

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Dana Pomerantsaite-Mazurkevich in Boston, Massachusetts-- excuse me, Brookline, Massachusetts-- on September 25, 2019. Thank you very, very much, Mrs. Dana, for agreeing to speak with us today and to share some of your life experiences during World War II and what came to be known as the Holocaust.

Thank you.

OK. I'm going to start our interview with the most basic questions, and we'll develop things from there.

OK.

OK? So the very first question I have, what was your name at birth, the name you were born and given? Given at birth.

Yes. My name-- [CLEARS THROAT] sorry. Those was Bella. And sometimes my mother thought that she called me Susie.

Susie?

Yeah. I don't know why. Susie or Bella. But this was two names.

OK. And your maiden name was what?

Pomerantsaite.

Pomerantsaite.

Yes.

OK.

My father's name is Pomerants because he lived-- I was born in Lithuania. And it was Pomerantsaite. My father was Pomerants.

And your mother?

Maiden name was Zulkov.

Zulkov, OK.

Yes. And when she got married, Pomeranciene. You know, like that endings.

So it was your name, your father's name, your mother's had-- or at least the two ladies, your mother's and yours, had Lithuanian language endings.

Yes.

OK, even though Pomerants is a Jewish name?

Jewish name, yes.

Yes, OK. And so you were Bella, sometimes Susie, Pomerantsaite.

Yes.

And what was the place you were born in? Where were you born?

When war started, my mother was pregnant with me. Then I was born October 11, 1941, when war started. And my parents-- and of course, I was not born yet-- was sent to Kaunas. I was born in Kaunas ghetto.

Oh, my.

Yeah.

You were actually born in the Kaunas ghetto?

Kaunas ghetto.

And did your parents live in the city of Kaunas before they moved to the ghetto?

Before they moved to the ghetto, my father was quite known, I would say maybe even very famous, violinist.

OK.

Should I maybe tell that here?

Well, first, I want to know. Where did they live before they moved to the ghetto?

In Kaunas.

In Kaunas.

Kaunas.

OK.

And because Germans-- they had to go to ghetto, like all the Jews.

OK. So that means, if you're born October 11, 1941, I believe it was two or three months before then that all the Jews of Kaunas were told, required, to move into the Kaunas ghetto.

Right.

And that was in what part of the city?

What part exactly of the city? Vilijampole.

OK. It was in a section called Vilijampole?

Vilijampole, yes.

OK. And what else did I want to ask you about that? And from what I understand, the Germans attacked what was Soviet Union, and Lithuania was in part of it, in June 20--

Second.

--22, 1941.

You're right.

And so there's these months between June 22 and October 11 when you were born.

Yes.

OK. It's an unusual place to be born.

Very unusual. I was born in a basement, yeah. And it was some kind of doctor there. But I was born, yeah, in the basement. But my mother said that she had a lot of milk. And somehow, that probably helped for me.

Yeah. If there was no food, at least you, as an infant--

She had milk, yeah.

She had milk. OK. And yes, you anticipated my question is, did she have medical attention at the birth?

She said very, very little, very, very little. And of course, ghetto, food and sanitarian conditions-- and October, it's already cold and basically no heating.

And I don't know. I could tell you then when I was such a small baby. Germans would say that they are taking children to children aktion, it was called. And I was 13 times in that kind of lines. Germans would count who today goes back home. To the right, to the left. Rechts, links. Rechts, links.

Rechts, links.

And for 13 times, I was exactly in that line to survive.

That is, I mean, when we think of luck, then that is extraordinarily lucky that you could have easily been-- was your mother holding you each time?

Yes, holding. And she said when she would come home, I was completely blue because she probably was not allowed to feed me. And it was very cold already in October in Lithuania.

And I just would like to tell you another case. When Germans said, you have to bring all the children, yeah, and they would be killed. My mother put me just in a pillow.

And what happened, this will happen. And Germans came, looked around, took that pillow, throw it to the wall, and couldn't find and left. And my mother said when they left, she opened the pillow. I was completely blue from probably injury.

And at that time, somehow, they started-- somebody wrote an article about me. It's called "Silent Child of Ghetto." I have that article.

And one more. I have hundreds of details, but one more. What I think is somehow I had some kind of luck, if you would say, that, again, Germans said to bring children. My father took me in his hands and ran away and tried to hide in some bunker.

And was one bunker where they said, oh, she's too small. She will start to cry. And somebody will find. And we went to five bunkers. And nobody let us in because I was too-- sixth bunker, somebody said-- it was rabbi in the sixth bunker said, oh, we have to let that girl in. How will we feel if something happens?

And all these five bunkers were bombed. And sixth, which I was with my father-- [COUGHS] sorry-- survived. They didn't find, Germans.

These are the sort of things you can't explain.

Yeah, there's something which you cannot explain. Yeah.

Can we cut the camera for a second?

Whoops.

OK, Mrs. Dana. We started--

You can call me Dana.

Dana?

Yeah.

OK, thank you. This is quite a beginning for any life, including an infant and what an infant needs and what an infant went through. I would like to step back a little bit at this point and talk about things that happened before you were born. But maybe you can share with us what you know.

And that would be a little bit about each of your parents. I'll start with your mother. And tell me again. What was her name?

Her name was Liucija.

Lucy?

Lucy, yeah, Zulkov.

Zulkov.

Zulkov was her maiden name.

And was she born in Kaunas or somewhere else?

No, she was born in Kretinga. And she had seven-- it was a family of seven children.

That's a lot.

Yeah, it's a big family. And she studied in Germany. She is in some kind of German lyceum, and children upbringing in languages. She was not a professional musician. Yeah. But when-- I don't know if I'm jumping.

Yeah, let me ask a question. And then we'll go from there. What year was she born? Do you know?

She was born-- I think she was born 1912.

OK.

But she always wanted to look younger that even on her monument when she passed away, she wants 1915, which my mother always hide it.

Hid her age a little bit.

A little age that maybe she's upset now that I'm telling.

Now, so was the family Zulkov in Kretinga for generations? Or had they come from somewhere else?

No, I think they were for generations.

So they were a real Litvack family.

Litvack family, right.

OK. And her father or mother, do you know what they did, how he fed seven children?

I think that he was a teacher. And her mother, I even don't know what she did. I know that my mother's mother was a teacher.

OK. And your mother's father, your grandfather, also a teacher.

Yes. Right.

OK. And in the local schools there or in a Jewish school, do you think?

I think in Jewish school.

OK. So would this have been a shul or a religious school, as well?

I don't know if it was religious. I think it was shul. Probably, it was a religious school, I think.

Yeah. And do you know the names of all her seven siblings?

You know, I don't know all the names. You know, I'm just afraid that I could be making a mistake. I know that one of her siblings was sent to Siberia.

We'll talk about that in a minute. OK.

And then I don't know exactly names. One, two of her sisters, they moved to Israel before war.

Before the war?

Yeah.

OK, so to Palestine.

Yeah, Palestine. Yeah, exactly, Palestine. All the details-- no.

OK. Do you remember any names of the siblings?

You know, I have to look probably, even-- at this point.

No, not really.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Because I never met any of them.

That was the key.

Yeah.

You never met any of your mother's brothers.

I met one of my mother's sister but very, very shortly, maybe in a train station.

Really?

Yeah. When she was going from-- she came to Lithuania, was studying in Moscow. And she was going back to Siberia. And she already at that time, rehabilitated. And I met her in Moscow.

And that was it.

That's it. I didn't met any of her--

So one of her siblings, Zulkov family, at least one, was deported to Siberia by the Soviets.

Right.

And this would have been what year?

She was deported '41. And later, I had a little bit about her that because she was deported to Siberia, somehow, she didn't die during Holocaust. Siberia, also a thousand-- million people died. But somehow she survived. But she survived being in Siberia.

Yeah. And this is the one that you met at the train station.

Yes.

Do you know why she was deported to Siberia, what the reason was?

I don't think you had to have a reason to be deported. Very often, if you knocked one door-- they were very simple people. But if you knocked one door and that neighbor is not there, they knocked another door and take another family. I don't think that-- even if they had maybe a little shop, they already were considered maybe not very poor.

And maybe because-- I don't think-- maybe somebody said something, you know? It didn't have to be a lot of reasons.

Yeah, yeah. And this is the only sibling that of your mother's that you ever met.

Yes. Right.

And your mother herself, what kind of education did she have growing up in Kretinga? Did she go to this shul?

She went to the shul. But then she went and studied, in German, Lyceum.

And where in Germany would that have been?

I don't know exactly the name, exactly, where she studied. But I know that, basically, she played piano, children education, and languages.

That's what she studied?

Yes.

Languages, children's education, pedagogy.

Yes.

Well, the German border was actually not very far from Kretinga.

Not far, exactly. Exactly.

So it could have been Koenigsberg. It could have been somewhere in the Prussian area that-- OK. And all of the other siblings perished in the Holocaust?

Couple two sisters survived in Israel.

OK. And everybody else, not?

Yes.

Including grandparents?

Yeah, exactly. You're right.

OK. Let's turn to your father now. You mentioned before that he was a very prominent, well-known violinist.

Right.

What was his first name?

Daniel.

OK. And where was he born?

He was born-- my mother was born in Kretinga. He was born in Siauliai.

OK.

And then he went to study Naujalis muzikos mokykla, school of music.

Music, OK.

Yeah. And then, being very young, with his brother-- his name was Juliano or Yehuda.

Yehuda, OK.

They want to study in Berlin. Yeah. And my father studied in Berlin Conservatorium and also took some lessons from very known violinist Bronislaw Huberman. He was teaching in Vienna. And sometimes my father was going to Vienna and getting lessons from him.

And he had very good career playing classical music and was very much enjoying. But at some point, he felt that he would like to become just violinist. I'm a little bit far from jazz. Even I like it, but I'm not playing any jazz. I wish, maybe. And he played in some jazz orchestra.

Can I stop you just for a second? Do you know the year he was born?

Oh, of course, 2004-- 2000s. 1904.

OK. So when he goes to study in Germany, is it during World War I? Is it before World War I? These times when his career is taking place, do you know how old he is, where he's studying, and then start--

I think he was going there almost when he was around 16.

So that would have been after World War I.

Yeah.

In the 1920s is when he studies there and his career develops.

Right, right.

OK. An interesting time to be in Berlin.

Yeah, very interesting. Very interesting time.

And about how many years was he a classical violinist?

From childhood, of course, till about 20, 22, he was classical violinist. But then he played Marek Weber, I think, orchestra. And then he came back to Lithuania. He arranged Daniel Pomerants orchestra.

And he played in that kavãne, cafe. Classical music, very classical music. Maybe not Bach or something a little bit heavier. But he played a lot of Wieniawski, Sarasate, different composers. And he played in Konrad. It was the name of that cafe at that time, Konrad Cafe.

And where was that Konrad Cafe located?

In Kaunas, Laisves Aleja.

So the Liberty Avenue, it would have been.

Yes.

OK.

And he was extremely, extremely popular there. A lot of poets, writers, actors would come there just to listen to him--

Play.

Him play.

So it sounds that he got his training with cultural elite in Germany and himself becomes part of the cultural society when he returns to Lithuania during most of-- I mean, if we're talking the mid-1920s is when he returns, those are years of great development and growth. And Kaunas was the center of it, being a provisional capital.

Right.

Did he ever tell you stories about this cafe life later, after the war, about what it was like before?



I know a lot about him. He is not very much talkative, especially when he came after concentration camp. He told something. But a lot I've heard about his playing, about his personality is from my adoptive mother, Elena Petrauskiene and Petrauskas, who were constantly-- or many, many other artists.

I know to get to listen to him play, people were staying in lines and lines. Even president, Lithuanian Smetona at that time, also would come to--

To hear him.

To hear him play. Somehow he was very popular that when I, myself, played in Chicago, one lady said that so many ladies had fallen in love with him that she asked if she could, for memory, cut a little bit of my hair. And I said, you're welcome.

[LAUGHS] Wow. And where did he meet your mother?

You know, it's very interesting. He had many admirers. But somehow, the way he talked and the way my mother talked, that when he played something and suddenly my mother came in-- and just one look, and he fell in love. He talks like that.

OK. So at any rate, he noticed her. She came to one of his concerts, and he noticed her.

Right, right.

OK. So this was not an arranged marriage.

Oh, no, no, no, no, no. No, no.

OK. Do you know the year that they married, what year that was?

I think they married one year before war started. They married about 1940.

OK. So he was part of this cultural life and playing with his orchestra up until World War II and even a little bit into World War II.

Right, right.

Let's turn a little bit now to your parents' personalities. I'd like to know. You mentioned just in passing that your father wouldn't talk or didn't talk much about his early years and his studying, and you learned from other people.

What kind of a personality did he have? Was he reserved? Was he outgoing? What was he like?

You know, about him, I can just talk nonstop. He was extremely kind. Just take--

Sure, sure. Take a drink.

Get emotional when I talk about him.

Mm-hmm.

He was extremely kind personality, extremely warm, that I think he had some kind of aura that I think why people were so attached to him-- that he really radiated that aura. He was very, very kind, very giving. All the money-- I think he was quite successful. Poor people would come and constantly ask him money. And he was giving everything almost away.

I think he had personality almost like child purity personality, that kind of personality. I know that when-- my aunt told, when war started, there was some kind of market. And he had violin. He put the violin, put a note who will give him instead-- oh, not violin. I'm sorry. Watch, he had a watch.

Put a note-- please take a watch, but give me--

Some money for it.

Some bread. He was ready to exchange for bread. But somebody took that watch but, of course, didn't give any bread. That's what they say.

You say with the purity of a child.

Yes.

OK.

Some kind of almost naive. I think he helped so many people and financially, not financially. To me, he's a saint.

Aw. And this is, you say, from before the war as well as after the war.

Yeah.

Now, one thing I forgot to ask about his siblings-- you mentioned a brother, Julian.

Yeah, Yehuda or Julian.

Yehuda. Entschuldige. Yehuda. And did he have any other brothers and sisters?

He had all bro-- his family was very, very, very close, which I met-- he had a sister, Sarah, a sister, Fania, Fania, that brother, Yehuda, and Shmuel.

Smuel?

Yeah, who survived. My father survived. Yehuda survived.

Daniel, Yehuda.

Sarah and Fania--

Sarah survived and Fania.

Other four--

So there were four more.

Four, yeah, each of them.

There were four more children?

Eight children.

Eight children. And did they all-- how did they--

Concentration camp.

OK. And do you know which one?

I think they were-- my Aunt Sarah and Fania, yeah, and Judith-- Sarah and Judith I knew very well, very well. And Sarah, we are so close. She passed away, but she didn't have children. So I was like her daughter.

Which year they-- Sarah was in an concentration camp, Buchen--

Buchenwald?

Not Buchenwald. And maybe later I can-- on the letter B.

OK.

But it wasn't Bergen Belsen?

Can maybe you stop, and I could-- if you would like, I--

No, we can look at it later during a break. We can determine this.

OK. She was in that concen-- they all were in that concentration camp.

OK, so they were not in Siauliai ghetto.

No.

They were in Germany.

Yeah, exactly.

And my father was also in Dachau, in Auschwitz.

OK, but he still was in a ghetto in Lithuania before that.

Yeah, right.

OK. How did his father support eight children in Siauliai?

I don't know.

OK.

I don't know.

Were your grandparents on your father's side-- had they already passed away before World War II?

Yes.

OK.

Yes, for sure. I never--

So there were eight children left, of which four survived.

Yes.

Daniel, Yehuda, Faige, and--

Fania and Sarah.

Fania and Sarah. OK. And Shmuel passed away?

Yeah.

I mean, was killed.

Yeah.

And do you know the names of the others who were killed?

I don't know names. But I know they passed away in concentration camp.

OK, OK. All right, I'm sorry. I should have asked this before. This is in the middle of when I'm asking about your father and--

Yeah.

All right. So what brought your mother to Kaunas from Kretinga? Kretinga is a small town, and Kaunas is the capital city at that time.

Probably, she decided to go maybe to see the city or to find some job there. I think she had her reasons to go to Kaunas and maybe to start to work in Kaunas.

OK. Did she return to Kretinga after meeting your father?

No, I don't think she returned.

OK. And they meet. They marry in 1940.

And was a big uproar, because my second mother, Petrauskiene Elena, told that so many women were completely upset with him and wanted to ignore him in the beginning that he married because--

Up until then, he's a--

Was a hope.

Oh, yeah. There was hope that this bachelor would choose someone else.

Exactly.

Well, that's kind of cute. I wonder if your father was aware of all this attention.

I think he was aware.

So later, we'll come to this part. Your adopted family, then, they knew your father from before the war.

Yes, they knew because Kipras Petrauskas and my father-- Kipras Petrauskas was a big opera singer, of course. And

Elena Zalinkevicaite-Petrauskiene was a famous actress and poet. That was very, very famous family.

And they lived on a street at that time named Kipras Petrauskas Street.

So he already had a street named after him.

Yeah. Yes.

That's something.

That's something, that. And because they went to listen my father play, of course, they knew each other very well.

So when your father formed this orchestra, it wasn't just jazz music that he played. You said some light classical music?

Yeah. He played jazz and, with Lithuanians, artists like Dvarionas, a singer, another singer. And he also played classical music. Yeah.

Did he play popular music, such as tango music and things like that?

With orchestra, yes. Yes. And that, his orchestra, Daniel Pom-- he's considered father of Lithuanian jazz music.

Oh, wow. Oh, wow.

He played tango and waltzes with his orchestra. They had a very beautiful sound. And my father actually had beautiful, beautiful violin sometimes. I listen to his sound and thinking about my sound.

Very little, of course, but I think there is some--

Connection.

Connection, yes, spiritual connection.

And was any of his music recorded before the war?

You know what? Actually, I would like to show you.

OK, hang on just a--

His orchestra did about 11 records in London by Columbia artists.

Before the war?

Yeah.

We will film this later. At the end of the interview, we will film that. That's amazing.

That is, to me, very sacred because somehow, somebody had these old recordings and gave them to me. That, to me, is unbelievable.

And it's quite an achievement.

Yes.

11?

11, yeah.

11 albums or records.

With London, Columbia Records.

And so did the whole orchestra go to London?

Yes. Yes, yes.

The whole orchestra?

Yes.

So it must have been quite an event in those days.

Yes, of course.

Do you know what year this was recorded?

I think it was actually '30-something, '36 or something like that.

OK. Now, of course, you're born in the basement in a ghetto and so on. Do you know what kind of place your parents lived in before they had to leave it? Did they ever describe the home they had together?

No, they didn't describe what home. I think probably it was a nice home because what I would like to say, that my father's family was very, very close. That what my father-- because like I said, he was so giving. He built a house. And in that house, all his eight brothers and sisters lived together. That shows. And when my mother got married-- not my mother, father got married, they lived in the same house.

So this was a house he built in Kaunas.

Yes, in Kaunas.

And so all of his eight brothers and sisters were also in Kaunas.

Yeah, exactly.

And so when they had to leave-- that is, when everyone was told they have to go to the ghetto-- did all of these eight brothers and sisters go together?

I don't know if they got together in the ghetto. I will tell you my father before-- not my father, Yehuda.

Yehuda, your uncle.

Yeah, my uncle went to Italy.

Before the war.

Yeah, he was a pianist. And he was a composer. I met him many times. And my father, many people were musicians. And he went to Italy.

And he survived there because he met an Italian woman. And somehow, he managed.

I see. OK. But the rest of the siblings were living in this house.

Living in the house. And when everybody had to go together, I don't know if exactly at the same time or somebody was sent immediately in concentration camp. I don't know that for sure. But I know that Sarah and Fania and my father, they went together.

OK, so at least the three were all in there. OK, OK. So I think that brings me up back to where we had been before, which is, is there anything else from your parents' pasts that you think is significant that they told you, that is of interest to you, that you would like to share with other people? Because I try to go back a little bit.

What is back? I think this what-- I don't know anything more.

Got it. Because you know what I think is-- when my parents there went through Holocaust, went to concentration camp, my father, yeah-- when they came back, somehow, I cannot say that they were talking so much about the past.

And I asked my father about concentration camp. And I understood. When I wanted to know more, I understood that, for him, it became almost like a fork. Even I know some details, but I know that they were not so much talkative, yeah, about that.

Yeah, many people report that. They wanted to forget. They wanted to go forward for whatever reason, whether not talking helped to go forward.

Your mother's personality. You told me a little bit about your father. Tell me about your mother.

You know, I think probably because they got married, probably if another woman would be like my father, I'm not sure if they would be able to survive. I think my mother is a different personality. It's a little bit down to earth. If my father was constantly flying, my mother was walking on the ground.

That's a beautiful way of putting it.

Yeah. I understand that. I understand that. But when I was adopted, for me-- maybe we'll go later, yeah.

We'll come to that later, yeah.

That was a little bit some kind of difficulty for me.

OK.

But she was very caring, very caring. Because my father was very hugging and kissing. And my mother was a little bit on colder side. She was not so outgoing. That, I felt difference.

So she was a bit more reserved.

Exactly.

More reserved, a little bit more down to earth.

Yes.

Well, you know, they say opposites attract.

Yes, yes.

Yeah. And often, a couple needs that. If somebody flies, somebody has to be on the ground.

I agree. I agree.

All right. Now we're back in the ghetto. Did your parents ever tell you what kind of living quarters they had in the ghetto where you were born?

It was some kind of one room. When I was filming my movie-- not my movie, but movie about me and my adopted parents and my parents-- I went to that part where it was, ghetto, and it was some little houses with still stink, even now.

I don't know if you can say a house. It's not a house. It's one room and--

A shack.

A shack, yeah. And it's just unbelievable conditions.

OK. So you saw the general area of what the ghetto houses were, not necessarily the specific house that they lived in.

Yeah.

Well, you had luck for 13 attempts. And it's amazing that-- I would have thought if you had cried, then that would have sealed your fate.

Yeah, exactly.

If you were in line or in the pillow or in any of these situations--

The bunker, yeah.

In the bunker. So that article called "The Silent Child" certainly sounds appropriate.

Right. But I will tell you once, when I cried a little bit.

You did, OK.

Yeah.

All right. So your parents are there with you. And there is action after action, roll call after roll call. I take it that when you were in the pillow is when the Germans come into whatever living quarters they have and are looking for children.

Yeah.

And they don't find you. What happens then?

My mother, because she was more realistic, she had that feeling that-- she was sure that I will not survive. How many times can you be lucky?

Then she asked somebody who had sleeping pills, yeah, to give me unbelievable-- now, in beginning, amount of pills. I don't know, maybe one, two. And I couldn't fall asleep.

Because my mother met one person. His is Simanauskas, yeah.

Who was Simanauskas?



Balys Simanaukas. He was Lithuanian. He worked in a fur factory. Yeah, factory. And my mother spoke with him if he would be able, in a sack of potato, to put me in because he had possibility to come to ghetto.

Now, how did she meet him in a fur factory?

She knew probably him before.

OK.

And because my mother also-- Germans were asking sometimes to take peoples who worked in some kind of factory. A little bit a type of ghetto, I think they were working.

Somehow, she met. And he said yes. Try to make her asleep. And I will try to get her out.

Now, did she already have some place for you to go?

Oh, yeah. My mother knew Elena Petrauskiene, yes. What had happened-- when she was so underground, she got in touch with Petrauskiene. And they agreed my mother, when she walked outside of ghetto, she agreed to meet Petrauskiene, Elena, in a small-- it was a small monastery, some kind of church or monastery.

And she agreed to meet there. But Petrauskiene didn't know what is the reason. And my mother came. And she met her. And she said, what you would like? You look terrible. What you would like to tell me?

And it's exactly not more than less. My mother said-- I saw that in another documentary. I cannot normally even tell about that. My mother said, I have a baby girl. She has blue eyes, blond hair. She doesn't look like a Jewish girl. She looks not like a Jew. Could you save her?

And Elena didn't think even one second, thinking because she had her own three children, was very famous, living on the name of their street. She said, bring her. Try to somebody to bring her.

How do you know? I'm sorry. I'm playing devil's advocate. How do you know that it wasn't even a second before she says, bring her?

My mother told that. My mother told that. And I will tell you. When we were in that church corridor, yes?

The courtyard.

Yeah, courtyard. And I must tell you. And her daughter, Ausra, and myself, they were filming. We both cried. And then a monakhina? How you say, monakhina?

Oh, is it a monk?

Monk, but woman.

Monakhina? Abbess, maybe, or nun or something.

She said, why are you crying? And we shortly told that story. And she started to cry. Because in that courtyard, I had goose bumps because it felt like it's happening there, what almost in the air.

You felt the connection.

Yeah, I felt that here, something had-- and then it was the question, how to get to me out of ghetto?

I want to interrupt in this point and say thank you for telling me about the film that was made about you and your

parents and the Petrauskas family. Film was done a few years ago.

Yeah.

Now it's 2019. And in that film, this episode is mentioned with the added information that your mother in the ghetto, when she leaves, calls by phone Mrs. Petrauskas and pretends to be somebody else.

It's not that she called. When my mother wanted to meet Elena--

To meet her.

Because my mother had a sister who was in Kretinga. Her husband was a very famous doctor who actually was also a very nice doctor, who was healing and sick and very poor, didn't have money. And Elena Petrauskiene and my mother's sister, very close friends.

Do you remember the name of this mother's sister?

Karlinskiene. And I will give you last name, Karlinskiene. But first name, at this point-- some also.

OK. So Karlinskiene, your mother calls and says she's Karlinskiene?

My mother called and said she is Karlinskiene. And when in that courtyard, because my mother was afraid-- what about she would not come?

If Petrauskiene would not come if she just presents herself as herself?

Yes.

Because they don't know each other.

They're not, yeah, very known. But Karlinskiene was then very good friend. Then when Petrauskiene came and saw my mother, she said, I don't recognize you. This was a new look. So what's happened? Something like that.

OK. So your mother just pretended she was her own sister.

Yeah, but then she told. I was afraid that you will not come.

Come and so on and so forth.

Yeah.

And then this man, Simanovichus--

Then they gave me big amount of pills, and I couldn't sleep, like having had that premonition that something will happen. Finally, like my mother, they gave me a horse dose. I fall asleep.

Simanovichus, he risked his life. Definitely, he risked his life. He took me in that sack, put potatoes, put on his-- I think on his shoulder.

On his back? Mm-hmm.

And at that moment, when we were passing ghetto border, I probably didn't have enough air, and I maybe started to cry. This is what I'm talking about. I said, [WHIMPERS].

Like that?

Yeah. And that German soldier asked, "was is das?" Who is that? And he said, "eine kleine Schweine." A little piglet.

A little pig. [LAUGHS]

And then he said, let's go.

He let him out.

Yeah. And Simanovichus still said when he brought to Petrauskiene's house, he knocked. In the beginning, nobody answered. And he said, if nobody is home, I will take that girl. Because he said I was so sweetly sleeping with so much dose.

But opened. And Elena asked, what is her name? And he said, I don't know. And they decided to call me Danute. And this is how my name is now.

And so you have stayed Danute.

Dana then and now Danute.

OK.

That name's disappeared.

All right. So Danute is a nickname, sort of like a--

No, Dana and Danute.

Dana and Danute.

Yeah.

Danute is the name in Lithuanian.

But in Lithuania, when I go to Lithuania, everybody calls me Danute. Here, people call me Dana, "Day-na."

OK. Let's step back a little bit. Tell me what you know about Mr. Simanovichus. What was his first name?

Balys.

Balys. And you say he worked in a fur factory?

Yes.

What else do you know about him, about his family, about his background?

I know that he had his wife, yes. And I know his granddaughter, which is now director of Vilnius--

Gaon.

Yeah, Museum, Holocaust Museum.

Uh-huh, Gaon Museum.

Yes. And actually, October 17, she's coming to Boston.

Oh, how nice. And she will stay with us in our house.

OK. But of his background-- again, I'm referencing the film that was seen-- is that he ends up in Siberia after the war.

Yes.

Do you know why?

I don't know why. But we spoke also with-- Camille is her name. I don't think that it was any reason to send.

So he was deported.

Deported, exactly.

He was deported, but there was no reason that you know of why he was deported.

No.

Do you know if he was a well-to-do person, whether he was an owner of anything?

I think probably he was because he worked in that-- probably he was maybe owner, but I don't know why they deported. I don't know.

OK, OK. All right.

But he was rehabilitated.

Rehabilitated.

Yes, exactly.

OK. Did you ever meet him after that?

No, no.

Oh, I see.

I never met him.

So even later after the war-- of course, he wasn't there anymore.

Yeah, right.

OK. So let's go back now. And you are newly named in the Petrauskas family. The door opens. Mrs. Petrauskas is there.

Yeah.

And then what happens?

Then everybody starts to say, how come you have that little girl? Then she said that her relative who lived in Ukraine because of war asked her to take care of this child for her for a while. That's how she told.

Do you think that explanation worked?

I don't think that it worked because she remembered-- she told me that when she went to wash my little blouse, and she didn't notice that it was that star. And she put it outside. And somebody said, what you have?

And she said she felt that she has to leave. And she went to area near Palanga.

All right. Tell us what is Palanga. What is Palanga?

Palanga is Lithuanian. It's a summer resort near the ocean.

Oh, OK. So it's an ocean resort.

Yes, yes.

OK. And so when she washed your blouse, was that soon after you came or after a year or two?

No, no, no. After I just came.

After you just came.

Yeah.

So she leaves with you.

Yes, yes.

And what about her own children?

She had all her three children. That's what they say. She risks her life, her husband's life, and her three children's life. If Germans would find out, of course, all the family would be killed.

But despite that, being by herself, unbelievable beautiful, unbelievable beautiful. Very talented, very warm. She risked-- unbelievable.

What are the names of her children, the three children?

Ausra.

Ausra.

Goda.

Goda.

Luka.

Luka. And Luka is a girl or a boy?

Boy.

And Goda, girl or a boy?

Girl.

And Ausra?

Girl.

Girl, so two girls and a boy.

Yeah. Ausra is alive. Goda and Luka passed away.

OK. I mean, everything that we've talked about up until now is really things that people told you because you were a baby.

Yeah.

I'd like to ask you now about your earliest memories. What are the first things in your own mind that you remember from your childhood?

Actually, very early, I remember when we started to run when war was going, Russians coming, and Germans coming. And everybody started to run away going west. And I remember that constantly bombarding.

You were three years old at the time.

Yeah, yes. That, I remember. And what I remember-- I remember that warmth of my adopted mother and her children and especially her. For example, I remember when it was very big shortage of food. And she would take a hair and get the bread and measure by that hair that all children, including me, would get the same amount.

Wow. Wow.

And also, I don't know if it's connected. But I remember then when we were in train station. And we had to go into train. But this, Ausra told me that suddenly, I got lost. I remember me quite early.

And I started to look, to look. And you know, when 1,000 people-- and I fall asleep. Somebody had some package, you know what, and whatever. I was so small. I fall asleep.

And they couldn't go to that train because they couldn't find me. Finally, they found me. That train left. It was late. And five minutes later, the train was bombed.

My goodness, another miracle.

Another miracle.

Like the bunker. Like the bunker. Now, when Elena moved with her children to Palanga, did they have a summer resort there, a summer house in Palanga?

They didn't had their own house. But they stayed in a summer house.

OK.

Sorry. Petrauskas he went to another residence because he liked fishing and hunting. But then he couldn't come back because already, it was closed.

All right. But what I want to try and establish-- again, I'm going back a little bit. When you come to her home, if you're born in 1941, you are probably at least a year old or a year and a half old.

Yeah.

So it would be 1942 or early 1943 that you were in her home on the street that her husband is named-- is named after her husband. And she washes the little blouse right away or soon afterwards, hangs it up without thinking because it has the star on it. And it's noticed, which sounds to me like she leaves Kaunas--

Exactly.

Right away. She no longer lives in Kaunas.

Yes, exactly.

Her husband does not join her. Her husband stays there in Kaunas.

No, her husband, Kipras Petrauskas, goes to their residence in the countryside because he said, I will come later.

OK. But again, nevertheless, even if you're there in 1943, it's at least a year and a half before you are three years old and you hear the bombs.

Yeah.

So in this year and a half, they lived apart?

Yes, exactly.

OK. And the place where he had another residence, what part of the country was it in?

Maybe later, even I have somewhere written. Now I don't remember the name.

OK. Was it in Samogitia, Aukstaitija?

Samogitia.

It was in Samogitia.

Yeah.

The reason I'm asking is I'm trying to establish, geographically, the distance between them. And does he join them? Doesn't he join them?

Mm-hmm. No, he didn't join them.

He did not join them.

Yeah.

Did he continue working throughout the war? Did he continue singing while there was a German occupation?

This, I don't know, during occupation if he was singing or not.

OK. Do you know whether, during the first Soviet occupation, he was singing or not?

I think that he was singing, yeah, because before, he was singing a lot of Italy, in Italy and Milan. And I read one review

which they said, he had 15-minute standing ovation.

Oh, wow.

Yeah. And I know that he was singing in Rio de Janeiro, in London, in all the biggest opera houses in the world. And they together were traveling in Paris. They spent a lot of time abroad.

So you're born into a family with a prominent violinist.

Yes.

And you get adopted by a family that has a very prominent opera singer.

Exactly, yeah.

In Lithuania.

And she, actress.

And she's an actress.

Drama, theater, actress.

OK. But I take it, during the war-- that is, during the German occupation--

I don't think that--

Neither was working in there for the Russians.

Exactly.

OK. What else did I want to ask about Palanga? Do you have any memories of Palanga? At that time?

Not too many.

So what you really start remembering is when you're on the road, when there's the bombing.

Yeah, exactly.

And do you know which train station it was that they lost you?

No, I don't know so many details.

OK, OK. It's OK. I asked them, and I realize that I am asking somebody who's three years old. And if someone asked me, what were you doing at three years old? I would not be able to tell them with the clarity that you are telling me. So I realize this.

And now especially, being a little bit older.

[LAUGHS] Yeah. So where were you moving to? That is, if there is movement, where is everybody going?

At this time, the way I understand when we spoke with Ausra, Germans were pressing and Russians were pressing, yes? And some people, they moved. And some people were also afraid of Russians because, also, of Russians' history.



Finally, we finished with all the bombing. I remember that we were hiding under the tree or in some kind of hole. Finally, we finished, in German-- how they call that? How you call that? Exiled people.

Like refugees?

Refugee camp.

You were in a displaced persons--

Oh, exactly, displaced refugee camp.

Well, that's a long way from Palanga.

Probably, yeah.

A very long way. Do you know what sector you were in in the displaced persons camps?

I think we were in Effelbaum Maybe I'm not pronouncing exactly that city. Or in two cities.

Was it in the American sector or the British sector?

I think it was American, displaced people sector.

In American sector.

Yeah, I think, because at some point, we started to get a little bit of egg powder, American egg powder. Because food was big, big shortage, big, big shortage.

So what this also tells me is that as a three-year-old little girl, aside from the memories that you tell me about, about the bombs and the planes and the train station, you don't have a memory of really traveling from Palanga all the way to the western part of Germany.

Yes.

OK.

I have the just memory, the traveling when it was bombing, bombing, bombing.

OK.

That is somehow some kind of traveling.

And it's connected.

Yes.

It's all connected. Who was with you, then? It was your adopted mother, her three children, and you.

Me and her mother-- Elena, my adopted mother.

Yeah.

And actually, I probably forgot to mention that when she adopted me, my name became not Pomerantsaite but Petrauskaite. I had--

You had papers.

Maybe I will show you. I'd become Danute Petrauskaite.

Now, did you know you were adopted? No.

So this is your real mother, as far as you're concerned.

100%. I don't want to jump ahead, but that was quite big, I would say, almost tragedy for me, for a child. Later, later.

Yeah, yeah.

I didn't know. She gave so much love and so much warmth and care about me that I'm like her own children. And in some ways, being from actors, poet, traveling the world, it's amazing, you know? To start with that little baby.

OK. But at this stage, this is your mother. Your father is out still in his summer residence someplace in Samogitia.

Adopted father.

I know, I know. But for you, at that point, he's your father.

Yes.

OK. And you don't see him much because you leave Kaunas.

No, not much. Yes, exactly.

All right. And why doesn't he join the family?

Because in the beginning, he decided that he would like to go hunting. He didn't like that resort area. And he had his house there that he decided to go hunting and fishing. He was a very good hunter when he-- in older age, he still was hunting. But when he decided to come, then it was war already didn't let him go.

So in other words, the front was at that--

The front, yeah.

--was at that spot where he was on one side, one army, and the other army. So he was on the Soviet side where there was the Soviet army. And the Nazi army, the German army, is on the other.

And as you're retreating-- that is, with your adopted mother, but for you, real mother-- and her children and her mother, her father came, too, or not? Or just was her mother?

Mother and father.

OK. So the two grandparents, the three children, and she, Elena.

And her sister.

And her sister?

Yeah, and her sister's children.

Oh my goodness. So this was quite a clan.

Yeah, it was a--

A big group.

Yeah, a big group.

All of you are leaving. All of you are traveling.

And he couldn't come just because it was caught in the middle.

OK. And you end up in the American zone in west Germany where eventually you get powdered eggs.

Yeah.

OK. What can you tell me about the circumstances? What was around you in West Germany? What do you remember of where you lived?

I just somehow-- would say I don't remember too much. Don't remember too much. Probably everything is a little bit foggy.

OK. Do you remember how long you stayed there?

I remember, like Ausra said, that if some soldier would come, Italian soldiers came, I would somehow try to pretend something till the end of the war, till the end of the war.

All right. Well, by the time it became the American zone, that's already after the war because Germany is partitioned. So you reach there, maybe, before the end--

Before, before end of the war.

And if you don't remember it, do you know now how long you stayed there in that displaced persons camp?

I think we came back because my mother got in touch with Red Cross. Petrauskas got in touch somehow. We got in touch. And I think they came back in '48.

So that means you were there three years.

I think '48.

So you're in a displaced persons camp for three years. That's a long time.

I think so. I think so.

OK. And you're still a little girl.

Yeah, when--

You're still only six or seven years old.

Yeah, I remember when we came already when we-- you know what? OK, maybe I'll jump. And when we came back in Lithuania, in Kaunas, train station there, hundreds and hundreds of people with cameras and photojournalism, maybe because of my father, that whole story of Petrauskas.

And my mother and father, by height, they're not very tall. And Petrauskas was very, very tall. And I remember when my father grabbed me. And he was not shaving. And my mother grabbed me. And I said to myself, what the hell? Who is--

Who are these people?

Who are these people?

So you're talking now about your real parents.

I'm talking first time when I met my-- coming back to Lithuania.

Let's stop there for the moment because we've got the three years that I want to focus on even if you don't have many memories of them. How does Elena find out if your parents, your real parents, survived the Holocaust?

Because my father was in Dachau, in concentration camp in Auschwitz, also. Somehow, my mother, who, during war, she was not in concentration camp, she was hiding in Petrauskas' house in Kaunas.

In Kaunas?

In Kaunas, yeah. When she escaped from ghetto, yeah, she went and asked people, where is Kipras Petrauskas? And she looked probably-- not probably-- terrible. She came to that house.

Which Elena no longer lived in.

No, no longer. And she was hiding in that house.

With Kipras Petrauskas himself there?

No, nobody lived that. No, a maid opened, let her in. They colored her hair. And when Germans, because some kind of another house where Germans lived-- then they came in. And they decided that she also is a maid because my mother studied in Germany. Then she knew good--

Speak German.

German. And she colored yellow hair, yeah, light hair. And they came looking probably for her. And they decided that she's a maid. She told that she's Petrauskas' maid.

OK. So that suggests maybe we should retrace your parents' steps, your real parents' steps, as to what really-- after you are taken away in the sack of potatoes, they continue living in the ghetto.

They continue living in the ghetto. But my father had a small orchestra in the ghetto, yeah, which they were playing.

Playing.

Yeah. But at some point, my father was taken to concentration camp. And his sister, Sarah, also taken to concentration camp. And Fania also taken to concentration camp.

The same camp?

The same camp.

So they were all taken to Dachau?

No, actually, mistaken. Not the same. But my father, Dachau. And they on letter Buchen-- on letter B.

Oh, this is on that B.

Mm-hmm.

OK, OK. And so that's his fate is that he is taken to concentration camp.

And actually, I don't know if I'm jumping, but I would like to talk about, again, so many miracles that how my father, being so fragile-- about violin, which somehow goes in both of our lives.

In concentration camp, he had frozen hands or something. But some German who liked very much music, he said, what you did before war? And he said, I was violinist. And he brought some kind of violin and asked him--

To play.

To play. And my father said, a couple times, he gave him a piece of bread. Once, he couldn't play because he had very bad hands, frozen, that he beat him unbelievable.

That same German?

The same German. But when he came from concentration camp, I think he was a little bit foggy. Let's put it this way. But when he liked when he played, somehow, he gave him-- he said that it helped him, that little--

That little piece of bread.

Yeah. And why I feel that connection, this is not the war now. When I was studying at Moscow Conservatory, we were going on a concert tour in Kamchatka, which is not far from Japanese border.

And I put my violin here, holding my back, because I had premonition, which I very often had, that something would happen. And we were here. People were sitting near me. And we were going that direction.

And from that direction, a truck was coming. And our driver-- it was a small little bus-- felt that he couldn't stop. He jumped from the car and let our little bus completely collide in high speed, winter time, with that truck. And I, because I was holding my violin--

In your back.

That I crushed my violin in small pieces. Oh, just-- [COUGHS]

Mm-hmm. Let's cut the camera. OK.

I had my violin on my lap. But the last minute, I held here. And I hold my violin. And I crush my violin-- and actually, I brought here, if you would like to film-- in tiny, tiny pieces. And I was thrown out from cuvette-- into cuvette with all my violin pieces on the snow. And all the people around me died.

Are you the only survivor?

Yes. That again, how my father said that violin in concentration camp who gave him to play helped him to survive, and how my violin.

How old were you when this incident happened?

I was a student at Moscow Conservatory.

So 20, 22?

Yeah. I studied with David Oistrakh, one of the most famous violinists in the world. And you know what? With that violin, again, I didn't had my-- I was without violin. Then when I studied, I was given by government Stradivarius because everybody knew that story.

But when we left Soviet Union, I couldn't take that violin. I was dreaming to find a-- to have a violin and jokingly told my husband, oh, maybe I will meet some old man and he fall in love and present me violin. And we usually played in Philadelphia. And really, after that, some came--

Somebody came?

Came. We started to speak stories and that and that. And he said, come to New York. I have two violins. And he presented us and that violin which I play now.

Was it also a Stradivarius?

Nikolo Gagliano, which is also very high level.

Wow. Wow.

And it was just present.

So in your life and in your father's life, violin meant life.

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. You exactly expressed right.

OK. So your father, of the memories that he tells you from Dachau, this is one where the violin saved him.

Yes.

And in the meantime, when he's in Dachau, your mother is in Petrauskas' home.

Petrauskas' house like a maid.

Yeah, hiding and posing as a maid. And that's how she spends-- at some point, the ghetto was liquidated.

Yeah, right.

And so he's taken one place, and she is able to run away.

Yes.

And this is where she stays. Now, when you're with your adopted mother in the American sector in west Germany, do you find out? Does she find out that your real parents are alive?

She found out. And she had agreement with my mother that if I'm alive, that she will return.

And if they're alive.

If everybody's alive, yeah. But when we returned, yeah, and even when we returned that first moment, nobody told me that I have different parents. I sometimes hear, let's say in United States or probably anywhere, they call you, prepares

you that you have different parents.

And suddenly, being already six years old about, from blue sky, I was told one day after that, here is my parents. And I must tell you. That, for me, was such a shock because I was very, very--

Attached.

Attached to her and to Ausra, to all the children. Very, very attached. My mother tried to bring me and my father to her home but without any preparation. And of course, I would start to cry. And I lost my hair. And I was vomiting. I couldn't accept that.

So you were in stress.

Unbelievable. Unbelievable stress. And then I was going in that house and in that house and that house, that house. And finally, even one day was like that, that I was in my mother's house. And I was thinking that she was not very nice to me.

And I went to adopted parents' house. They lived quite far on a hill, quite far, in Vilnius.

Back in Kaunas? Oh, now in Vilnius.

No, in Vilnius.

So both parents now live in Vilnius.

In Vilnius. Yes, I a little bit jumped. And being in Vilnius in adopted parents' house, I went to bed and suddenly start to feel guilty, guilty that now probably my mother is crying. How I can do-- at 2 o'clock at night, I went back to my real parents' house.

My mother opened the door. I came in. I was not spoiled. But my bed, nobody waited. I can see my bed is not made. It doesn't matter that made or not made. But I feel that nobody-- I wrote a note. I went to mother who loves me more.

And at 2 o'clock again, it shows a child turbulence. And then the next day, it was in newspapers. My mother went and saw that little paper that I did like that, wrote, I went to mother-- what I say that, it was a lot, a lot of turbulence. Finally, I felt like I had lived in two houses.

Well, one of the questions that I have is, how did both mothers handle this? How did your real mother understand it and react? And how did your adopted mother react?

I think that they-- one would not say, no, you cannot go. Another would say, you know-- they probably had some kind of freedom because with Petrauskas, my adopted, I always would get summer time. I would go with them for whole summer. Then I would live one month in that house, one month in that house. It was some kind of not very logical--

No. But the other thing is that it's also very unusual that your real mother would take your note and bring it to the newspapers.

That was a little bit surprise, yeah.

To me, it sounds like she was angry with you.

She probably was angry. And I can see that. I can see. I understand my turbulence. But I can see that to hide that kind of note, I went to mother who loves me more, it's a big insult to her. Yeah. Especially now, being myself a mother, I understand that it's--

But at the same time, you're a child. And she is an adult.

Exactly.

And children say things.

Yes. And then that adopted mother, it's her personality. She's very, very warm. And my mother, when she gave me away, she had to cut something, because how you-- even it's war. Of course, I can think she did something unbelievable. She saved, also, my life, giving me away.

But in order to give away, you have to cut something in yourself. When I came back, probably she cut that for her, to get that warmth was probably difficult.

Did you feel guilty?

You know what? I felt guilty. My mother adopted her sister's daughter, who Balys Simanovichus also took out from ghetto and in different-- Lithuania, in some village, left that. Her name was Ruta.

The daughter.

Daughter, that of her sister.

The one whose husband was the doctor who was very good to people? Or was this another sister?

No, it's another sister. My mother had another sister. It's confusing. When my mother decided that she didn't had any information, she went to that village and adopted that girl, Ruta.

Because her own sister didn't survive?

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. That Ruta became my sister. And what I feel, I feel-- well, oh, again Sache -- that I had two parents, adopted and my birth parents. And her parents were killed.

So you feel guilty about her not having any parents.

And we lived together. And she was so beautiful. She was unbelievable beautiful, unbelievable good heart. But she always felt that she didn't have her parents. That part made me feel-- oh, thank you.

That part made me feel always guilty that I thought that, even I suffered a lot in my life. But I'm this person. I don't know. By nature, I am optimistic. And she was a little bit more depressed. And I always protected her. She would be my eye, you know? To me, everything was to give each other, to her. If I had candy I would not eat, I would give to her.

Was she older or younger than you?

She was older. And we were closer like twins. Very, very, very extremely close. But she passed away a few years ago of cancer. But she was very beautiful soul. The guilt I feel about her, that she is such a beautiful-- didn't had her parents.

And you had two sets.

And in some ways, I had-- not in some ways, in real ways.

You were doubled.

I am doubled, exactly.



You're doubled. She has none, and you have double.

Yeah. I always, all my life, felt that I have to do something for her. I helped her to go to the best resorts, her best clothes that she would-- better than I was here, send her that she would have the best food, took her to eat early together, some kind--

Well, there's no way that you could ever fill that hole.

Yeah, to spoil her a little bit. I felt that life didn't spoil her, that at least I can.

You can.

I can spoil her.

Yeah. But you didn't feel this kind of feeling about the turmoil that you felt with both sets of parents.

Maybe I was not so sensitive.

Oh, I don't know if it has to do with that.

I just felt I needed both parents. I was very much at that probably-- when you're in your childhood, from 1 and 1/2 years old, you know these just parents. Then somehow, probably, it's difficult, accept other-- I accepted later.

For example, when Kaunas opera theater, opera theater stayed in Kaunas, and my father who, after war, played in symphony orchestra, they moved to Vilnius.

Your father, Daniel?

Daniel. Yes, yeah. That period, for me, was very difficult because before, I could go in both. And then later, that opera theater also came to Vilnius.

And I will show you one letter when I was in Lithuania. I see this amount of letters which I wrote to my adopted mother, Elena. And one letter, I brought here. You can film. It's unbelievable. It really touched me very much. It means how much--

You loved her.

Well, maybe we need to stop a little bit.

So you were still very attached to Elena, who became your adopted mother.

Yes. She also was very good to Ruta, also very good, also felt sorry for her.

And what about the relations between the two women?

Ausra?

Oh, no, no, no. Between Elena and your own mother.

I think they had good relationship. It was not like, why you took her or why-- no, I think I would say normal. Maybe it was not-- probably my mother felt very grateful to her, I'm sure. I'm sure. It was normal.

It was normal. Well, it was a price to pay.

Maybe for my mother, also, was a bit difficult because she probably felt that I would like to go-- I was torn because I adored-- like I said, my father is saint, yeah. And I adored my--

Adopted mother.

Adopted mother. And it's conflicted. My mother, of course, was caring and giving food and clothes. Really, really caring. But maybe I needed more that warmth.

Have to explain something. Nobody tried to work with me how war came and how that came that I have two parents. But on another hand, because I am very spiritual person, myself, and I have students that have a child or husbands, grandchild.

I'm very connected to people. I don't know, somehow, always-- I don't know. I meet person, accept person. Somehow, somebody hugs me. They say, I know you 2,000 years, 20,000 years ago or something. I feel that connection.

In some ways, I'm lucky because I had two parents. I have music. I'm teaching. I have my students, teaching at university. I can express my feelings and my immortal soul music, you know? And that is unbelievable, which I think many people, Holocaust survivors or not Holocaust survivors, I think music really helps you.

And because of that, I saw recently one person. He said, you always smile. I don't know. Maybe I smile. But I see a bird. I smile. I don't know. It's hard to explain, to me.

Well, as you're telling me--

I'm not bitter. Maybe to say that what I, in some ways, suffered, I didn't turn to bitterness. I really turned more to love, to my family, to people, to my students. But that, I think, maybe I could be, in some ways, maybe proud that I knew how to turn. I'm not unhappy person.

As you're telling me these things, different thoughts go through my mind when we're talking about these relations. Number one is when you find out that your parents are not your parents, that other people are your parents, these short people and a man with a beard who hugs and kisses you--

Didn't shave.

--and didn't shave and so on, it sounds like it was a trauma, an absolute trauma.

Of course, of course.

Because the world that you had known that had given you security, that you were attached to, all of a sudden doesn't belong to you. You belong to someone else. And that world was never supposed to be yours to begin with.

Right.

And still, you're six or seven years old. And what you learned was reality is actually not reality. And the confusion that results from that, that this is where the loss is, is that, who can you believe?

I mean, this is how I interpret it. Who can you believe will ever tell you the truth? Because the people that you thought were telling you the truth were not telling you the truth. The people who are strangers are supposed to be your parents. And yet they don't-- and yet every single person in this drama has an enormous loss.

If you say your natural mother had to cut herself, cut something inside of herself, it's one thing to give away a child. But it's another to realize that once you've given away that child, she may never be yours again. It could be that someone else comes in that place, and you no longer have that.

Many young women who will have children out of wedlock and give them up mourn that they can't be the mother anymore because somebody else has taken it over. I mean, I'm assuming here. I'm making assumptions. I'm supposing. I'm this, I'm that. But I can imagine that each person in this circle went through enormous grief.

Yeah.

Your adopted mother, because she got attached to you.

Yeah, very much.

But you don't fully-- she doesn't have full rights to you. Someone else does. And it sounds like it was, of course, on the outside, a wonderful situation that you have parents who survived, adopted parents who were loving, wonderful, good. All of these are beneficial things.

But within that circle, there is these losses and this, how do we come out of here whole? This situation that we were put in, how do we grow out of this and be whole?

Right.

And I can see it in how you tell me that it hurts still.

It's true. I think when you go through your memories, of course, it hurts you. Yeah. It hurts, maybe you're going again through that pain.

Yeah, you touch it again. It doesn't mean you're an unhappy person.

Yes.

But it means that this is something that was deep.

Yeah, it's true. But you know what? I would like to say that some people who, let's say, were abused, they become abusers. People who had trauma, somehow they create a new trauma in their life.

I think I learned-- maybe it's not so shy to speak about me. From that trauma, I think if I would not have that, I would not be that person which I am. I didn't turn to bitterness.

But I feel for my letters from my students or my friends, from my daughter. I just could start to cry because it's so much how it is changing their life connected with what I could give to them. It's trauma, but trauma is there, of course. But I turned different.

OK. But I think another aspect is that everybody in this circle was good hearted that you were telling me about.

Yes.

There was no cruel person in here. It was a cruel situation.

Yes, exactly.

And yes, that is-- OK, I have a few questions. But I want to stop here for a moment. I want to change directions.

May I tell--

Sure, sure.

--one thing? When you said that nobody told me the truth, that I will tell you, when Elena Petrauskiene adopted me and it was war, how she knew if my parents will survive? And that time, psychology was not so developed like now, for example, especially in the United States.

I think she didn't tell me that I'm not her-- she is not my mother in order to protect. You understand what I mean? Because in that cruel war, during war, concentration-- who would even probably think that could be that miracle that my family and mother and my father survived?

I think that she probably decided that she will not tell. And they told me when we met. Maybe it was a little bit too late. Maybe it was a little bit too late. But this is how she chose.

So in other words, she didn't want to traumatize you.

I think she didn't tell the truth because she didn't want that to traum-- for sure, for sure.

OK.

And if my parents would not survive, she definitely--

You would have continued being her daughter.

Yeah, 100%.

OK. Do you think this was the stamp the Holocaust left on you, what we just talked about?

Yes. Yes, there's no question, no question.

OK, OK. I want to go back now.

OK.

When you leave west Germany to go back to Lithuania in 1948, number one, that was a very unusual thing to happen. Most people did not go back eastwards. And most people, when they did go back eastwards, went really east. That is, they went east of Kaunas, east of Vilnius, east of Moscow, all the way up to the Arctic Circle.

But I will tell you. Her mother, Elena Petrauskiene's mother, went to Australia. So Luka's son and Goda went to Australia. Her sister with two children went to Australia. Elena Petrauskiene, Ausra, which we grew together, and myself, we went back to Lithuania.

Why?

Because first of all, Petrauskiene promised that if my parents will be alive, she will give me. I will choose where I would like to live. But she didn't tell me that. But later, she said. And Petrauskas was in touch with her. And Petrauskas wanted his wife.

Back.

Back, yeah.

What I want to say, and this will probably be guilt inducing, as well-- but that's a huge step because people who, let's say, politically, ideologically have other language, they would say she stepped from freedom back into slavery, those who were communist and anti-communist, and saying she left the possibility of living in the free world.

In the free world, yeah.

And returns to Lithuania, which was not under a free soc-- that's what the others would say.

I understand that. And I heard that.

Did you?

Yeah.

Who did you hear this from?

We spoke a lot with Ausra. We grow up together. And then I'm living in two houses with Ausra, of course, considering also two sisters. With Ausra, I don't have that guilt because she had her parents alive. But we were very close.

So you really have two sisters.

Yeah.

Ruta and Ausra.

100%.

OK.

But like I said, through it, I felt very, very sorry and guilty. With Ausra, I didn't feel because, no, to have your parents and they're alive. But I heard people say, how, from free world, she comes to--

Occupied.

Occupied, occupied. But her husband was in Lithuania, in Kaunas, yeah. Her husband wanted to have--

Her back.

Definitely, he wanted her back. And she probably wanted also to have her husband. And Ausra wanted to go back. I think that's what it--

So this was Ausra's free will, your sister's free will, to return to Lithuania?

I don't know. Actually, I didn't ask if she asked Ausra. Because Ausra, OK, she was a little bit older, three, four years older. I don't know if a child makes that decision.

But I think she had that wish to go, I think, to Petrauskas. I don't think she knew too much about that system. Because when she came, in beginning, she started to work in drama theater. But then because she was kicked out from it, yeah, she was kicked out from the theater. I cannot say that her life was also easy when she came back.

Do you think that she ever regretted coming back?

I don't know, to tell you. I know that Lithuania was occupied. And Petrauskas was invited to sing when Lithuania was-- to many, many opera houses. He probably could leave.

But I think probably, for some people, to leave to that, he was a country boy, yes? To grow up in a village. And he became very known. To live in that, probably there is that connection with your country, would be that occupied or not occupied.

It's his home.

There is that kind of feeling of home. Because for example, I can see people who immigrated, yeah. I can feel that somebody's still longing to go. There are people who are actually going back. Or there are people who were dreaming of Israel. They went to Israel. And they would like to go different places.

I think, especially Petrauskas, I remember when he was birthday-- people from his village came with birbinas, and were singing near his--

Home.

His home. I think, by nature, he was that kind of country boy. And I'm not sure even if he would have, abroad, these millions. I think probably, for him, would be difficult to leave. But I know there are different--

It just struck me as a very huge step to go back, a very huge step. And most people who were induced to come back by Soviet authorities were then imprisoned for that. Why was she not imprisoned?

Maybe because that big name. I don't have that answer why she was not imprisoned. Maybe because they lived on the name of-- maybe that name was so, so known. And like I said, they lived on Petrauskas Street.

Maybe they came back. They lived in that house. And I went to Kaunas. I saw. Maybe the government was afraid to send them. I don't have that answer.

The other point that you made and that comes to my mind is that not only do you come back, and she is not arrested.

Yeah.

Which I'll say for the camera, the Soviets often did with people who had fled to the western zones and Germany. And they either enticed them back. But because of the exposure and because they had even fled, they were considered traitors. And so that's why they were arrested and deported to Siberia or imprisoned, at the very least. But not only did that not happen, but there were cameras and news people and filming at the train station.

Yes, yes. Was many people.

Why? Why did these cameras come? Why was that there?

I think that story became very big. My father, for example, he survived concentration camp, yeah? I know that every night, my mother and my father were afraid that they would be sent to Siberia.

Many people who survived or even soldiers who were not killed by Germans, I remember when Stalin would say, why you were not killed? Why you in German prison, for example? You know, like a soldier. Then when they finally were released from German prison and would come back, they were sent to Siberia concentration.

Everybody knew my father, a very famous violinist, a little bit like a rock star. Everybody knew Petrauskas. Everybody knew that big family took a Jewish child.

At that point, I was not a musician. But later, especially even now, I became quite known violinist, a teacher in the world, traveling to many countries with my concert and with my husband, with my concert.

That all combination, even now when I come back, there is that kind of-- I had many TVs and many interviews and hundreds, I would say, that maybe there is that kind of aura of that story. A Jewish child was adopted by Lithuanian, very famous. Father was in Dachau, father survived.

Father was famous.

For example. I think that all combination.

I see, I see.

For example, even now, even now, when it was parliament, some kind of meeting or something, quite big, I even didn't know. Everybody got pictures of myself, photos. They got child which survived ghetto.

I even was thinking, nobody asked me if I want to give that. What I'll say, even now, I have calendars which is with my picture. I don't have explanation. But I think that it's a little bit that story. It's not probably me, like me, but that story of the famous people.

There's context.

Yeah.

In this country, in this Lithuania, these people were well known, were prominent, were cultural figures, and so on. And well, you know-- OK, go ahead.

There are many families, Lithuanian families, who saved-- for example, Petrauskas and Petrauskiene got Righteous Around the Nations in Israel. I brought some letters.

And sometimes, their names not always are known. There are many who don't know-- there are some, maybe-- that story is very known, very known.

Your story.

My story, yeah. And maybe because it's that famous people, that whole combination.

Well, it's interesting. Again, this is just thoughts coming into my mind. Your father gets a little bit of bread because of a violin. You have your life saved because of a violin. Postwar protection from, let's say, Soviet policy could be because, if not violin, then the world of culture, the world of music. The world of arts was so well known that it made no sense to-- one creates more martyrs and more bad publicity for oneself if you apply the same policies that you would to somebody who's not known.

Yes, yes.

I mean, again, I'm supposing.

Yeah, there is something in that. Yeah.

Yeah. And what you talk about now with this world, this context, this aura lasts until the current day.

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Exactly.

OK. Well, let's take your life, then, after you come back. And you then travel between both sets of parents. And tell us a little bit about your future studies, your career. You've mentioned music. You've mentioned that you, yourself, are a violinist. Tell us about all that and how you end up in the west again.

Yeah. When I came back, almost very soon, even Elena Petrauskiene felt that I have some kind of musical talent because I would take some kind of comb and-- [BLOWS AIR] get some kind of music. And my father decided to teach me violin.

What a teacher.

Yes. But of course, a child doesn't listen too much when the father is teaching. My first teacher was Livontas, which was quite known violinist in Lithuania. And then I showed some kind of talent.

And it was in Moscow Conservatory, was a very famous in the world teacher, David Oistrakh. And he heard me play. And he decided that, even he would take not too many students, he took me like a student.

And then I took part in competitions, which was also successful. Then I met my husband, who was also a student.

In Moscow?

In Moscow. David Oistrakh introduced us. And we got married.

And your husband is-- what is his name?

Yuri Mazurkevich.

And where is he from?

He was born in Ukraine in Lvov. Lviv, Lvov.

OK. Well, Lvov, Lviv is between Poland and Ukraine.

Yes.

Once, it was part of Poland.

Poland, you're right.

Now it's part of Ukraine.

And when we finished conservatorium, was in post-graduation, all this stuff, then we were invited to teach to Kiev Conservatory.

And this was about what years?

What years? When we finished, probably around '70s, I think.

OK, in the 1970s.

Yeah, I think so. Not very good with numbers. My husband said, do you remember when we got married? I said--

[LAUGHS]

And then we played-- we never were allowed to leave at some point abroad together, because somebody would think that maybe we would escape. But when we decided to immigrate, even in Soviet Union, we played in Soviet Union quite a few concerts.

Then we came here. We got invitation to not one university. And we became almost-- in one or two days, we got invitations to many universities and McGill and another university. And we just turned towards, and we decided to stay, to accept London University of London, Ontario in Canada. Meanwhile, we were concertizing almost in many countries.

Did you know that this is what-- you would have this kind of success when you came to the west?



We did not probably that we would have that kind of success. But probably, we felt that something, we would have, because we had very, very good schooling, yeah, studying with the best teacher in the world. Moscow Conservatory at that time was very big, the biggest, biggest names in the world, the best and teaching, studying there.

And we already had some kind of name in Soviet Union. When we came here, we didn't have to prove like probably many people. Somehow, for us, I would say was--

What year did you emigrate from the Soviet Union?

We were in Kiev, yeah, when we were teaching. We decided that in order to immigrate, in Kiev, situation was politically not very flexible. You would-- we probably would lose job, everything.

And wait, and you don't know. Then what we did, we moved to Lithuania. We moved to Lithuania. And we got jobs. And everybody probably felt that maybe we will leave. But everybody was very friendly, very supportive.

And we applied-- not like we applying, but we applied, like my parents applying. And we're going, because they're old people, and we would like to go with them.

So your parents were still alive when you emigrated.

Yes.

And did they emigrate, as well?

Yes, together.

And where did they go, also to the--

To Toronto.

To Toronto.

Where we stayed, yeah.

So it was the four of you?

Four.

And did you have a child at that point?

Yes.

So five of you?

Yeah, five of you.

Five.

Of us, yeah.

Did your parents ever return to the Soviet Union, to Lithuania?

No, no.

So they passed away in Canada?

Yeah, passed away in Canada. Yeah.

When did your father pass away? What year was that?

My father passed away 2002.

Wow. He lived a good, long time.

Yeah, he lived a good, long-- and my mother, I have to-- I can refresh my memory. My mother also lived longer, even, than my father.

Really?

Yeah.

And into this century?

Yeah, for sure.

OK, OK. And when they got older, did they share more of what their stories had been? Or were they always kind of closed about it?

I don't think that they shared. Now, maybe, I a little bit regret because I wonder that I maybe had to try to get as much as I can. For example, my aunt, who survived concentration camp, and I think her child was killed in concentration camp.

And once, very gentle, very gentle, I was going around and tried to get that answer. And she said, if I didn't speak about that, it means I don't want to speak. That was closed. That's what they say. Somehow, probably, people doesn't want to go back to their pain.

Yeah, yeah. And here's another question. Because you were attached so much to your adopted family and integrated into that family, do you feel a difference in identity? Are you Jewish? Are you Lithuanian?

Good question.

Did that question come up?

That question come up, and that question come up in me. It's a very good question. For a time, I felt more Lithuanian. I felt more Lithuanian. When I came to this country, I started more to question me, to question my parents, and to question that all my family was-- almost everybody was killed in such a history. That Holocaust is such a history.

And I started who I am, you know? And then my daughter was growing up. And when she was growing up, somehow I didn't teach her Jewish tradition because I felt mostly like-- and part of me is Jewish but somehow Lithuanian, because mostly, I speak Lithuanian. This is my first language. Danute, Dana is my Lithuanian name.

But when we came here, I started to think. And my daughter started to ask, but you never told me about your days. You never told me about any traditions. Then she presented to me a book, Jewish for Dumb.

[LAUGHS] Jewish for Dummies?

Dummies. Yeah, that I would know a history.

That you know a little bit about who they are.

Yeah. Because my husband is also not Jewish. And somehow, when we came here, I must tell you. Ukrainian community, when they asked me who I am-- because some was in Moscow, when there is persecution. First time when I applied, I was not accepted because I'm Jewish. Of course, I wrote. In some ways, if I'm very open, I must tell you that I almost hide it.

Really?

Yeah. For example, then my husband asked me who I am--

When you first met?

Yeah. I said, I'm Lithuanian. But then I started to say, yes, but I have to tell you. And because that atmosphere, if you tell that you are Jewish, it's nothing positive about that. I tried to hide.

In the Soviet Union?

In Soviet Union. I told my husband that I'm from Lithuania. But then we already got each other and were planning to marry that I said, no, you know, I'm Jewish. And he was very shocked and very surprised, somehow, I'm not sure even 100% understanding in the beginning.

Then when we came to Canada, yes, somebody asked my husband am I Jewish. He said half. Half Jewish. He thought that I will be better accepted, especially in some communities, not Jewish communities. Jewish, of course-- I remember when somebody asked me--

Was there truth to that?

In some communities, maybe. Or maybe we had that imagination. I cannot say. somebody asked me which half of me is Jewish. I forgot what he said, my mother or-- this half of me is Jewish or that half. I didn't know what to answer. Finally, I said, look-- finally, then when I was starting to think, I said, no, I'm Jewish. Now, for sure, I feel Jewish.

OK. Do you now feel Jewish inside?

Yeah, yeah.

OK, OK.

Still, there is Lithuanian inside of me.

Well, there are some people who would say you can be both.

Yes, there is Lithuanians still because it cannot be not to be. But I feel Jewish.

And what makes you feel that?

Some kind of memory. That's what survived my parents. And almost nobody is alive, all brothers or sisters, my father's brothers, my mother's all sisters-- nobody is alive-- that I feel it's my duty to keep their tradition. My daughter now is more intense that we celebrate or Rosh Hashanah, something like that. There's something.

Well, Dana, Danute.

Danute, yes.

Danute. I think that we've come close to the end of our interview.

Yes. Maybe, if you just would like to--

Of course. But what I'll do right now is I will formally close the interview. And then we'll film some of the items that you were telling me about.

OK.

OK? So I will say this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Dana Pomerantsaite-Mazurkevich on September 25, 2019 in Brookline, Massachusetts. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

OK. Mrs. Dana, I'm sorry I say it that way.

Dana, Dana.

OK. Tell me, who is this a photograph of?

This is a photo of my birth father, violinist Daniel Pomerants.

And do you know about when this photograph was taken?

That photograph is taken before they did that recording. But like I say, I'm not very good with numbers. It's 1935 or '36.

OK, all right. And now we're going to go to the other side. And there's a photograph of another young man there. And what is his name?

Here is the name of Dvarionas.

What's his first name? Vladis, I think it's-- no, Antanas.

Antanas Dvarionas. He was a singer and made, actually, in that recording, many with my father's orchestra.

So in other words, he sang with your father's orchestra.

Orchestra, exactly. Exactly.

And this is his photograph from then and his biography, it looks like.

Yes.

And was he an opera singer? Or was he more of a--

I think not opera singer. He's more singing liaudies dainos.

Folk songs.

Folk songs, yes. Not just folk songs, but not opera singer.

Was he more popular music?

Popular music, definitely.

So jazz, as well.

Yeah. Definitely.

All right. Now, what you're holding, where this photograph is, is actually the 11 records?

Yes, it's 11 records my father did in London, England, Columbia, very famous Columbia record.

OK. If you could hold it up again like it was.

Oh, OK.

And we'll see the index. Hold on. Let's see the index so that he can pan that. And tell us, can we flip it a little bit so we see the different albums?

Here's number one.

Number two.

I have to put that another record. One record, I gave to Vilnius. They asked me for Vilnius Holocaust Museum.

Oh, the Vilnius Gaon Museum.

Gaon, yeah.

Gaon Museum.

I'm not sure if it's called the Gaon Museum or-- Gaon? Yeah. That's why it's empty, because they have that.

I see. Number three.

Here is number four.

Number five. That's quite something. And these all were recorded in the '30s with your father's orchestra.

Yes. That's what they say, that my father did a fantastic job.

Yeah. And there we are again.

And here we are again.

OK. Thank you. So tell me, who is this a photograph of, this lovely young woman?

This photo is of my birth mother.

And her name again?

Liucija Zulkov. And here is her mother.

In the distance, in the background?

Yeah, in the background, yes.

And do you know about when this photograph was taken?

I don't know.

You don't know.

I don't know.

Do you think she was married yet or not?

At that time, I think she was not married.

OK. So this is Liucija Zulkov as a young woman.

Yeah, right.

All right, thank you. OK. And who's this lovely lady?

This lovely lady is my adopted mother, Elena Zalinkevicaite-Petrauskiene.

And do you know about when this photograph was taken?

I don't know exactly. But I have many photographs of her where she's in the film roles.

In costumes in the theater.

Yeah, in the theater, yeah.

But it looks like it would have been a pre-war photograph.

Yeah, pre-war.

This is pre-war, OK.

Yeah, pre-war.

OK, thank you very much. [NON-ENGLISH]. OK, and what is this that you're holding in your arms here?

This is record of my adopted father, singer, opera singer, Kipras Petrauskas. That recording, I don't know which year it's done. It's re-recorded maybe a few years ago. But originally, it was recorded by EMI records in London.

UK.

UK.

OK. It's an album that says Kipras Petrauskas, "Folk Songs and Operatic Arias."

Yes. I can show another side, which he's here in different roles.

OK. Have you got it? Thank you. So tell me, what is this photograph of?

This photograph of my adopted mother and myself.

And about what year was this one taken?

It's about '47, probably.

So you're a five-year-old, almost six-year-old girl.

Yes.

OK. And this would have been done in west Germany?

Yeah, exactly.

All right. All right, thank you.