's going-- I'm talking in the political sense.

Yes.

Did they talk often about what's going on in the country?

Yes.

And do you recall what it is that they would be saying?

Well, they all wanted to get out as soon as possible.

Yeah, yeah. And how is it that you ended up being there with them at age 12?

Well, we have to go back to that little school in Mittelsinn.

So this was just a vacation?

Well, I lived with them for a while, but that was after Crystal Night.

OK, we'll come to that later then. We'll come to that later. So at age 12, your life changes. Your school life changes that you now go to that school in Mittelsinn that is run by the Hebrew teacher. And it's one classroom for lots of different kids. About how many children were in that classroom?

I would say about 20.

OK, all Jewish children?

Yes, of course.

From age what to what?

Age, I imagine, 8 to 10 and--

Older?

Older, yeah.

How did this teacher manage to teach children at different levels of education?

Well, he wasn't a good Hebrew teacher when he came to town. And he certainly wasn't a good teacher for all of us.

[LAUGHS] In what way was he not good? Tell me.

I can't describe it. He was just not a good teacher.

OK. Was he a kind person, or was he a strict person?

No, he was not a strict person.

OK. Did he know how to control a classroom?

At times.

OK. Were the kids able to run circles around him at other times?

No, no, not that bad.

OK, OK. Do you remember his name?

No, not at all.

OK, do you remember what he looked like?

Yes.

Tell me.

He was not too tall-- and heavy. I remember when he came to town to teach, when he was just our Hebrew teacher, he ate most of the time that he was supposed to teach us.

And let's do the same thing for that teacher who was so cruel to you. Do you have a vision? Can you describe to me what he looked like?

I think he was in his 20s.

So he was a young man.

Yeah.

Was he tall?

Average.

Did he have any other distinguishing features?

Not that I--

OK. About how many teachers were in that school, in the one that--

In Burgsinn?

Mm.

I don't know.

OK, OK. But you're saying that your father's business did not seem to suffer much. Did that change?

Well, everything changed after Kristallnacht.

All right, tell me about that. What happened at Kristallnacht?

My father wasn't feeling well. And we were in school in Mittelsinn. And what I learned after we came back is that my father was arrested with all the other Jewish men in town. And we had no idea where they were, or how long they're-- or if we'd ever see them again. In the meantime, the Gestapo came to the school in Mittelsinn and said, if you're not out of here in one minute, we'll chop your heads off. So we left our books, our coats, everything, and we ran home.

So you ran from one town to the other.

Right.

Do you know how much of a distance it was?

It was quite a distance, but we were able to do it. And I don't know exactly how far. But when we got to our town, there was a bonfire in front of every Jewish house.

Including yours?

Including ours. And they threw everything out of the windows to burn it. But after they started our house, one of the Gestapo came and said, stop here. Because he wanted the Iron Cross First Class. So they didn't destroy much of our stuff. But at the end of the day, they brought all the women to our house.

From the 20 families?

Yes.

So it was like a holding center.

Right. And I remember my uncle called from Berlin and asked my mother, how are you? And she says, not so good. And with that, they pulled the telephone out of the wall and said, you ungrateful person. Here we spare you, and you say that. And they held a conference to decide what to do with my mother. And they let her go.

That must have been terrifying for you.

It was terrifying. Then my mother came over to me, and she said, you have to go up in the attic. I don't know how we're going to do it. But there are a bunch of American dollars, and you've got to get rid of them. Because if they find it, we will all be gone.

So the bathroom was upstairs. So when we went to the bathroom, one of the Gestapo stood on the stairs. So they must have distracted him somehow. And I was able to sneak upstairs, find the money, and flush it down the toilet

Oh, my goodness. And have you any idea how much it was?

No.

What a lo-- how bittersweet because people weren't able to leave with a lot of money from Germany.

Right.

I want to get a sense of how this happened logistically. Earlier you described to me that there were the two houses connected, and there was a staircase from the house where your father had his work place and your living room, and there was a staircase that went to the second floor where you had your bedrooms. And was that staircase-- and that was above where your grandmother lived. Was that staircase inside the house or outside?

Inside.

Inside.

It was really from my grandmother's living quarters up to the second floor. And there was a door on the first floor, and you can use the steps to go up.

So the bottom or, say, the ground floor areas were connected to each other where your grandmother lived and where your father had his workshop. Is that correct?

All the houses were really separate with a wall separating them except for that one door--

Into your grandmother's place.

--for the stairs to go up.

OK, OK. And it's this staircase that you had to use?

Yes.

All right. What was happening with your grandmother at this time?

My grandmother was in an old-age home in Berlin.

With Arnold? That is, he was taking care of him-- her?

Yes.

Uncle Arnold. OK. And what about your grandfather on your mother's side and your aunt Rosa, where were they?

My grandfather was in a old-age home in Frankfurt. And my aunt had gotten married just around that time and lived in Frankfurt.

Did you have any chance to visit them?

Just before we left, we visited them.

And did they have any plans to leave?

Everybody had plans to leave, but they had no way of accomplishing it.

So they never left.

No. My grandmother from Berlin died in the cattle car to the camp. And my grandfather and my aunt died and her husband died in the camp.

Do you know which one?

I think it was Birkenau.

How were you able to find out about your father's mother in the cattle car? Somebody must have told you that they were there or something.

Well, there were-- the Germans kept track of everything very well.

OK, so there was a record. So let's go back to that situation where your mother is in her home, and that's on the second-- every-- all those other ladies were herded into the second-floor living room-- and the children. And how long do they stay there? How long were they kept there?

A couple of days.

Wow, wow. And did any of the men return who were arrested?

They all came back.

How long did it take?

Less than a week.

OK. Did your father tell you what that week had been like?

No.

Did he look different?

No.

And did you ever go back to that one-room schoolroom where you had left your coats, and your books, and anything?

No.

So that was the end of education. So then what happened?

Well, my uncle and aunt in Berlin made arrangements for us to go into an orphanage in Berlin.

And why was that? Why would you-- you have parents. You have other relatives. You have aunts and uncles. Why would you go to an orphanage?

Because there was no other place to go, and that's one way of going to school. I lived with my uncle and aunt for a couple of months while my brother was in the orphanage already.

And this is after Kristallnacht.

Yes.

Why did you not stay with your own parents?

Because it was impossible to stay in the town. And my parents were in the process of leaving the town too.

Did they sell their home, or did they just leave their home?

I don't know if they were able to sell it, if they were allowed to sell. But they moved to be near us into a [NON-ENGLISH].

What's that?

That's a farming compound that teachers, lawyers, and doctors, and all kinds of people had to farm. So if they go to Israel or wherever they go, they at least would have an idea of what to do. They would be able to work on a farm.

So my mother was in charge of the kitchen, and my father was in charge of the fields. So he was on horseback. And every so often, we went to visit them there from the orphanage.

So you at first lived with your aunt and your uncle.

Until they left for England.

Ah, so all of this is after Kristallnacht.

Yes.

And they leave for England. Then you go to the orphanage together with your brother. Was this a Jewish orphanage?

Yes.

And it was in Berlin.

Yes.

And the [NON-ENGLISH] that you're telling me, what-- where was that located?

Near Berlin.

Do you know the area, the town.

[COUGHS] Excuse me. No.

OK. Did your father still have his car?

No.

OK. So how would you meet with one another? What transportation did you take?

That's a good question. I guess we took a train.

OK. You just don't-- you don't remember.

I don't.

That's OK. That's OK.

Was it a long journey?

No.

OK, OK. So it clearly is that there are plans to leave the country one way or another. Your parents are trying to retrain themselves so that they would know how to make a living doing different things.

They were teaching people and training them so they could make a living as a farmer.

Was there--

My father was an equestrian rider. He was very good with horses.

Ah. Now, one thing I had forgotten to ask about Burgsinn, how did the town itself fair economically? That is, what ran the town economy-wise? Was it the farming around? Was there some kind of manufacturing? How did most other people, aside from the ones that you had told me about, how did they make their living in that area?

I don't know.

OK, OK.

Well, there was a bakery. There was a general merchandise store. And I don't know how anybody else made their living.

OK. So it wasn't like it was a town that served a farming community.

No.

OK. So farming was really new to your father and your mother in this place.

Right.

All right. But he had experience with horses, and he was good at it. Did you ever go riding with him on top of the horse?

No.

Did your brother?

No.

OK. Did you visit them there, or did they visit you at the orphanage?

Both.

Yeah. What was living in the orphanage like?

My brother was very unhappy there.

Henry.

I was less so. We put on plays, and we had services every Saturday. And I found it not that difficult to adjust to.

OK, can you describe to me what it looked like physically? Like I asked you about your home and your grandfather's home, what did this place look like, this orphanage?

It was a large building, and one wing for the boys, one wing for the girls, had a large walking place in between.

Like a courtyard?

Like a courtyard. And--

Was it a stone building?

Yes.

One story?

I think it was a two-story.

In the center of town or in a residential area?

In a residential area.

Do you know that-- what area that would have been?

I should know it. I can't think of it right now.

OK. Was it in one of the Berlin suburbs?

Yes. No. It was actually within the city.

It was within the city but in a residential part of the city. West or east, would you have an idea?

No.

Because in the west part, there's Schöneberg. There's Charlottenburg. There's Dahlem-Dorf, There's Wannsee. There's Zehlendorf, Lichtenfelde, Lankwitz. Any of those ring a bell?

Well, we were so busy trying to adjust to it, and we went to school from there.

Oh, so the school was not part of the orphanage.

No.

But it was a Jewish school.

Yes.

And did you walk to the school.

Yes.

Do you remember the name of the school?

No.

One of the reasons I'm asking all these questions is because sometime in the future somebody may listen and say, oh, that's interesting. I'd like to know more about this orphanage. And the more we have detail of it, the more we can place it in context.

But I completely realize that it's, in some ways, an unreasonable thing to ask because you're in a different circumstance and mindset. At the time, you're a 13-year-old child who was trying to hold it together. You know? And these are not the sorts of things that one would normally remember. But forgive me for asking.

Not at all.

That's the reason why I do. That's the reason why I do. So was it a long walk from the orphanage to the school?

Manageable, apparently.

Were you chased or in some way harassed between the two?

No.

OK, so it wasn't like Burgsinn where when you left school, the other kids could chase you.

No.



OK. Did you feel safe there?

Yes.

OK. And about how many children were in the orphanage?

Oh, quite a few there were. We were the exception to the rule. There were mostly orphans in the school-- in the orphanage.

Real orphans.

Yes.

Not people whose parents just couldn't--

Right.

--handle them.

Were there any who were like you?

Not that I know of.

OK. And why do you think for your younger brother it was so much more difficult?

He just had a very hard time adjusting. He always said, I want to go home.

Yeah, yeah. Sometimes maybe those few years make a difference. You know, you were a few years older. I want to go back too. In all of this turmoil, in all of this uncertainty and hostility, you also lose a brother, Werner. What happened with Werner?

He had-- oh, my brain is not working right today.

That's all right.

Anyhow, there wasn't penicillin or anything. He had scarlet fever.

OK. So this came on suddenly?

And he was in a hospital in WÃ¼rzburg.

And were there difficulties there for your parents to get treatment for him?

No.

OK, OK. So it wasn't like the dentist was with you?

No.

All right, is that where he passed away?

Yes.

Did you visit him there, you?

No.

So when was the last time you saw him?

Before he went to the hospital.

Was he conscious?

Yes.

Was this a surprise then when he didn't come home?

We knew he was very sick.

Were your parents with him when he died?

I believe my mother was.

And so where was he buried then?

In WÃ¼rzburg.

In WÃ¼rzburg.

A Jew cemetery was in WÃ¼rzburg.

Did he have a stone?

Yes.

Do you know if it's still standing?

Yes.

Have you ever been back there?

I have not. My mother has.

OK, OK. And were there other family members buried in that same cemetery?

Yes.

Is he close to them? Is his grave close to theirs?

I don't know.

Did you ever go there?

No.

Oh, so even right after he passed away, his burial was taken-- took place separately. That is, you didn't go. Your younger brother didn't go, but your parents did. I can't imagine what a loss it must have been for them.

It was horrendous.

Yeah. A hole right there in the family. So we can go back now to the orphanage that you're there with your younger brother. Did you have any items from home with you?

No.

No toys, no dolls, no books, no nothing. What did you take with you from Burgsinn when you left to go to Berlin?

All I remember is we took a suitcase with our clothes.

And that's it.

Yes.

Everything else was left.

Yes.

Did any of this of the household items, your items, your parents items, or things like that, did they ever make it to the United States?

No.

All right, so it was pretty much the shirts on your backs. When you were in this orphanage, how long did that last? How long were you there?

Well, my parents decided that I should go and learn a trade instead continuing in school.

OK.

So they sent me to a school for dressmaking. And there were also only other Jewish girls there.

So again, it was a Jewish school.

Right.

So I don't remember exactly how long I was there. But one day, the Gestapo came in and said, all of you are now working for the state. So we weren't allowed to do dressmaking anymore, but we had-- we were doing radio wiring for Siemens.

Did you still live in the orphanage?

Yes.

So instead of going to school from the orphanage, you would go to this facility. And instead of making dresses, you did whatever they told you to, and it happened to be wiring.

And we were watched by a Gestapo woman who had a rifle, and we weren't allowed to talk, or to sing, or to do anything but concentrate on what we had to do.

So it was much more a prison-like atmosphere.

Yes.

Your brother stayed at the orphanage?

Yes.

Did your parents find out about this situation?

Oh, yes.

Did they come to visit you when you were already working there?

I'm sure that they couldn't visit me there. But at the orphanage, I'm sure they did.

OK.

We spent many nights in the air raid shelter and had to go from the air raid shelter right away to the factory.

So you were still in Germany when the war started?

Oh, yes.

Do you remember? Since you were in Berlin, the war started September 1, 1939. Do you remember how you learned of it, how you heard of it, what your day was like once you learned that Germany was finally at war?

Mixed. We were afraid for our lives and glad that somebody's trying to wipe that man of the face of the earth.

Yeah, yeah. But did the life outside, let's say in the city, in the streets, did it change once Germany declared war on Poland?

Yeah, there were bombings almost nightly.

Really? That early on?

Yes.

OK. Who from?

England.

OK. And was life at the orphanage affected by the fact that there was now a war going on?

Yeah, because we spent most of our nights in the air raid shelter.

All of the kids together?

Yes.

Was it a public air raid shelter, or was it one that was in the cellars, for example, of the orphanage itself?

It was in the orphanage.

So you didn't have to share an air raid shelter with Nazis, for example.

Right.

OK, OK. And yet, during the day, you had to go back to the facility where you were working for Siemens. Did the facility change? Was it still the dressmaking location? Or did they take you from there to someplace else?

To someplace else.

So what they really wanted was the labor--

Right.

--the labor force. OK. And how far was that someplace else from the orphanage?

Not any larger distance than from the dressmaking school. It was in walking distance.

OK. Did you--

[PHONE RINGING]

Let's cut for a second.

Cutting.

Would you like to answer the phone?

Oh, you know what? Hang on one second, OK?

Oop. Cutting again.

Yeah.

Mhm.

Speed.

Whenever you're ready.

OK. Was there anybody accompanying you when you would go from the orphanage to this facility where you worked for Siemens?

No.

OK. But once you got there, it was-- it sounds like it was like under lock and key. And--

They were all-- they came to the place where we were learning how to do dressmaking. And there were all Jewish girls there, and they just took everybody and put them to work in the factory making radio for Siemens for the war.

What was your job? What did you have to do?

Wiring.

So what did you have to wire? Did you have to wire-- yeah, describe for me what it was that you had to do.

I don't remember exactly.

OK.

All I know is it's wiring that they used for the radios.

But these weren't radios that people would have in their houses, were--

No, no, no. That was for military purposes.

So they were smaller radios. Uh-huh. Maybe they were like walkie-talkies or something like that.

I have no idea.

OK, OK. And about how many of you were there to a room?

Well, it was just the one room, and we must have been about 15, 20 girls.

And you weren't allowed to speak.

No.

You weren't allowed to make any kind of noise.

Right.

And there was somebody there with a gun, a Gestapo lady with a gun. Did anybody ever step out of line?

No.

OK. Did you ever see anyone beaten there?

No.

OK. How long did this go on for?

Until we left for the United States.

So what would you say, about a year or two years?

I think it was less than that.

Less than a year?

Yeah.

OK.

But you had to have-- in order to get a visa, you had to have a ship's passage. And otherwise, you couldn't get the visa. So my father had to spend a lot of money to have the ship's passage forged. And the organization that ran the farm where he worked was a big help to him.

OK.

And that way, we got the ship's passage. Now, I had to get permission to leave the factory.

I was wondering. Because that wouldn't be so easy if you're already pulled into a military kind of activity.

Well, I got the permission.

OK.

And I had to get my visa separately because I was just 15. So this was a huge room, and there was a circle in the middle of the room.

Was this a German administrative office?

Yes.

OK.

And if you were a Jew, you had to stand in that circle.

How weird.

And you literally had to hold on to each other to not to step out of that circle.

Well, what would happen if you did?

We didn't find out.

So I have to picture this in my mind. You're going to an administrative office to get a visa to leave the country. It's an exit visa. And when you get there, non-Jews stand in line, and the Jews go to the center of the room where there's a circle. And you have to stand in the circle, and you can't step out of it.

Right.

But how large was that circle?

Not very large.

About how many people could fit into it?

I think it must have been about 10.

OK, so 10 pairs of feet could fit into the circle. And how did you stand so that everybody had an equal chance not to step on those lines? How were people standing?

Well, we would hold on to each other.

So it was-- it sounds like someone's thinking up some sort of cruel and weird game.

Absolutely.

And how do you give your paperwork to the people who have to either say yes or no to the exit visa?

Well, then they would call us over to the--

OK, then you could leave the circle. I've never heard of that before. Do you remember how long it took standing there?

No.

No? Did you get your exit visa the same day?

Yes.

OK. And with that exit visa, did you need any other kind of entrance visa to someplace else?

I don't think so.

OK. What did your Uncle Arnold provide? Was he the one who set this in motion that you folks could leave?

Because by then, he was in America.

OK.

His passage to America had come through, so he vouched for us.

OK, so he was able to provide that kind of affidavit. Did you have a visa from the United States that you could enter the United States? See, there are two types. One is to leave Germany, and one is to be able to go somewhere else.

I believe we must have had it.

OK. But you didn't go to the American consulate or the American embassy to obtain that visa.

I don't think so.

Because, OK, the reason I ask is because the one for the exit visa is in your memory, but getting the American one is not.

I think that was included in my parents'.

Got it. Now, when they had been on that farm, that [NON-ENGLISH], was that with the idea that they might actually go to Palestine rather than the United States?

Well, it was. My father was willing to go anywhere, Australia, Palestine, wherever he-- he started as early as '36.

OK, OK. So you get your exit visa. Your brother is with your parents. Do they pick you up from the orphanage? Is this what happens?

It must have.

OK, and was it at that point that you said goodbye to your grandmother in Berlin.

Yes. My parents took us to Frankfurt because they had all moved from Bibra to Frankfurt. And we said goodbye to my grandmother, who was still in Berlin in the old-age home, and then in Bibra-- in Frankfurt to my grandfather and aunt.

And do you remember those last meetings?

Yes, I do.

What did you talk about?



Nothing that special. What could you talk about? We knew we'd probably never see each other again.

Mm, mm. And from there, where did you go?

It was a sealed train that went from Berlin to Lisbon.

Directly? Wow, OK.

And--

Were there any-- who else was on that train besides yourselves?

A couple of other Jewish families.

And any other passengers?

Not in the car that we were in.

OK.

We were in a separate car. And all of France was occupied. So we were sure that we made it until we got to Spain. And there was a Jewish organization in Spain who had dinner for us, and that was a tremendous treat.

Why was it a treat?

We hadn't seen white bread in years or a lot of other types of food that weren't available.

Was it that it wasn't available to you because you were Jews? Or was it because of war rationing?

I think it was because of war rationing. I don't know.

OK, OK. So you were in Spain. You were allowed to get off of the train in Spain, and a Jewish organization arranges dinner for you. Do you get back on the same train in the same car?

Yes.

And then what happens?

Then we were in Lisbon, and we spend a couple of days in Lisbon. And my father was wearing his riding boots.

From the horses, yeah, OK.

And I told him to not to wear them because it looks too much like what Hitler's wearing.

Too much the Hitler fashion.

Yes. So he had a pair of shoes packed. That's all we had. We just had a suitcase each.

What were your parents' demeanors like at this time throughout the journey and when you get there? Can you describe that for me?

Well, they were still in Berlin before we got on the train. They were still debating whether they should let the men go or not.

So it was still on edge. Yes or no. Yes or no. And that was the Gestapo officials who were debating this?

Well, that was literally the last train that left Germany.

Was it really?

We got to America Labor Day, 1941.

Wow. What was the date that you left in Germany, that you left Germany itself? Do you remember that date?

No.

Was it August or July 19--

Has to have been August.

So it would have been the height of summer. OK, July or August, 1941, which means that Germany had already attacked the Soviet Union. It was no longer an ally. It was fighting there. At the train station, what did the platforms look like? Were they filled with people, or were they empty?

I don't recall.

OK. And then in Lisbon, you said your father had forged-- had paid for forgeries of documents that would say that you had ship's passage. But if these were forgeries, how did you get real ship's passage?

I have no idea.

OK. But you did have one?

Oh, yes.

Do you remember the ship that you were on?

The [? Monzinio ?].

[? Monzinio ?]? And what did it look like?

Well, they had ripped out the whole inside, and it were like bunks. And men, women, and children slept in one big room in those bunks.

So this was no luxury liner.

Oh, it certainly wasn't.

OK. Did a lot of people get seasick?

I did.

You did? OK. A lot of swaying over the ocean? And what about the rest of your family?

They were better than I was.

Oh. How long did the voyage last?

You know, I don't even remember that exactly.

OK, but you do know you arrived on Labor Day in 1940--

We arrived Labor Day.

So early September, 1941.

Yes.

That is late. That is really late. How do you know it was the last train? I mean, I can understand that it's at that time. But that it's literally the last train out of Germany, did you find out later? Were you told at the time that no more trains are going?

We found out later, I believe. And my uncle and aunt met us at the-- we landed in Hoboken.

Oh, yeah.

And it was Labor Days, and the ship had run out of food. Of course, they wouldn't-- they didn't have the crews to discharge the passenger on Labor Day. So they brought us some food to eat.

OK. Your uncle and your aunt did?

Yes.

And so they met you at the ship. And were you discharged on Labor Day or the day after?

The day after.

All right. What were your first impressions of what you saw?

Like I'm in a different world.

Yeah? And describe for me what it is that you saw.

Well, you know, New York is very impressive when you come.

Where did your uncle and aunt live?

In Kew Gardens.

In Queens? OK. Did they have their own automobile?

No.

So how did you get from Hoboken to Kew Gardens?

Well, we didn't.

Ah.

We found refuge in a rooming house at 72nd Street near the park.

So you were in Manhattan.

And you usually were able to stay there only a couple of days until you found some el-- someplace else to live. My father was looking for a farm.

Oh, yeah. Not many of those in Manhattan.

No. But he was working with an organization that took him Sundays around to a farm. And so since nobody came after us, they let us stay there for much longer. I remember watching the Thanksgiving Day Parade from there. So we were still there at that time. And I was always hoping my father wouldn't find a farm.

[LAUGHS]

And he didn't.

And he didn't.

So we got an apartment in Washington Heights.

Where so many other Jews from Germany lived. And how did your father-- did he find a job?

Oh, yes.

What kind of a job did he find?

Well, he had the people he bought leather goods from had established themselves here.

Ah.

So he got a job with them.

Doing what he knew how to do.

Right.

OK. So did he continue in reselling different parts of the materials that make shoes? Or did he make shoes?

No, neither.

OK, what did he do?

He was just there selling.

Shoes?

Materials to make shoes and repair shoes.

OK.

And my mother got a job knitting hats.

OK. Was she working in the garment district?

I believe it was, but you could do a lot of the work from home too.

How easy was it for your parents to learn English?

Not easy.

OK. And did they continue speaking German with one another at home?

Yes.

What about for you and your brother?

Well, it was very important for me to learn English. I was very lucky. I was too young to get a working permit, so I had to go to school here. So I started in high school. First year, I had a teacher who was remarkable.

She took me on her lunch hour and taught me English. She had books, children's books and things like that for me to read. And I took English I and II. And my second-year English teacher wrote a note to give me a 65, not to fail me.

So it sounds like it was the first kind experience with teachers who were competent.

Yes. And I took as a language, I took German. And of course, you know--

You did well.

Yes. And I had enough credits for graduation, but I didn't have enough time, not enough school time. So I went to the head of the language department. And I said, I'll do anything. I'll make it up at home. I'll do whatever you tell me to do, but you gotta let me pass. And he did.

OK. Did your brother also have a positive experience in American schools?

Yes.

OK. You were there already in the country then, and you still were in Manhattan when Pearl Harbor happened, December 7, 1941. Do you remember where you were when you learned that there was the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor? Where were you?

We were in the house. The first thing my parents bought was a radio, the very first purchase.

Why? Why would that-- why was that?

They just felt it was important for them to listen to it and to learn the language that way.

OK. Now, I forgot to ask this. But for many people back in Germany when Hitler came to power, if you were a Jewish family, the radio was confiscated. Was that true in your home or not?

No.

No. You still had a radio till the time you left Bургsinn. OK. Describe for me a little bit your first apartment in Washington Heights. How many rooms did it have?

It had two bedrooms, kitchen, and a living room. My brother got the small bedroom. I slept on the couch in the living room, and my parents had the bedroom.

And how many years did you live there?

Until I got married.

Hm. Did you go to college?

I went to Queens College at night.

OK, and what were you doing during the day?

I was working. What was my first job? I was working in a superintendent's office or some buildings on Broadway.

Did anybody ever ask you, from, let's say, the American authorities, what kind of work you were doing at Siemens back in Berlin?

No.

OK. Did you ever go back to Germany?

No.

Did your brother?

Yes.

He did, and your mother did.

Yes.

And what about your father?

My father passed away early. He was 62 when he died.

Oh, what year would that have been?

I don't remember.

Was it still in the '40s or the '50s?

It wasn't in the '40s. It must have been in the '50s because he was 62 when he passed away.

From what?

He had-- he was a heavy smoker.

Ah, OK. What kind of effect, what kind of mark did those years under Nazi rule leave on your parents?

That's a difficult question to answer.

I know.

I think they tried to forget those years as quickly as possible and live their lives that was given to them, literally.

Did their personalities change?

No.

They stayed who they were.

Yeah.

Had you seen your parents during any of those times show stress, or tension, or nervousness, or anger?

Anger, yes, at the unfairness of everything.

But not then internalized and expressed to those around them.

No.

OK.

Because everybody was pretty much in the same boat.

Yeah, yeah. And so there's the same question on you is, what kind of mark did those years leave on you?

Well, as I said, several years ago, the day-- I had made a date to be interviewed, and I didn't sleep for three nights. And I said, it's not worth it. I'm not doing this, so I canceled it. But when this opportunity came, I said, at my age, who knows if I have another opportunity to do it? So I better do it now.

Did you have the same experience? Did you have the same three nights of no sleep?

No. I tried not to think about it, to push it out of my mind, and just go along with the flow. You had background information.

Yeah.

Forgive me for the question I'm about to ask because it may seem self-evident. But what about telling me this story has that effect? What about relaying those experiences, what part of those experiences are the hardest to put words to?

All of them. All of them from the time Hitler came into power until we came here. And the first year was so very difficult here, too, because you didn't really speak the language. And you tried to make it in school, which I wasn't supposed to. My parents figured I would work. But as I said, I wasn't old enough to get a working permit.

So then once I was in school, I begged them to let me finish it. So I always had a job after school because my parents said the only thing we can afford to give you is a roof over your head and the food on the table. Whatever else you need, you have to do it on your own.

So you had to grow up fast.

So I always had a job after school.

Mhm. Do you feel like you didn't have a childhood?

Not a normal one, that's for sure.

Your parents-- I would-- I'm making an assumption, and tell me whether this is a correct assumption. But because they were an older generation, because they left Germany as middle-aged adults, because your father had fought in World War I and had gotten the Iron Cross, they're German as well as Jewish. You know, they're-- I'm getting the sense that you don't have much German identity. But for them, was it difficult for them to stop having a connection to Germany?

I don't think so.

OK.

We were all so relieved that we made it out.

Yeah.

I don't think they had a moment's regret.

OK, OK. And you?

Oh, my heavens, no.

OK. Did your kids ask you much about what your childhood and those years in the 1930s were like?

No.

Did you tell them much?

No.

How did they find out about it?

Well, a couple of years ago-- I think we sent you a copy-- I sat down, and I wrote some things for my children and my grandchildren. And I guess that's how they knew.

So that's the first time your own children knew the details?

Yes.

That's not long ago. That's just a little while ago.

About 10 years.

So they grew up not really knowing much about what your experiences were.

Well, they knew some of it.

OK, OK. Did they ask many questions?

No. Because I figured they knew it was a difficult subject for me to answer. But they certainly wanted me to ask you how they can get a copy of what's going on today.

Oh, I will tell you, and I will tell them. And they'll be able to see it, and hear it, and have a copy of it. That we can be assured of. Is there anything else that I may not have asked you about that you think is an important part of your story?

I think we've pretty much covered.

The one part that I'd like to get a better sense of is, how much has this shaped you? How much did these experiences in the 1930s from the time Hitler comes to power in 1933 to the time you come, you land in Hoboken on Labor Day '41, those eight years, how much of this shaped you to the day now, to now? It may not be a fair question, but I'd like to know.

It shaped me in a way that I was grateful for everything I had here.



Was your husband also a survivor from Europe?

Yes, but he came here in '38.

Quite a bit earlier. OK, also from Germany?

Yes. My first husband.

OK, and his name was what, your first husband?

Louis.

Louis.

Stahl.

Stahl. OK. And how many children do you have?

I have two sons, and I have two stepsons.

OK, and the sons names are?

Kent and Gary.

And the stepsons?

Irv and Norman [? Gastman. ?]

OK, so that was your second husband. Was he also a survivor?

No. He came from Poland in the very early '30s.

OK, OK. Well, thank you very much.

I thank you.

You're more than welcome. It's been an honor. It truly has. And I hope that you don't have any more sleepless nights about this at all. And I'll say then, with this, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Susan Stahl on January 17, 2019, in Delray, Florida. Thanks again.

Thank you so much.

You're welcome. You're welcome.