

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Ruth Meissner on December 6, 2019 in Rockville, Maryland. Thank you, Mrs. Meissner.

I thank you.

Well, it's an honor for us to be able to hear your story and to capture it for future generations. And it's a real gift. We appreciate it.

Thank you.

I am going to start the interview with the most basic questions, and from those, we'll develop your story.

OK.

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

May 8, 1925.

May 8, 1925. And what was your name at birth?

Ruth-- or as we said, "Root"--

"Root," yeah.

--Karlsberg.

Karlsberg.

Like the beer, only with a K.

And I think the beer is actually not German, isn't it?

Danish.

Danish, right. And where were you born?

In Hamburg, Germany.

So the northern part of Germany?

Yes.

Was your family from Hamburg for generations?

No, as a matter of fact, they were not. My parents were from Hamburg, but the grandparents came from other cities, but they were all Germans.

OK. So you're born in May 1925 as Ruth Karlsberg in Hamburg. Did you have brothers and sisters?

I have an older-- had an older sister and a younger brother.

What was your sister's name?

Rahel.

Rahel.

Well not the "th." They called her Rahel.

Rahel?

"Ra-hell."

I don't know if I said it right.

Rahel, yeah.

Rahel.

And my brother's name was Walter.

OK. What year was your sister born?

She was born in '23, 1923--

And he?

--on July 17. And my brother was born December 23, 1926. We were all born within four years, less than four years.

Yeah. So you're close in age together, and you kind of all grow up together.

Absolutely, yes.

OK. Let's turn to your parents, now.

OK.

What was your mother's first name and her maiden name?

Ilse Mathilde Heilbrun.

Ilse Mathilde Heilbrun.

Right.

And was your mother born in Hamburg, too?

She was born in Hamburg.

Do you know the date of her birth?

September 30 1900, easy to remember.

Very, very. And your father, what was his name?

My father was also born in Hamburg on October 11, 1899. He always said, I'm from the previous century.

[LAUGHING]

And what was his name?

Bernard Karlsberg.

So there was only a year separating them.

That's right.

Well, and not even. Just--

Not even a year.

Not even a year.

I have an engagement picture. They got engaged in 1922. And they look like kids.

And your sister was born the following year.

Yeah.

OK. So did your parents know of each other as they were growing up in Hamburg?

Yes, they did. The parents-- their parents were acquainted with one another, lived in the same neighborhood. And as I was told, my dad was only meant for the other grandparents' oldest-- younger daughter, not my mother. But they knew each other's kids.

OK.

Same Jewish community.

Community.

Yes.

We're both sets of grandparents religious?

My grandparents were religious, yes. You know, it's hard to say. They kept the holidays. We went there for Seders, during Passover. And actually my dad turned out, as a kid, more religious than they were-- than his parents were.

Well, that happens sometimes. So would you say that--

My mother's family-- I really don't know. They were less so.

OK. Would you say they were assimilated into German society?

Totally.

OK. OK. So did they see themselves as Jewish first or German first?

That I could not tell you. But I know that both my father and my uncle, his older brother, served in World War I in the army, German Army.

Yeah.

And they consider themselves German, absolutely-- and Jewish. They did not-- in those days, you didn't make these distinctions.

I know. Some of them are kind of artificial and arbitrary and speak more of how we think of things today than then.

Right. Exactly. You put the nail-- hit the nail right on the head. Nowadays, it's all in compartments sort of.

But you see, here's the other thing is that sometimes the compartments came about also artificially, but very forcefully, you know? And that's part of what we're talking about is when you feel-- a person may feel that they are part of German society, and someone else comes along and says, no, you're not. You belong in this other compartment.

Yes, yes. It-- I don't know what came first. When Hitler came to power, the rise in anti-Semitism, or that it was always inherent-- I don't think the Germans were particularly anti-Semitic, no more than any other country, including the United States.

Well, I think that was--

But with the proper instructions, they became so.

You know, at this point of our interview, I usually focus on factual things, but you've brought up something that I think is really important, that I've heard many Germans say the same thing, is that what happened here could happen anywhere. There wasn't anything, in the blood, for example.

Yes. Exactly.

And when you think about that, the repercussions should give us pause because if it happened there--

You better believe it.

You know? It means that we're all human.

Yeah.

OK. Let's go back to-- let's go back to some of the biographical picture. So you mentioned that your father had a brother. Did he have other siblings? Did he have other siblings, your father?

Yes, he had his sister.

What were their names?

His sister was Ilse, as well.

OK.

And she got married to a Alfred Unna, U-N-N-A. They emigrated to what was then Palestine. My uncle Ernst died-- and his family, his wife and two daughters, also went to kibbutz before--

The war?

--before things got serious. Before the war broke out, yes, but when Hitler came to power.

So the two siblings from your father emigrated out of Europe.

Out of Europe. But my uncle, Ernst did not. He died before.

OK. That is, did he die in Palestine?

No, in Germany.

In Germany.

Only his widow and the two girls went to--

OK. Was your Aunt Ilse married?

Yes, she-- my Aunt Ilse was married to--

Oh, Unna, of course. You mentioned that. Yes.

They had three children. All of them were older than I am, so they died.

Well, that means that those two branches of your family survived.

Yes, except my mother.

Yes, your mother is different.

And my grandparents-- they all-- they got killed in Sobibor. My widowed maternal grandmother was sent to Sobibor, and a week later, my paternal grandparents went the same way.

And your mother, as well?

My mother-- that is a longer story.

We'll come to it, then.

She died in Auschwitz, as far as I know.

OK, OK. No, by that branch of the family, I meant the two siblings, not the rest of the family.

Oh, yes, that is true.

They were-- those children were safe.

And that's the Israeli branch.

That's right. So your father-- where was he in the oldest to youngest? Was he the oldest or the youngest of the children?

My father was the youngest. My mother was the eldest.

Isn't that funny?

Yes.

And how many brothers and sisters did your mother have?

She had one brother and one sister.

And her brother's name was?

Martin and Alice.

Alice. And so they're born after 1900 at some point.

Yes. I could not tell you exactly their birthdays. But they lived in New York. They managed to escape. First to France, and, then, they went from France, after the Germans invaded the Netherlands and Belgium, they were able to escape to the United States. There was no war waiting for them.

No. Thank goodness.

I had to get that one in.

[LAUGHING]

That's fine. Your grandparents, on both sides of the family, what kind of business were they in?

My grandmother, the widow--

So your mother's mother.

My mother's mother, I don't know that she was in any kind of business. She probably, after her husband died shortly after World War I, probably of the influenza-- I don't know exactly what-- she owned an apartment building.

Oh, it could have been the rent.

So it could have been-- yeah, I don't know, exactly, her business. They didn't have children at the time.

No, no.

My grandfather, my paternal grandfather, worked for the Cunard White Star Line, a British company, as you probably know. And he-- let me think. Well, that was closed, of course, at the outbreak of the-- not the outbreak of World War II, but when the Germans-- let me think. I want to get it straight. No, that was closed when, yeah, when World War II broke out.

So when England and Germany declared war--

Were at war in '39, they closed it, of course. But he was retired. He lived in Amsterdam-- they lived in Amsterdam-- until exactly the same time, got a pension from.

So your maternal grandparents' names-- what were they?

My paternal grandparents' name was Morritz Karlsberg.

Morritz Karlsberg.

We called him Molly. And my paternal grandmother's name was Amelia Simon, S-I-M-O-N. My maternal grandmother's name was Heilbrun, of course, and her maiden name was Froehlich.

Froehlich, OK. And your grandfather that you never knew, the one who passed away. What was his name?

Siegfried.

Siegfried. You don't get more German than that.

They were totally assimilated.

Yeah. So he was Siegfried Heilbrun?

Yeah. But then, later on he called himself Simon. I don't know at what point, but I think it became too much.

You said that they were not from Hamburg, either set.

No. My maternal grandfather came from Hagen. It's in Westphalia. My paternal grandmother came from Frankfurt.

Am Main.

Am Main. And my maternal grandmother, I think, came from Mainz.

So you know, not that close to Hamburg.

No.

No, and they still--

My parents' generation was the first generation of Hamburgers.

OK. But it does suggest that this is an old German Jewish family.

Yes. They did not make the trek to the East and back, like many Jews who came centuries ago with the Romans. They were ousted and sent to the eastern part of Germany, and, of course, Poland. But they changed borders and names all the time. And they stayed-- as far as I know, their families were really German Romans.

So do you know anything of your deeper family's history? How many generations-- you know, where somebody eighth generation back might be buried? Do you know these things?

I wish I had brought it. I have a huge-- I could send it to you somehow, maybe next time I come visiting-- where my grandfather, my paternal grandfather, made a whole family tree that goes way back.

OK.

Would you be interested in that?

Well, yes. But I'll tell you the reason I asked the question is to get a sense of how much you had a chance to know about these things. Some people, when all of life went upside down, know very little about their families. They know only fragments. And so one of the things I wanted to get a sense of is how much had already been transmitted to you of what your roots were when you were a child.

Well, I think I gave you a pretty comprehensive idea.

Yeah, I mean, if he compiled a family tree, that says that somebody had done some research, somebody had looked and documented certain things. In other words, it existed. There is a thread that exists.

Yeah. Oh, yes. Well, this is why I wrote about this, my story, to give it to my children. Give them a little background of where they came from and what went on before them. That was really my motivation. It was a letter to them.

That's, in some ways, I would say a love letter, you know? I read it and it was very, very informative for me, too.

But I did not go into all the details-- I know.

--that you were asking about. But a general idea is what they got.

Yeah, yeah. Did you know your three grandparents who were still living? I know them very well.

Were they-- did your parents-- where you lived and were growing up, was it close, physically, geographically, to the grandparents? Yes?

Yes.

OK.

You mentioned the Grindle?

Yeah.

We all lived there.

That neighborhood?

Yeah.

Tell me about the Grindle. What kind of a neighborhood was it?

It was-- they were mainly Jews living there. Of course, not predominantly. But I cannot compare it to any other city I lived in. Excuse me.

It's quite all right.

It was a well to do neighborhood. I would say mainly what is considered, now, upper middle class, or mid-middle class.

So tell me a little bit about your own home, then. Did you live in an apartment?

Yes, we lived in an apartment. In fact, in Hamburg, before I left, I lived in three different apartments.

That's a lot of moving around.

Yes, I was born, actually, in a private home where my grandparents lived, and that was Klosterallee acht.

Klosterallee acht. How wonderful that you remember. Number eight.

Yeah, but before that, my sister, my older sister was born around the corner in the Hansestrasse.

Hansestrasse, OK.

In a fairly small apartment where my parents moved after they got married. But that became too small, so they were offered some rooms in my grandparents' house.

Your paternal ones?



My paternal ones. Then, a larger apartment came up. So they moved into a very large apartment-- again, Hansestrasse same building. 63.

63, OK. Hansestrasse 63.

It was a large apartment. However, it became somewhat too big. That's where my brother was born and I was born. But then, we moved, in the same building, to a middle-sized apartment. So it's actually four places.

All very close to each other.

Yes. The three apartments in the same building and my grandparents home.

The one that you remember the most, is that the one where your brother was born? The last one? Or the second to last?

Of course, I don't remember Klosterallee. I was an infant. I remember the big one, and then, the one we lived in last. I remember them pretty well.

So my next question is could you describe them for me? Because when you say that this was probably upper middle class, I want to know, in those days, what did upper middle class mean?

OK. Let's say the large apartment. There was--

Please charge battery. Please charge battery.

Excuse me, please.

Hold on a second. OK.

Are we rolling?

Mm-hmm.

OK, we were talking about, what did that largest apartment look like that you remember?

OK. We had a living room and a dining room and a herrenzimmer.

What's a herrenzimmer?

That's where bookshelves were placed and places to sit.

Sort of like a library or a study?

A study-- library or study. Large rooms. The living room and dining room were separate. We had a grand piano in one of the rooms. And then, there were the children's bedroom.

So all children in one bedroom?

Yes.

OK.

And a room for the maid and my parents' bedroom.

And a kitchen.

And a large kitchen, yes.

That sounds very spacious.

Yeah.

Yeah. Was there a balcony?

Yes. In fact, I am going to give you a picture that was taken on the balcony at my sister's sixth birthday party with a lot of kids.

OK. And what did the balcony look out on?

The street.

The street. So it would have been Hanse Street.

Yeah.

OK. And how was the place heated?

I don't know.

Did it have coal ovens? You know, those coal ovens?

Not in the apartment. It was Zentralheizung, central heating.

OK. Well, that's pretty modern.

But what it was powered with, I don't know.

OK. But that's already pretty modern because many apartments-- to me, it sounds like it was an apartment that might have been built turn of the century, something like that.

Yes.

And some of those still had these decorative, old ovens that you would shovel coal into.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I lived in apartments like that, too, later on. But that-- we had central heating.

Central heating.

And I take it you had electricity and running water.

We had electricity. But I remember when they installed a telephone.

Was that an event?

Yes.

[LAUGHING]

How old were you?

Maybe seven, or so.

OK, so '32. 1932. And do you know what number you had?

No, I don't. My brother would have remembered. But I don't remember that. It was a two-digit number.

A two-digit number? How they've grown.

[LAUGHING]

And did you have a maid at home?

We had a-- well, when we were born, temporarily, a nursemaid. Then, we had a governess. We had a washer woman who came in once a week and did the washing and not in a washing machine.

By hand, huh?

And we had a cleaning woman.

That's quite a lot.

And a cook.

And a cook. So was your mother freed from most of these types of responsibilities?

In those days, that was not uncommon. Women worked for very little money. Some were sleep ins. You know, they-- I don't know how much they got paid, but it wasn't much.

Were you close to any of these people?

Oh, yes. I was very close to our governess.

Yeah?

Well, she was always there for us.

What was her name?

Marta Hanchen Klahn.

Marta?

Marta Hanchen.

Hanchen.

Klahn.

Klahn.

Yeah.

K-L-A-N?

K-L-A-H-N.

Marta Hanchen Klahn. And what do you remember of her?

She was our substitute mother, you know? You did not have such contact with your mother like nowadays. She was always there for us. She slept in the room with us.

Were your parents distant from you when you were younger?

I wouldn't-- we did not see them nearly as much as Marta.

OK. As Marta-- that is, you saw her much more. I'd like to find out a little bit about their personalities-- your mother's personality, your father's personality.

Well, I never knew my mother as a grown up, because the last time I saw her, I was 15. And, you know, you don't go into deep examinations about your relationship with your mom. I loved her a lot. And I always thought we were pretty close while I grew up. There was never a doubt in my mind. She was a very reticent person. Not like me. And the exact opposite of my father.

So what was he like?

He was-- I hate to say it. He was a bully.

Oh.

He yelled at us. He beat us. I hate to say that about him, and I don't try to mention it to people who know me. But he was very outgoing, extremely intelligent, and frustrated, I think, with life.

What would have been the cause of his frustration?

I don't know if-- how to express it. He was so smart. He had gone to-- he studied Latin and Greek and other languages, like Turkish, which when he was drafted at the age of 17, he was used as an interpreter in Turkey. I mean, he was full of knowledge. And people mostly ignored that. I think that's what a lot of frustration can come from.

Was he a university graduate?

Yes.

OK.

Incidentally, the Nazis took that away from him. It was negated.

It was negated?

Yes, a friend of ours saw to it that it was reinstalled at the University.

Oh my, I hadn't heard that that happened.

When he came out of-- he was-- obviously, it was the end of the war.

World War I?

World War I, yes. He went back to-- he went to university. It's a little different from here. He went to Gymnasium,

graduated, and was drafted.

OK.

So then, 1918, the war was over, and he went to study. First in Munich, at the university, and made his PhD in economics.

Well, that's quite impressive.

Yeah.

And so did he work-- where did he work afterwards? How did he make his living?

Well, we lived in countries that did not allow people to get a job.

I'm talking before then. When you were in Grindle, and you're in the Hansestrasse in the big apartment, how did your father--

Oh, he worked for the Cunard White Star Line.

As well as your grandfather?

Yeah.

OK. Did that work require him to travel? Or was it more an office job?

Yes, he traveled to England. You know, the headquarters, of course, were in England. He often went to England. He spoke English fluently.

OK

And that's how he made a pretty good living.

But it is sounds like somebody who has a PhD in economics would have a different career path.

Yes. But I don't know-- don't forget, there was poverty.

There was the '20s. It was, economically, not a good time.

Not feasible. And in fact, the whole Nazi movement was based on the poverty of many people. And I mean, poor.

Yeah.

Hunger.

Did you see that, even though you had such a different life?

Well, you know, we were brought up as, you may have-- may remember in very political household. So that's why I know a lot of things that ordinarily kids nine years old do not--

Do not know.

No.

So tell me about the politics a bit. Who was the political dr-- ?

When he-- my father joined a fairly new movement. It was the Zionist movement, you know about. And got into trouble with them because of the way they-- you know there was a movement to Israel.

That's right.

And he was not satisfied with the way they had planned to treat the Arabs. And being very verbal, he voiced his opinion.

So he had a sense of social justice?

Yes. So right from there, he stepped into the Communist Party, which was legal when he joined them, an of course under Hitler, it was not. So he was really a fighter for social justice.

And yet, he comes from an upper middle class background?

Yes, yes. He got rid of all his religious beliefs. We were raised completely atheist. We did not get any Christmas presents. [LAUGHS] Poor things, huh?

Well, you know when they go--

Or Hanukkah presents.

Yeah. When the zeal catches a person, it goes all the way.

Zealous is a good word to describe him. My mother also, under his influence, joined the Communist Party and, as far as I know, never was kicked out. He was kicked out later on.

Of the Communist Party?

Yes, because he was not going along with Stalin.

Gee. He had his own opinion.

[LAUGHING]

Absolutely.

Well, you know the picture that you--

But, you know, for that, I give him credit.

Yeah. Yeah. Because many people are, in the German term, [GERMAN], you know, fellow travelers. And didn't really think on their own.

Yes. What else is new?

Yeah, it's true.

No, he-- as far as that was concerned, I have to admire him.

But was he somebody who was-- for example, did you feel close to him or were you frightened of him?

I was never frightened of him. But I was pretty pleased that we did not live with him for the years later on in Prague. We

lived in-- we get to that.

Yeah. So he wasn't somebody who-- I wasn't-- did not love him like I loved my mother.

OK. OK. It also sounds like your mother didn't have much choice, if she wanted to maintain the peace. I mean, I'm not trying to put words in her mouth.

Yeah, no, no, no.

But she didn't have to.

She did not fight back.

Yeah, yeah. How did his parents react to such things?

Oh, to them, he was their idol.

Oh, really?

Oh, yes.

So they didn't--

They worshipped him.

OK. OK. So there wasn't friction because he turned away from Jewish traditions?

No, they accepted that-- as far as I know. Maybe when they were by themselves they'd say, oh, he really should. But, as far as I know, that did not spoil their relationship.

So as you're growing up, and all of-- you know, Germany is in a turbulent time in the Weimar Republic.

Oh, yes.

Politics comes into your house. It's very rare that it does to such a-- I mean, for many people that I talk to, politics is something far away.

I believe it.

You know? But in your home, that's different.

Absolutely. So how did it make itself felt? Did people come and visit? Did the-- was there-- did he talk about it at the dinner table? How did it--

Constant talk about it, yes. Particularly, when the first-- when Hitler came to power-- even before then. There was a tremendous change in the air for Germany caused by World War I, as far as I could tell.

Did you-- in the house that you lived, the one with the three apartments, did anybody who was not Jewish live in that building? Or was it entirely Jewish?

Oh, yes.

Oh, there was.

Yes.

Did you know your neighbors?

I had contact with non-Jewish children in school and my teacher. My teacher-- you know, at one time, they told the teachers in the morning they had to say, Heil, Hitler. And we had to say it back, of course. And my teacher was called Mrs. Koopman. And she came in, and she said, Heil Hitler [GERMAN]. You know, we stood up, sit down. And she let the Jewish children go home before the others because the kids were beating each other up.

So that the children, the Jewish children would have a chance to get home without being--

Beaten.

--harassed and beaten.

Yes. And we were all-- in those days, I don't think it's anymore. There was no separation of church and state or the schools were not state run. I don't know. We had to pay a little something, not much. But part of the curriculum was religion. And the Jewish children did not have to attend.

Did a rabbi come for the Jewish religious instruction?

No, no, no.

This is after Hitler comes to power?

No, never.

Never. Even before.

Even, not even before. It was just Christian.

I see. Well, that's interesting. So what was the teacher's name again?

Koopman.

Koopman.

Yeah. K-O-O-P-M-A-N-- maybe two N's. I don't know.

Frau Koopman.

Frau Koopman.

OK. So she doesn't require the kids to say Heil Hitler back?

That-- maybe we just didn't say it. I'm sure we had to say it, too.

OK.

And then you stood honoring the flag. You stood in the school outside.

The schoolyard.

And sang songs. Oh, as far as political discussions, we were taught "The Internationale--"



At home?

At home. My father took us to the bathroom because there were no windows.

[LAUGHING]

Closed all the doors, and then, we had to memorize--

"The Internationale."

Yeah, and other songs.

And other ones, too.

Communist, and the funny thing is-- funny, some were to the melo-- the Nazis took the melodies and made their own. But they were all about bloody battles. The communists as well as the Nazis.

The funny thing-- you know, that says something, doesn't it?

Yes.

To me, I would say, well, you know, boys need to go have their battles.

OK. That's--

But I'm putting words into the situation.

Absolutely.

So your father, when you were a young child, is very politically engaged. And he's a member of the party, but you say, that later, he does not like what Stalin is doing.

Yes. Many, many communists stepped out because of how things went there.

Now, do you know what specifically he objected to?

The whole-- it's about the reign of the proletariat-- I mean--

Because there are many-- the reason why I ask is there could be many reasons. Either news of the repressions--

Yeah.

--or the purges that were taking place.

All of it combined. I remember there was an article-- Stalin dismisses-- the revolution dismisses children, you know.

Oh, it eats its children. There is something like that. Mandelstam wrote a poem. Yeah.

They put their intellectual people in jail-- sent them to Siberia or worse. That is what he objected to.

And of course, Trotsky was thrown out of the party.

Yeah. It was almost a badge of honor to be thrown out of the party.

OK. But this, then, says to me that by the mid '30s, he was disillusioned.

Oh, yes.

All right. So Hitler is in power in Germany, but it's not yet the wartime. Because the next step were many people who had a belief in communism step down, is when Hitler and Stalin make the pact in 1939.

Oh, that came much later.

OK. So his disillusionment is much before then.

Oh, yeah, that's way back then.

OK. Did he formally leave the party or just mutter a lot and didn't like what was going on?

I could not tell you that. He just said as.

OK.

Before that, he was actively writing, organizing for them, but he stopped it.

But that tells me, also, he was prominent.

I think he was thrown out, again.

OK. OK.

Because he was not one to keep his opinions to himself.

Like you said, one has to give him credit for all that.

Oh, yes.

Because that speaks for some integrity, you know, that what you say and what you do match up. What you believe and what you do match up.

Yes.

And do you remember when Hitler came to power?

Yes.

Do remember the day? Do you remember the events? Do you remember--

It was 1933. I do not-- in April. I think about the end of April. I could not tell you the exact date.

Did you have a radio at home?

No, we did not have a radio. In those days, you heard-- we read it in the newspaper. My grandparents had a radio, but we didn't.

So did you ever hear Hitler over your grandparents' radio?

Hear him?

Yeah, hear him in his speeches?

His speeches, yes.

Were there loudspeakers in the streets?

I don't know exactly-- in the movies. You went to the movies and you heard the news and you saw Hitler making speeches.

OK, so the newsreels.

That's how we-- yeah. That's how we got to hear him.

All right. When he comes to power, you're eight years old. Is that correct?

Yeah. Just about to turn eight. And does your life change after that happens?

Well, yes, in a way everything became hush, hush. And as I told you, in school, there was-- that was the biggest change. And certain children wouldn't play with us anymore.

Were there any Nazi families in your building?

I don't know about Nazi, but-- I don't know-- I had friends who were not Jewish and who stuck with us, I mean. It just never came up. But in those days, you played a lot outside on the sidewalk with other kids from the neighborhood. And they-- suddenly they wouldn't play with us anymore. But since we had each other, I don't think I was very upset about it, looking back.

What about your brother or sister, were they?

We had each other to fight with.

Most important.

[LAUGHING]

Yeah.

I'm sorry, I was wiggling.

That's OK.

But I don't know-- I cannot tell you I was in a constant state of fear. Not at all.

OK. OK.

I don't think children fear something that is never expressed in words, you know?

Well, you know, grown ups try to protect. So they don't want-- whatever world they've been able to build for their children, they don't want to upset it too much. And sometimes children feel something anyway, and sometimes that protection works. You know?

Yes.

And so you're not exposed to, let's say, what a grown up might be feeling or wondering or fearing.

Right.

Did there come a time-- did you see, for example, parades in the streets?

No. We went-- no, I don't think I can remember any.

OK. Did you ever see Hitler in person?

No. He came to Hamburg once and everybody went to see his car. I didn't go.

We mentioned, I think off camera, that Hamburg is a very well-to-do city and, in many ways, a very proper city.

Yes.

I've also heard, and please correct me, that it was not a city that would have been a Nazi stronghold. That other places--

No, that is true. That is true. I personally cannot tell you, honestly, that I suffered from antisemitism.

When you were still living in Hamburg?

[? We never ?] lived in Hamburg.

OK. Now, I understand that at some point you left Hamburg.

OK.

Let's talk about that.

1934.

Oh, one year.

Pretty soon. As you may look at it, it's that-- we waited. We went to a regular school. My husband, for instance, who lived in Berlin, he went to a Jewish school and was kicked out of school. But we stayed in the public school until we left.

OK.

It was decided to send us, the three of us, to Switzerland. And to-- I don't know the term for kinderheim.

A children's home, maybe.

Children's home. It is something we don't know here.

Yeah. Tell us, what is a children's home or a kinderheim?

Children were sent-- it depends. Some were just for children who went on vacation. Others for recovering from an illness. They took in children for all sorts of reasons. And you know, whoever was able-- we went to Switzerland, could go skiing and sleigh riding.

But was there school in the kinderheim? Was it a boarding school?

No, there was not. I really did not go to school very much in my life. We had-- almost a year we stayed there.

And why were you sent to Switzerland to this kinderheim? What was the reason?

Because they wanted-- I think they wanted to get out of Germany, my parents.

Well, one of the things that it suggests, of course, that if your father was in the Communist Party, he is known to the police.

I'm coming to that. We went there in December of 1934. My father received a message that he was on the list to be arrested for high treason, packed his bag, and joined us in Switzerland.

That leaves your mother alone in Hamburg.

Left my mother alone in Hamburg. My father went to Amsterdam.

From Switzerland?

From Switzerland. And tried to get some kind of visa to bring his family there.

Were your grandparents already living in Amsterdam? His parents?

No, my grandparents came after us. He tried to get a visa for us to go to France and to the Netherlands. I mean, he had to support a family of five. And I don't know if that is known in this country is that many, almost all the countries there, did not let you take a job. They may give you a visa to stay there, but you could not take a job away from the population.

That is still true. That is still true. You know, just because an American citizen might have permission to live in Europe, doesn't mean they have permission to work in Europe.

Oh, it's that.

Yeah.

Well, so he had to get some kind of a counseling job. Women went into house cleaning and cooking. That house-- help in the household could be accepted.

Your mother-- did she stay in Hamburg?

Temporarily, yes. He finally got permission to stay in Amsterdam and started some kind of-- well, he helped people apply for visas to get abroad and things like that. Counseling, I would say. My mother-- but he did not get permission for the family. So my mother and my siblings went to live in Prague.

Why Prague? Why Prague of all places?

Because we got permission to live there.

Was there any connection, personal connection to Prague before then?

No. Prague was a city where not predominantly Jews went. It was a lot of political people who had to escape from Germany went to live in Prague.

And do you remember where you lived in Prague?

[PLACE NAME].

[PLACE NAME?

Yes. That's the street. We had an apartment. And later on we moved to a street called [PLACE NAME].

[PLACE NAME].

[PLACE NAME].

Did you learn Czech? Did you learn Czech?

Of course, we all had to learn Czech, but we went to German schools.

I see. Yes, there was a strong German population in Prague, too.

You could get around with German, easily, in Prague before.

The streets that you mentioned-- were they in the center of town or were they in a neighborhood?

Well, not the way neighborhoods are now. But in those days, it was not the center of town, but you had trolley cars. The school my sister and I went to was in the very center of town. So it was a 10-minute ride on the trolley car. It wasn't that big.

Was it north of the center, south of the center, east or west? Do you remember?

No. It never came up to find out.

I know, I know. But there are some beautiful sections like Vinohrady and Vysehrad and Pankrac, will Pankrac, maybe not so much. But they're are lovely--

No, we did not live anywhere near there.

OK, OK. And so you had been in Switzerland for a year--

Nine months.

Nine months in the kinderheim. No school.

No school. Now, we go to Czechoslovakia, as it was then. And back to school.

And you are now how old?

When we came to Prague, I was-- I had my 10th birthday in Switzerland. 10.

10, OK. And your father stays in Amsterdam.

Yes, and builds up-- with a partner, builds up an office for--

So kind of his own business. He's allowed to have his own business.

That legal, too.

All right. And then, was Prague easier for him to support your family?

Yes. The guilder he earned went much further in Prague. Zloty, I think. That's right-- no, no, no.

No. Koruna.

Koruna, yeah. Koruna.

The Koruna in Prague. So he could support us pretty well from his earnings.

And so it was your mother and the three children in Prague.

Yeah. He came to visit off and on.

OK. And who is left in Hamburg, then?

All my grandparents.

So the three grandparents are left in Hamburg.

Yeah.

The children of your paternal grandparents-- two of them are in Israel-- one of them has died, one of them is in Israel, and one of them is in Amsterdam.

Yeah.

The children of your widowed grandmother-- one of them is in Prague and two of whom are still there, but manage to leave for Belgium, Germany, and, then, finally, the United States.

No. My aunt, at one point, was warned to get out of town. She actually moved to Berlin. And then, she was told to get out of town and she joined us in Prague. My uncle went to a place called Cognac in France.

I guess what they make there.

[LAUGHING]

You guess right. Yeah. And then when the blitzkrieg-- they first fled to the South.

Of France?

Yeah.

My aunt-- when we left Prague, my aunt went to Paris. And when that became dangerous, she went to the South of France, and from there she managed to get to the United States.

And your uncle, as well?

And my uncle, as well.

OK. So in the end, it is the three grandparents who are left.

Yes. They-- I'm trying to remember. I think they came to Amsterdam when we were there. We left for Amsterdam almost-- well, I think in '37.

So you had lived in Prague for two years?

Almost three years.

Almost three years. OK.

I can look it up.

No, no, no. This just needs to be approximate.

Yeah, appro-- We left when Hitler occupied Austria.

Right next door.

My father made sure that we-- we could not go there through Germany, so we flew-- KLM propeller. Yeah, we were very happy in Prague. It was upset number two.

Yeah. So then, you move, the three of you, after almost three years in Prague, move to Amsterdam.

Yes.

And what kind of a place did you live in in Amsterdam?

Well, we first lived in what they called a pension.

Pension.

Yeah, pension. And then, we got an apartment. In fact, the address was Merwedeplein, and next to us lived in Anne Frank.

No, really?

Yeah, really.

Did you know her?

Yes.

You did?

Yeah, I tell it sometimes, but not often because I don't want to go down as the woman who knew Anne Frank.

Anne Frank. Of course, of course. But I have to ask you, then, how much did you know her and what kind of impression did she leave you?

She was younger than I am, she so I saw her on the street. You know, kids played in the street? I saw she went to the school where we went. Actually, I knew her-- Margot, I think, was her sister's name. It's a tragic thing, what happened. We knew her better than Anne because she was more our age.

And did you ever play with them? Or was it just you knew them from the street?

No, my brother-- let me think. My brother was-- his best friend was-- I forget his name, but he was the guy who lived in that place where they were hiding.



Well, I thought--

The son.

Your brother's best friend--

Was there.

He was also one of those who was in hiding with the Frank family?

Yeah.

Do you know what that man's name was-- that boy's name was?

No.

Was it the one that Anne fell in love with?

I don't remember. That can easily be looked up if it's of interest.

It can be.

But-- I think I got that connection right. Somehow, he knew about the fate of the Franks sooner than anybody else. After the war, he told me about it. But you know, there were so many stories. Well, you know it more than anyone else. You can't keep them all straight. And I don't want you to hear inaccuracies from me.

OK. My interest is only to find out what kind of connection you might have had, whether it was waving in the street or just knowing that this is Anne Frank, but you never really spoke, just that--

No, no, it was-- we said hello to each other. I can only explain it by casual acquaintance. I saw her. I saw her sister.

And then, you know, who knew that this is going to become Anne Frank, at that time.

Exactly.

And what was it like to be reunited as a family back in Amsterdam? Because you had been living apart.

Difficult.

Was it?

Yeah.

Yeah. In what way?

My parents did not get along. And there was a lot of what I called strife. And I was in new surroundings and new school and a new language. The Dutch did not have German schools. Difficult, but nothing disastrous.

Had your parents gotten along better before, when you lived in Hamburg?

Actually. I think they were quarreling day after they got married. They were just so ill suited for each other. It was not a happy home.

That's sad.

And after a while, my grandmother joined us, also, on Merwedeplein. She roomed with a family who lived downstairs.

This is your mother's mother?

Yes.

OK.

And then somewhat later, my grandparents, the paternal grandparents came. And he still got a pension from Liverpool.

Cunard, yeah.

So he could--

He had something to live on.

He had something to live on. He did not have to work.

Was the home that you lived in-- the apartment that you lived in in Amsterdam more modest than what you had known in Prague or in Hamburg?

It was a very nice apartment. It was, again, a study, a dining room, a kitchen, and two bedrooms downstairs. And then, inside the apartment was a floor going up-- an attic where my sister and I had a very nice room.

Oh, it sounds spacious.

Yeah, it was spacious. And, of course, I had to get new furniture. It was a nice place.

OK, OK. One of the things that's a curiosity to me is that given the connections that both your father and grandfather had with the Cunard Lines, I would have thought that they would have had an easier time to find visas to leave Europe.

Absolutely. They could both. But I remember, when the war started, you know, it had gone on already for a year before they invaded Holland, Belgium, and France.

I believe it was May 1940 that they came into the Netherlands.

Yeah.

And in '39--

The war starts.

--the war into Poland. Anyway, my grandfather stayed in Amsterdam to be with his son and his family. He was very proud of him, as I told you before. And my father said, shouldn't we leave? I remember a conversation I had. Holland was neutral in World War I. And he said, I give you assurance, no German soldier will ever cross the border to the Netherlands. I'm sorry, he was wrong.

So you're father--

So we stayed. We figured Holland would be neutral again and we can-- after the war, we go back to Germany. That was the general idea for most emigrants.

Yeah. So there wasn't even a search for visas to leave Europe. It was this place will be safe.

Yeah.

This place will be safe. Was there any discussion amongst the adults with others who thought differently?

Oh, I'm sure there was. But you know, I had started my teens, so did my sister, so did my brother, actually. We didn't sit around listening to the grown ups talking all that much.

[LAUGHING]

Of course not. They say boring things, these grown ups. How do you remember your life in Amsterdam?

It was nice, actually going to school and feeling really-- now, we've settled down again and this is it. You know, we had to learn the language and that was fine. Wasn't too hard. Not as hard as Czech.

Yeah. So it's not as different.

Yeah. It's a Germanic language. And what I missed was our youth groups that we had in Prague.

What kind of youth groups did you have?

These were the Social Democrats. They had a group for young people. We went on hikes and get-togethers, at summer, camping. That was really fun. That, we missed in the Netherlands. And you know, you had to be careful. Living in a country where they could kick you out any time, you better not be politically active. I think Czechoslovakia was a much more progressive regime than Amsterdam.

It was one of the tragedies of Czechoslovakia, that it was truly a Democratic country until it was taken over.

There were Communist youth groups. That would be like the Social Democrats were.

Yeah. And there wasn't anything analogous to that in Amsterdam?

If there was, I never investigated it.

So does it mean that you were lonelier?

It was different. We went to-- every Saturday, I think, we went to meetings in Prague. Yeah, I would say, but I made friends in school. You know, I went to school.

Did you have a radio in this home?

No. My grandmother did, who lived downstairs. We had no radio because my mother said this place is noisy enough.

OK. And how did you get news then? Dutch newspapers?

Yeah.

OK. All right. Were there any--

And you know, don't underestimate the newsreels in those days in the movies.

You see, because it's not part of our lives. It's not the first thing I think of. But you're absolutely right. You know, it was in the movie cinemas that news was transmitted.

Newspaper, I would say. And friends who did have radio, they would discuss.

So do you remember when the war breaks out, September 1, '39?

Yes. And how it not touched us for almost a year at all. You heard the horrible things that were happening in Poland.

Did you know-- stepping back a little bit. Because your father was politically active, there were many people who were political who were amongst the first prisoners in Dachau. Did you know that there were such things as concentration camps already?

Oh, yes. That was known.

OK. All right. So not everybody did.

I mean, you interviewed probably a lot of people, and know that this comes as news to me-- well, not entirely, but many people were completely apolitical.

That's true.

So of course, what really was going to happen escaped them. I mean, my father was politically active, but he came to the wrong conclusion, as far as the war was concerned. But at least he was knowledgeable. I have a friend who-- she asked me if she could read this, and the only comment she came was, how come your father was a communist? And I told him, any intellectuals, even in this country, at the time, had their hopes that that would work, up to a certain point. But to her, this was just a bunch of rabble-rousers.

You really have to go into both the development of these ideologies, the people who founded them and believed in them, and the thing that drew others to them. It is not enough to portray all of those believers, whether or not they are false or not, as boogeymen. It doesn't tell you anything. There's something that attracts a person. And so, what is that thing and what hopes does it speak to? That's how movements get power. That's-- we could look at the Nazi party that way. It was something that they solved that attracted people. And either they didn't care about the bad parts or they agreed with the bad parts.

Yes, true.

You know? But there was something that pulled them in-- normal people. These are questions that nobody's had a final answer for.

No, and should not condemn offhand.

Yeah.

It was a search for equality, for instance.

Yeah.

They their terrible conditions in what was then Russia when that movement started.

Yeah. And the attraction of somebody, like your father, wanting to have equality for everyone, that he cared about people beyond those of his own class, should we say, that's an admirable thing.

Yeah.

Let's go back to Holland, then. And the war starts, and you hear of things happening in Poland. And your father

continues to believe that they won't march into the Netherlands.

Yes.

All right. You heard and you read about the war in the East.

OK.

And of course, then, they started to invade Denmark and Norway. And then, in May 1940, they invaded the Netherlands.

Where were you when that happened?

In Amsterdam.

Were you at school? Were you at home?

Well, I remember the day when they pulled into Amsterdam. And you know, the Maginot Line? They built this-- we visited some time ago. They also jumped to the wrong conclusion because instead of coming from the east, like they did in World War I, they came from the north. And then, they said, the Dutch government and the queen and family left for England. And the Germans said, surrender-- they bombed Rotterdam. And they said, surrender, or we will destroy all your cities. We were not prepared. We-- the Dutch were not prepared for this. So they surrendered.

And did you see soldiers in the streets?

Oh, yes. I was outside, and I saw the motorcycles. They came across the bridge. You know, Amsterdam is surrounded by all sorts of water. I saw them. And there was no resistance that went underground.

And how did your life change?

It changed because my father went into hiding.

So did he come home from his office, and say, I gotta go now?

Well, no.

How did that happen?

We went-- he discussed it with family. And he said, I have to go into hiding. And he wanted my mother to go, as well, because he rightly anticipated that he would be arrested. So he went into hiding. And he asked my mother, and my mother refused. So she stayed in the apartment. And my grandparents moved in with her.

Your paternal grandparents?

Yeah. And Hannah, who, later on, became my father's second wife. We met her in Prague. She was the girlfriend of our private tutor in Czech. That's how we-- she came from Prague and lived with us for a while, so she stayed in place there.

OK. And so your maternal grandmother is still downstairs.

Yeah, everybody is still in place except my father. Now, what to do with the children.

Exactly.

He couldn't work anymore. So we went to Wieringen. I'll have to explain.

Yes, please.

This was a camp that was erected by the Dutch government for people who were fleeing Germany and on their way to Palestine, it was called-- Israel.

Was it a camp-- you say, it erected by the Dutch government, not the Jewish community.

They did not want them to come to the Netherlands. They were in transit. And the Dutch were very concerned that they do not stay or even learn the language. So they went to Wieringen-- which were-- I don't know-- are you familiar with Hakhshara?

Tell me about it. I don't really know.

It is a Hebrew word. It means preparation.

I see.

They were prepared to go to-- I call it Israel-- to the kibbutzim-- make the desert bloom.

And how do we spell Wieringen? How do we spell it? W-I-E-R-I-N-G-E-N.

OK. I want to stop, just for a minute. Can we cut the camera? What time is it right now?

OK, am I sitting--

You're fine.

You're fine.

Give me directions.

We're rolling, yeah.

We're fine.

OK.

So the children are sent to Wieringen, yes?

Wieringen, yeah. It is called-- I have to explain. The Dutch were very adapt to gain soil from the water. They drained a England Sea to become partly soil for agriculture and living on. That is called a polder.

Polder?

Polder, P-O-L-D-E-R. On one of these polders was called Wieringermeer polder from the name Wieringen. There were about 300 mostly young people who had escaped from Germany on their way to Israel, Zionists, and were ruled by what was called the Jewish council, Judenrat.

The place was built by the Dutch government, but it was run by the Jewish council?

Yeah.

OK.

For what various reasons, they wanted people not to start settling in the Netherlands, but be on their way. Again, there was no school. It was an agricultural station. They had cattle. They had a place-- a smithy, carpentry, and a vegetable garden. And they were barracks.

I wanted to ask about that.

Yeah, they were about maybe 12, 13 barracks in a semicircle, which each contained three rooms-- no, two rooms, a living room and a bedroom. No indoor plumbing. And slept maybe four to six people.

Per barrack?

Per barrack-- per room. There were three rooms in one barrack. It was pretty small. There was no indoor plumbing or heating. There was a stove, which, in the winter, didn't work very well. And regular beds, you know, cots. And a big community hall where we ate and a big kitchen where the cooking, of course, was done. A place where you repaired and ironed garments, a laundry. That's about the size of it. And people had been going-- but when the Germans occupied the Netherlands, of course, the transit part was out of the question. And many young people went there-- at first, they could still come out of Germany-- went there on their way to the United States or South America.

As well as Palestine.

It was not just the Zionist outfit. And they agreed to-- although I think the youngest was, I think, was supposed to be at least 18, and I was only 15, at the time, and my brother was 13. They accepted us to go there.

[PHONE VIBRATES]

I'm so sorry. That's my phone. So in this camp, in my mind's eye, the picture that I'm getting is people whose journeys are interrupted, young people who were there waiting to be able to leave. Now, the Germans come into the Netherlands. They can't leave. And children, like you, younger-- were you the only ones that were sent there or were there other children?

No. That was a favor they did my father.

I see. So this was an exception.

Yeah.

All right. The Judenrat did an exception for him.

Yeah.

OK, OK.

And my brother-- are we on again?

Yes, we are. Yes, we are.

Sorry.

It's OK.

My brother was put into a barrack with 16-, 17-year-old kids and didn't like it there. So he went back to stay with my mother in the apartment.

OK.

My father is now in hiding. My grandparents are without income, live in a small apartment. Oh, my grandmother lives in the rented room. And my grandparents move into the apartment with my mother.

That's right.

And Hannah, the friend of ours, who saved my life lived there. And my brother comes home.

OK.

My sister and I stay in Wieringen. That's what we called it. Actually, it was called [NON-ENGLISH], a labor camp, Jewish--

Labor.

--labor. So what should I tell you first? What happened to me or what happened at home in Amsterdam?

I would say, my first question would be, is how long did you stay in this particular place?

Again, almost a year.

Almost a year.

Yeah.

OK. And was there any change, I mean, since the country is now occupied, was there any attention paid to this camp that has a concentration of Jewish young people in it?

Yes, one day a whole bunch of high-placed Nazis pulled in and said, everybody pack a bag and get on a bus.

That's after a year?

They only left a skeleton crew because you can't leave a farm, which it was, and cattle unattended. And the rest was shipped to Amsterdam.

Were you left or were you taken?

No, I went to Amsterdam with my sister and stayed with Hannah, fortunately. But many kids had no place to go. And for them, they established a home, a house in another part of where we were staying. And most of the younger kids, boys, stayed there.

So if I understand this properly, you are taken away by people who are Nazis or Nazi sympathizers. They were Dutch?

No, these are Germans.

They're Germans, OK. So these are Germans who get everybody on a bus and take them to Amsterdam and leave just a skeleton crew.

Yes.

But in Amsterdam, they don't take them further? The Jewish community comes to get--

It was not established, yet, the trains and things like that. But now comes the Mauthausen Action. Actually, they



arrested young men-- ones-- I don't know how they knew there were strangers in the Netherlands, refugees. Arrested them and shipped them to Mauthausen, which is in Austria, and worked them to death. The death camps did not exist yet.

So were these-- the people that were arrested, the young men that were arrested, were they formally in Wieringen?

Yes, some of them.

Some of them, OK.

I think most of them. It was an action, well planned. They arrested them and shipped them there. I don't know how they came upon the list. And they were never-- none of them survived. Not one.

When you get back to Amsterdam, you say, you live with Hannah.

Yeah.

Why is it that you wouldn't go live with your mother and your grandmother and your grandfather and your other grandmother?

Because we took that part of the story first. I'll tell you what happened with my mother.

OK. What happened?

My brother is now with her and Hannah and the grandparents. And one day, the doorbell rings. Again, the Nazis ask for my father. Remember, he was going to be arrested for high treason?

In Hamburg, yeah.

In Hamburg. He's not here. Where is he? I don't know. Well, then they took my mother. Put her in jail in the Netherlands. I'll briefly tell you what happened to her. She was there for a few weeks. Actually, my brother was able to visit her once. But this is September--

Of 1940.

--'40. Then, they shipped her to Hamburg and put her in jail there. Then, she went to court for all sorts of crimes she had committed while living in Germany. And she was able-- there was a lawyer who was able to get her free of that. Now, she could not-- a lot of people-- political people, knowing that the parents were out of the country before were accused of things. And they said no, I didn't do it. The Karlsbergs did it. So there was a lot of bogus-- there were a lot of bogus charges against her, which were dismissed.

But she could not go back to Holland. She was put under house arrest in a nursing home in Hamburg-- a Jewish nursing home, of course. Those people, one day, were shipped to Theresienstadt, Terezín. There, she stayed for several years and went with one before the last shipment to Auschwitz.

Oh, my. Oh, my. Did you-- was there any communication between her--

Yes, there was. We had bogus addresses and wrote bogus letters.

What do you mean by bogus letters?

She would not write to the address where we were hiding.

Of course, she wrote to someplace else.

Yeah.

But she wrote a real letter?

Yeah.

A real letter that would go to another address that would get to you somehow.

Yes, address and certain names, not our names.

OK, OK. So did you know of her conditions, at least a little bit, in Theresienstadt?

She was actually dismissed from the jail in Hamburg because she had been down to 80-- 40 kilos, I mean. That is little more than 80 pounds.

Oh, my.

And she was taller than I am, so that was pretty thin. So you know, there was always-- there were always people who were able to do things that were not strictly according to the book. This is how whoever survived, did survive.

But what a-- what a-- OK.

Yeah. It was bad times.

When did you learn of your mother's final fate, final destiny?

Right away.

Right away.

Oh, that she went to Auschwitz, we only found out after the war was over.

OK. But that she was in Theresienstadt, you knew?

Yeah.

OK. It's also quite amazing that she was able to survive Theresienstadt for several years--

Yeah, she trained herself-- she was never a nurse before, but she worked as a nurse. And I think she made the mistake when she arrived in Auschwitz-- you know, they were asking people, what do you do? OK, what can you do? And if the mother of a friend of mine from school said, I'm an electrician. She had no idea about electricity. But nurses they had-- what do we need nurses for here?

Yeah, yeah. So this friend heard your mother say, I'm a nurse.

No, my mother said, I'm a nurse, thinking she would be employed as a nurse. But it was just the opposite.

Yeah. But what I want to ask here is-- or clarify, that this friend-- this mother of a friend of yours actually saw your mother in Auschwitz and heard her say that?

No, she came back-- she was the only one of her-- no, her son-in-law, she and her son-- she had two daughters and a husband who were killed. Her son-in-law and she survived. And I visited her after the war.

Did she see your mother in Auschwitz?

No.

OK.

It was completely-- they didn't even know each other.

OK. So when you're telling me, it's not like there was a witness who saw her say, I'm a nurse.

No, no, no.

It is a-- you're making the assumption that your mother would have said, I'm a nurse, and then she's put in the wrong line.

Probably, yeah.

Yeah, OK. I just needed to clarify.

That is an assumption.

Yeah, that's OK.

But I know for a fact about what she told me. It saved her life.

That she's an electrician. Yeah. So all right. So your mother is gone.

Yes.

What happens to the grandparents?

The grandparents, all of them, were deported to Westerbork. It's another story. And I put them all on the train.

You did?

I was there when they went on the train.

So when you go back to Amsterdam, you live with Hannah. Does Hannah still live in the apartment that your mother lived in and that your grandparents moved into?

No, that was before. She moved in only-- I know, it's confusing. But she only moved in to that apartment when we went to Wieringen.

I see. And then, she found her own place?

After.

You went to Wieringen.

No, she lived there for a while. But after that, when my mother was arrested, they had to dissolve the apartment. Everybody went their own way.

I see. So Hannah, your paternal grandparents, and your brother have no place to live?

My brother went to live with some people who took him in.

OK.

He was a minor. He couldn't live on his own.

And your maternal grandmother--

Stayed where she had lived all along while in Amsterdam.

OK. And so when you come back, everybody is scattered, but they're still there.

They're still there.

OK.

My grandparents-- I was already taken Westerbork. That was the final camp.

All right. So you're with Hannah.

That's way ahead of our story.

I'm at the point where you come back to Amsterdam and you're living with Hannah.

Yeah.

You go to Hannah's house.

Yeah, and then I moved-- we were interrupted then. I moved to that house I told you about, where the boys lived, the minor boys who were taken from Wieringen to Amsterdam.

Oh, you moved to that house.

I worked there in the kitchen or cleaning.

OK.

They took in three or four girls to do--

That work.

In those days, boys didn't do that kind of work.

OK.

And from there, eventually, we were taken Westerbork. I can tell you about Westerbork, too.

Please do. First, tell me when you were taken to Westerbork.

That was in May of '43.

OK. So that means that you live in this place for quite a while in Amsterdam. A year, two years at least. Something like that. So May of '43, around your birthday, you were taken with whoever still remains there--

Was there.

OK-- to Westerbork. Now, tell us, what is Westerbork?

Westerbork, in fact, I just read a book where they-- put it this way. This was also built by the Dutch for people who came-- who escaped from Germany. Also, small barracks-like structures. However, the Germans took it and made a concentration camp out of it. It was built with big barracks, 300 people per barrack. One side for the women, one side the men. Children under 10 with the women, boys over 10 with the men.

OK. And were you in such a barracks when you were sent there?

Yeah. They put barbed wire around it. Stations-- strangely enough, Dutch state troopers guarded that camp, but we had a German Kommandant and under Kommandant.

Do you know their names? The Kommandant's name-- do you remember it?

Yeah, Gemmeker.

Gemmeker.

Gemmeker.

Oh, yeah, Gemmeker.

And he made a deal with the farmers around who were in need of working hands.

Labor, yeah.

And rented us out. I was part of that labor group to work in the surrounding farms. That's how I was able to escape.

OK. When you were in Westerbork, where is your brother?

My brother-- you see, the Germans made what they called a razia.

An action. Yeah.

They would go to a certain part of Amsterdam, went from house to house, to find Jews. First, they go-- went through-- you always ask me, how did you come to know? They had loudspeakers going through the streets. And in Dutch and German, told people of Jewish descent-- and I'll tell you later how they knew who was Jewish-- to pack a bag, no more than you can carry, and went from door to door and picked up the Jews, transported them by train to Westerbork. And from there, later on, the station-- Westerbork was located in a province of the Netherlands called Drenthe, and the capital of Drenthe was a city called Assen, A-S-S-E-N. And from there, it wasn't far to the camp. So the first people whom they picked up had to walk from the station to the camp. Later on, they built a railroad track right into the camp. Because from there they deported 98,000 people from 1942 to 1944. That's what I told you I had just read about.

So it was a concentration camp that was also a transit camp.

Exactly.

OK. And your brother, was he taken up in one of these razia?

No, my brother was with these people and hid in that apartment. They had-- I don't know if you're familiar with it. In Holland, there are many apartments that had a closet. And inside was a mirror and a basin and, underneath, a cabinet. He went into that cabinet while they searched the apartment. And they didn't find him.

Same thing happened to my sister and my brother-in-law. They hid under a bed. I mean, I'm talking about it. And as I talk, I say, no, that's not possible. That didn't happen. Can you understand that?

I can try. I mean, it sounds like, OK, hiding under a bed and not being found. Who wouldn't find you under a bed?

Well, the bed was very close to the wall. So they went under the bed. And the guy could lift the mattress, look in the bed, and couldn't see them. So they waited until-- incidentally, these actions were committed by both Germans-- Green Police, we called them; they were Gestapo-- and Dutch police. The Dutch record is not sparkling when it comes to-- although some people risked their own lives to hide Jews, but many took advantage. Looted the apartments that were emptied. Wouldn't return valuables that were given to them in trust when people came back. But they took in children.

Was your brother well treated?

My brother was taken in by wonderful people, but he couldn't stay there after that, you know? He went into a hiding.

Did he ever tell you about the details of that?

Well, yes. He hid, and then some other-- there was an underground, already, going on. You know, they were not entirely cooperating with the Germans.

The other question I have is, was there news at all from your father? That is, did you know--

Oh, yes. We did not know his address, but he came and visited my sister and her husband. I tell you about that story, too.

Yes.

I mean, there are so many stories, I don't know if you want to hear them.

Well, what I-- yes, I do, as a matter of fact. I want to find out what happens to each family member. So we know what happens to your mother. We know partially what happens to you, that you are in this home where the boys were from Wieringen. And that it's from there you're taken to Westerbork.

Yeah.

I know, now, that, at first, your brother hides in this cabinet at one family, and then has to leave and is hidden by the underground.

By some people who offered to take him in, but that didn't work out. So he then-- Hannah had moved, in the meantime, and taken in my sister and my brother-in-law.

Had she been married?

No, she was not married. She saved our lives, no two ways about it. She rented, also, an apartment--

I'm talking your sister. Was your sister married?

Yeah, my sister got married with a fellow she met in Wieringen.

OK.

So she took them in, and Walter joined them there. And my father sometimes visited them.

OK. And in the meantime, your grandparents-- what happened with them?

While I was in Westerbork, they had an action in the part of the city where they lived and my other grandmother lived, picked up, and sent to Westerbork.

And you meet them there?

Yeah.

OK. How large was-- how many people were there? Was it just common knowledge that you-- if you knew someone, you would bump into them in Westerbork?

Oh, you were free to walk around inside the camp.

OK.

We were sent there with a group, and we were housed, if you can call it, in the same area.

OK. Could you-- where you slept, were there mattresses on the bunk beds?

No, there were three tiers of bunk beds.

So it was like a concentration camp, in other words.

Yeah, it was--

Yeah. Like the ones we know about.

Yeah, exactly.

So you bump into your grandparents in Westerbork.

Oh, I knew they were coming.

Oh, how did you know?

I visited them in their barracks.

How did you know that they would be coming to Westerbork?

I knew that that part of where they lived was being-- they were cleaned up.

It was being combed through.

Yeah. And a few weeks later, my grandmother went on a train.

And that was the train to Sobibor?

Yes. And a week later, they went.

And did you know at that time-- were they given a name for an end destination or that it was just going east?

No, supposedly-- this is-- they had no idea. This was, oh, you were being relocated. I mean, yeah, right. Grandparents, babies in little settlements, like a shtetl, if you know what a shtetl is. In the east, where you belong. Nobody said you

were going to be probably killed.

And when you were in Westerbork, were you getting letters from your mother?

No, I did not get letters from my mother, but I got letters from Amsterdam.

That she had written?

No. No, I did not-- I had no contact with my mother while I-- I wasn't there all that long.

OK. So what happens when you're-- you're there long enough to see your grandparents.

Yes.

And you say goodbye to them.

Yes.

OK. Did you have an inkling you won't see them again?

No. I said al vita zein.

I'll see you again. Yeah, al vita zein. And what happens to you?

What happens to me-- I was part of a detail that was on a daily basis, we went out to whatever farmer needed us, whether it was a big job or a little job, to help with the harvest. This is September. And so sometimes, we went out with a large group, and sometimes just two-- whatever the need was. And in order to do that, we went out as a group with no soldiers or anybody with us. Just one guy who was responsible for the group-- Jewish. And we were wearing the stars and work clothes, easy to recognize, and sent to various parts.

So I knew a fellow from Wieringen who was a courier. Went from Amsterdam to Westerbork. What he couriered about, I don't know.

But he hadn't been picked up?

No, no. He was-- well, he was Jewish. And he actually survived. But he was given a job.

Oh, so this was official job. This wasn't one in the underground.

Official between the Jewish council and Westerbork.

OK.

And he knew me, and he knew my sister and brother-in-law, who, in the meantime, had gone into hiding. And he said, would you like to get out of here? And I said, sure. It was easy for me to get away from the group. However, where do you go?

Yeah.

The territory around Westerbork was heavily supervised by, again, state troopers, I would say. They called them [NON-ENGLISH]. And where do you go in your work clothes with a Jewish star. So he said, on such and such a date, Hannah and a friend will be waiting for you outside somewhere with their bicycles and some clothes for you to change into. And one of-- Hannah and you-- I will take over-- you will take over the bicycle of the other person. And bike through a-- not too close a railroad station and off you go. Sounds easy?



[CHUCKLES]

Only when you're telling me, yeah.

I could not find them. And he said, if it doesn't work one day, right away, the next day, you do the same thing. So I go out with the group. What my mind pretense was-- I had a little dish of so-called gathered berries, if I run into a state trooper. Again, I didn't find them. So another day later, he came back to Westerbork and said-- with a map that Hannah had drawn, and said, you point out where you want them to be. And that time it worked.

OK. So you had missed each other before?

Yeah, we just missed each other. But that third time when we finally-- when I finally made it, I didn't go out with the group. I'll tell you why. We were counted going out and counted coming back in. I didn't want the leader of the group to get in trouble, and he's missing somebody, right? So I let the group go. I went-- I put some bandages on my wrist. And about 20 minutes later, I went to the station where the control was, and said, I'm with such and such a group, but I hurt my-- I had to go to the hospital-- they had sort of a hospital.

Infirmery kind of place.

Infirmery. But they'd said, I had to come to work anyway. So I went there, out of-- I was noted to go out on my own, but was not out of the count of the group.

OK.

So they never found out that I was missing until about midnight.

Did a lot of people disappear from Westerbork?

I'll tell you, I was the first one.

Really?

Yes. There was one guy who tried it on his own but was picked up. And after that, they had worked out a scheme. My sister was picked up the day I was finally out.

From hiding?

She went-- this is something people will not understand in 50 years from now-- to a phone booth.

She went to a phone booth.

Every day, she went to a phone booth. Is Ruth out of there? Yes. No. And then, she heard yes, she was so excited that she ran back to tell her husband. They were not in Hannah's apartment because they figure if I get caught and somehow they get it out of-- very intricate situation. So she runs-- and neither she nor I look very Dutch. They had walking around so-called Judenkeine-- people who were trained to recognize Jews. Have you ever heard of that?

No, no.

They were paid some money, if they-- more for a man than for a woman, for some reason. And they knew pretty well what to look for. And by running, she attracted attention to someone like that and was arrested in the street, brought to the office of one of those Nazis, said she had to go to the bathroom, jumped out of the window. It was on the ground floor. But ran past the window where the Nazi was sitting and was caught again, send to Westerbork, where she stayed several months. Actually, she was called up to be put on the train, at one time, and she went to the Kommandant and

said, could I stay here and wait for my friends to leave so I can-- and he let her go.

Anyway, by then, the underground had worked it all out. You were-- let me put it this way. Every Tuesday morning, at around 4 o'clock, the lights went on in the barracks and the names of the people who were to go east were called and could get their things ready and checked out of the barracks and put on the train. And you know what trains-- she had to wait until she was-- her name was called. And then, with the help of the Jewish-- they had Jewish police. Some were good and some were not good. But smuggled out of there. She was with a whole group. They'd spent the night in the horse's stable, but nobody looked for them because, officially, they were on the train.

So there was never a count at the train.

No, no. Entering the train, nobody counted anymore. You know, you were checked out of your barracks and nobody looked for you. So the next morning, they went on phony exits to work in the fields, had their overalls or working clothes with the star on top of regular clothes and were met by somebody from the underground who gave them money and advised where to go and where the next train station or bus station was and were able to escape. And actually, several hundred people made it that way.

Well, I've talked to people and heard some, read some testimonies from Westerbork where they say that the Dutch police, even-- some of them were members of the underground.

I don't know about that. But let me tell you what happened at one time. A friend of ours was the contact person, a young woman. And she got caught by one of those--

Dutch policemen?

[? --was she saying, ?], yeah. And she was able to talk them out of arresting-- she was with a group of maybe six or seven people, maybe more. And she said, there is nobody searching for them. All you have to do is look away. Nobody's looking for these people. And she was finally talking them out of arresting them. And then, he said, could I talk to you in private for a moment? She said, yes. And he said, don't help these people anymore. I let you go, but don't do this anymore because they turn around and stab you in the back, these Jews. She said, I'm Jewish myself. I thought that was a pretty nice story.

Very telling. Hannah-- was she Jewish?

Half. That's why she was able to live legally and gave us shelter.

I was wondering. I was wondering. Because she's actually from Czechoslovakia. Is that correct?

She-- we knew her from Prague, yeah.

OK.

And she could live legally, at least, in Holland, they exempted people who were in a mixed marriage.

Children of a mixed marriage.

Children.

That's interesting, too.

Also, people from a mixed marriage.

So then, you finally meet up with Hannah. And you have civilian clothes.

Yeah, my sister's clothes.

Your sister's clothes.

I could say, at the moment when I was in that ditch changing, that I really didn't own the shirt on my back. That thought went through my mind.

How did you get back to Amsterdam?

I was first taken to a small town with people who took me in for two weeks, because it was known that I had escaped, and they watched every station and terminal in Prague. And they didn't want me to--

You mean in Westerbork?

No, in Amsterdam.

In Amsterdam. Yeah.

For possibly-- they'd looked for me. The only time anybody looked for me.

[LAUGHING]

They said the Kommandant was so mad, he said, any time of night you find her, bring her here. I'm going to shoot her. Because his reputation was made. He not only was managing that camp was only one other Nazi, keeping German soldiers for the Eastern Front, you know? But he also made money on us by selling us to-- our labor.

Of course. OK.

OK.

Did things like that happen in the camp? Did you see people being shot? Were people hung? Those types of brutal--

No, no.

So Westerbork didn't have that?

No, not at all.

OK.

I know of one-- I think, a guy was caught in in flagrante he went over to the--

Lady's side.

Lady's side and snuggled up to his wife or something. And he was told about it-- we had Jewish police in there; not Dutch or German-- and was told, and he beat him up.

The policeman did?

No, the Kommandant.

The Kommandant.

That's the only physical punishment I-- oh, we had to stand on appell.

So you had roll call in the morning.

Yeah, every once in a while for hours on end.

So then you get--

Oh, yeah. Roll call every night. You know, they went through to see if everybody was on there bed.

Yeah. So you stay at this place for a few weeks because they're looking for you in Amsterdam.

Yes. And then-- but on the day I escaped-- I told you about my sister. She went to Westerbork. And she went, got out the way I've just described to you how the underground had made a procedure.

They found a loophole.

Yeah. They made it so these people were not looked for, and met by somebody to give them directions how to get to the nearest bus stop or railroad station and money.

You have to have something like that, yeah. So we're talking what year, at this point?

I got out in '43.

OK.

And she went in and came out in '44, in January or February '44.

And by that time, you were with Hannah?

I was with Hannah and my brother and my brother-in-law.

So the three of you are living with Hannah in her home, whatever that home was.

Yeah.

Was it an apartment?

The three of us plus my sister's husband.

Yes, yes. And describe for me where this was.

It was one of those-- it was-- what they called Amsterdam Zuid-- South. Nice neighborhood. Maybe you've seen a film. They made a film about where we-- because Anne Frank lived there. It was one of those houses that had two floors. First, you walked upstairs and you're on one floor. And then, you walked another set of stairs and went up and was part of the house.

It was a residential neighborhood?

Residential neighborhood. The last winter was bad, as you might have heard. We called it the Hunger Winter because the Dutch government, in exile, told the railroad workers to go on strike. And the Germans said, OK, go on strike. We'll use Germans, but don't expect any deliveries, you know. The Netherlands-- the part of the Netherlands that had not been liberated in '44 were starving, literally.

And Amsterdam was in that area.

I recollect that the Allied forces occupied France, Belgium, later on, got into Germany, but-- and part of the Netherlands, the south.

But that--

But get couldn't get across the Rhine. And that winter, the northern part of the Netherlands was still under German occupation.

So that brings us to, actually, the winter of '45--

'44, '45, yeah.

Yeah. Because the Allies land in June '44.

Yes, correct.

And then, they take over all these territories the latter half of that year. So when you return, you're really coming close to what becomes the end of the war. It's not quite there, yet, but in the last year of the war.

When I got back to Amsterdam, that was in September of '44.

Yeah, September '44. And the war will last until May.

My sister-- no-- wrong. I got back to Amsterdam in '43.

September of '43?

Yeah.

OK.

And she stayed there until early '44. '44, yeah. We still had that whole year.

OK.

Amsterdam was liberated in '45, May of '45.

So it was two winters-- actually, two winters that you had there.

Yeah. Yeah.

Now, how were you able-- did you ever venture out of the house? Oh, I was assigned-- you see, the thing is, I'm very small, as you noticed. And the Dutch are very tall. So in those days, they thought I was a child. You know, we stood on line, on ends people watching, talking to each other, never even looking at me because they thought I was a kid.

Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness. And here you are, you're almost 20 years old. You know? 19, 20.

18, 19.

Oh, my.

20. No. On my 20th birthday we were already at-- we, actually, on May 8, 1945 I turned 20 and that was the day of liberation. So I was not a child anymore.

No.

Not even a teenager.

No.

Yes, I was a teenager.

Yeah.

So I-- in the winter, you know, you have your coat on and scarf around your head. Who looks at me?

So you would-- and it was the same for your sister and her husband and your brother?

No. They had to-- my sister, once in a while, went out. But we only had one winter coat between us.

Oh, my goodness.

So the neighbors after the war said, we thought you were one person.

And none of the neighbors suspected?

No. Actually, the downstairs neighbor-- oh, we-- the last winter, the Germans cut off the electricity. So the toilets didn't work. So we all had to use a pail. And the downstairs neighbors had a garden and dug a hole and gave me permission-- my sister and me permission to empty--

In there.

--in there. And I always thought, they must be wondering because my brother and my brother-in-law never showed up. They couldn't. They would have been recognized immediately. And there were Nazis living around us, [? torch ?] Nazis. I know a woman who I was told to stay away from. You know, you went to the store and you stayed there for a while.

And why would you stay at the store for a while?

Because you stood on line.

I see.

Because--

There was rationing?

Yes. You got-- let's say you got-- oh, let's say, a soup kitchen. For a while they had a soup kitchen. And you had coupons. And you stood on line when it was your--

Now, how did you get coupons?

Underground.

OK.

We all had false papers-- ID papers.

Now, all of this time, the older generations are gone. Your grandparents have been shipped off east. Your mother's in Theresienstadt. Your father is in hiding. Do you still-- does he still come visit at this late date?

Did he visit us?

Yes.

Yes, he did.

OK. And do you know, if he was staying close by in Amsterdam?

I have no idea. He never told us, and it somehow never came up.

All right. But you knew he's around. You knew he's alive.

Yeah.

OK. When your birthday comes in May 1945, how soon after that does he show up?

Oh, we were all-- immediately. Actually, my brother was the finder of people. You know, my brother-in-law had a brother who was in hiding and he had no idea what happened to him. And my brother goes out and finds them somewhere.

[LAUGHING]

It was really strange, strange-- you know, it was bittersweet. Because the news was not good. So many people we knew had perished. We-- I didn't know. People would say, oh, I knew all along about the death camps. I didn't.

Were you waiting for your mother?

Of course. We found out-- Hannah's sister was in Theresienstadt till the end. And she wrote to her that my mother had gone to Auschwitz.

So how did you come together, then, at the end of the war? You know, the war is over. And now, it's the three of you, your father, and--

Hannah.

--and Hannah. Do you stay in Hannah's place?

Yes. We moved, but then I was almost ready to go to the States. I had an aunt, my mother's sister, younger sister.

The one who had also been with you in Prague.

Yeah. And gone to Paris, and then to the South of France, and made it to the States. She and my uncle wrote, come to the States, if you want to. You know, you had to give--

Affidavits.

--affidavits. And my sister and I decided to do it. And my brother stayed in Holland.

And your father?

No, my father stayed in Amsterdam. Remember, he was a known communist and every time he visited us in this

country, he had to have a special permit from the government.

From the US government.

Yeah.

Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist party? That's the question that is asked.

Yeah.

You know?

Yeah. Have you ever-- yeah, yeah.

Have you-- yeah.

As a matter of fact, after he died, Hannah came visiting one time, and she was pulled out of-- as she got off the plane, went through passport control, and was pulled into a room. And she was 80 at the time. And questioned about communism. Are you still member of the party? She said, finally, I'm 80 years old. I'm visiting my stepchildren. Come on.

And did they let her go?

Yeah.

OK.

Very strange circumstances. You don't believe it, when you think about it.

Yeah. Did Hannah and your father, then, become a couple?

Well, they got married.

When did they get married?

I forget.

Had you left for the United States?

Were they married already? No. When they came here first to visit, they must have been married. I don't know. I was here already when they got married.

OK. Was it a happier union than--

Better, much better, yeah.

--than with your mother, yeah?

Yeah.

Yeah. Have you been to Auschwitz?

No, I have not. In fact, when we were visiting in Prague, my brother and my husband and I, there was a question of they take tours to Theresienstadt. And my brother and I said no. My sister went at one time.



It's a cold place.

You've been there?

I've been there. I used to live in Prague for a while.

Oh, really?

That's why I was asking earlier about neighborhoods. But I remember I got the feeling of it being like an old garrison town, which it was.

Yeah.

But very cold, very cold kind of atmosphere. And of course, I mean, it was a camp.

I went there, as I told you with my brother and--

Your husband.

My husband spent the boy-- grew up, actually, his teens, in Sweden.

So from Berlin to Sweden?

Well, his parents-- you know the children that were given permission to go to England?

The Kindertransporter.

The Swedes had a similar program. And he and his sister-- his parents never made it.

When did you go to Prague?

We were in Prague in the '70s, I think?

So when it was still under the old system? When it was still Czechoslovakia, and it was still a communist country?

Yeah, it was still Czechoslovakia.

Did you ever go back to Hamburg?

Twice, I was-- once, you know, they invited people who had had to leave. So we went to Prague. And I don't know the second time. And my husband, who's from Berlin, we went to Berlin, as well.

What kind of a feeling did that leave with you?

I-- The feeling was the Hansestrasse was gone. Where I lived, that corner Klosterallee was gone. Bombed. And there is still a Hansestrasse, but it goes a different way.

So it's not recognizable?

No, no. And we always went to a park, which my sister said she recognized. I had no memory of it. The place where my father worked, I remembered. That building was in the center of town.

We've come close to the end.

OK.

And number one, I have a couple questions. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you would like still to share that is part of your story, part of what this entire-- I mean, journey into not only your life, but the life of your family, and your brother, your sister, your parents, and so on. Something else you would like to share with us about that?

I cannot say that I want to share something that happened. Of course, there was a very intricate story of how I got caught to-- sent to Westerbork. But looking back, I must say, I was extremely lucky. And because of friends-- relatives and friends who stuck by us. We couldn't have done without it. Children who were saved and the parents perished. And people who were hiding with Christians who would have been sacrificing themselves, and their families, had they been caught. I want to express there's never enough gratitude.

Did your children ask you questions as they were growing up?

I never talked about it.

You didn't?

No. My-- I started with my daughter, older daughter who, unfortunately, died a couple of years ago. But she-- for some reason, she was a very nervous girl, and I didn't want to burden her with it. So with the resulted with Helen, whom you met, we never talked, or very rarely talked about it, only lately.

You know, I have a friend from the time I lived in-- we lived in New York-- so that's a long time. She's the only one I know who's as old as I am. It came up recently, and she said, why didn't I know about that? So I said, you never asked me. I decided, unless somebody asked me, and I feel they really want to know, I don't go around and say, I'm a survivor, or whatever. Like some people do.

Like some people do. That's true.

But when we came here, first, I thought people would be interested to know about our experiences. But many people didn't even want to hear about it.

Was that lonely?

Or got bored.

Or got bored.

Yeah. And we've got troubles of our own, you know? So I decided, unless somebody specifically asked me about the time, I don't talk about it.

Were there such people?

Yes.

OK.

Then, I wrote my story. And many people, including grandchildren, showed an interest.

OK. Your husband-- did you talk with one another about what your various experiences were?

Rarely.

OK.

Of course, I knew that he was sent to Sweden and how that affected that family. It must've been horrible to put your children on a train knowing you may not ever see them again.

And it was true for so many families. And that the children were saved, but the parents were not.

Oh, yes.

Yeah.

I heard from German friends that said, his mother did not die in Auschwitz, she died on that day.

Thank you.

Thank you for listening to my trials and tribulations.

This was an honor. It was an honor and a gift that you gave to us. So I thank you for that.

All right. You're welcome.

I will say, then, that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Ruth Karlsberg Meissner on December 6, 2019, in Rockville, Maryland. Thank you, again.

Thank you.

OK. OK. So here we are at our first photograph. Tell me, who is in this picture?

This is a family picture of the Heilbruns.

So your mother's family.

My mother's family. From left to right, my grandmother, Oma Zis; then, comes Uncle Martin. Then, comes my grandfather, Simon Heilbrun; and my mother, Ilse Heilbrun.

And of them, Simon dies before-- in 1920 or so. He dies young. Martin survives the war and is in New York. Your grandma Zis is sent to Sobibor. And your mother, Ilse, ends up in Auschwitz. Is that correct?

That is correct.

OK. And about when do you think this photo was taken?

To judge-- she was born in 1900. So maybe she is there--

She looks three or four years.

No, she-- my Uncle E was, I think, two years younger than she was. So let's say, oh, maybe-- she may have been six or seven.

OK. So between 1905, 1910, something like that.

Yeah.

OK. OK. Thank you. Thank you, very-- OK. Who is this photograph of? These two little boys.

The two little boys are Bernard Karlsberg, my father, and my Uncle Ernst.

And your father is the younger one. Is that correct?

Yeah.

And what are they wearing?

Some kind of little German uniform.

And your father, here, also looks like he might be 10 years old or something like that? Do you know?

More like eight, I would say. So then, that would be 1907 when this picture was taken.

OK. Thank you. OK.

OK. This is my grandfather, Simon Siegfried Heilbrun, my maternal grandfather, whom I never saw because he died shortly after World War I. I don't know the cause, but I assume it was the influenza.

Yeah, that certainly was a pandemic then around the world. He looks, here, like he would be a man in his late 30s, or something like that. A young man, but not like 20 or 25 or something.

No, no. He's at least 40, 45 I would say.

OK. All right, thank you.

OK. This is--

Yeah, this is who?

This is my grandfather, Morritz Karlsberg. We called him Opa Molly. He was born, I think, around 1850 in Frankisch-Crumbach. He was not born in Hamburg.

OK.

He died in Sobibor.

And he worked at the Cunard Line. Is that correct?

That is correct.

OK. So Opa Molly. Thank you very much. OK. And tell me, what is this photograph of?

This is my father and my mother, and it's their engagement picture. They were, at the time, 22, 23 years old, respectively. They were born in Hamburg. My mother was in Theresienstadt and was transported to Auschwitz in October of 1944, and did not survive.

And your father?

My father lived in Hamburg until the age of 85.

He went back to Germany, actually? To Hamburg?

No.

He-- no, he lived in Amsterdam.

OK. Until Amsterdam. OK. Thank you very much. But before-- Catherine, because how do you have all of these pictures? So many people don't have family photos.

My Aunt Ali had-- she was a photographer.

So your mother's sister?

Yeah.

OK. OK. All right. Thank you. OK.

OK. This is my mother and my kid brother, Walter. My mother died in Auschwitz, and my brother survived with us and died some 12, 13 years ago in England.

OK, So he passed away in, let's say, 2007 was it or 2006?

Just over-- I don't remember exactly the year.

OK. But he stayed in Europe, first in the Netherlands?

For a while, he lived in the United States, but-- he lived in New York. And when his daughter, one of his daughters was ready for junior high school, he didn't like it and moved to Italy. In fact, he was-- the office where he worked sent him to Italy, and he accepted.

So that his children could have a European education?

Yeah, they grew up in Italy.

OK. Thank you. OK, what is this photograph?

This is the three Karlsberg siblings. There's my sister, Rahel.

The oldest?

The oldest, who was born in 1923.

And she's in front of the bike, right?

She's in front of the tallest one, obviously. And she died three years ago.

In 2016 or '17?

Yes.

OK.

And

Behind her is who?

Behind her is myself, Ruth. I'm still alive, obvious-- obviously. And my little brother, Walter, who died, also, some years ago.

He's at the edge, then, at the right-hand edge, in the darker suit?

Right. He is away from his sisters.

And do you recognize where you are? Where this photograph was taken?

Yeah, in the park in Hamburg.

Right by your home?

Right.

OK. And we--

Innocentia Park.

Innocentia Park.

See, I know where we lived, not when we died.

Your brother-- we wanted to just correct it that he died, not in England, but in the Netherlands.

In Amsterdam, yes.

In Amsterdam. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you very much for that. And now, we-- I wanted to cut, but when you were saying something.

Oh, we did cut.

OK. So this looks like a very happy picture. Where is this taken?

This is taken on the balcony in Hamburg.

The balcony of your home?

Of the Hansestrasse. In our apartment there was a balcony. And the occasion was my sister, [INAUDIBLE], sixth or seventh birthday. I'm not sure. She is all the way on the left side.

Oh, on the second row? On the left side?

On the front row, all the way on the left.

She's holding her hands together, in front of her a little bit. Yes, OK.

Yes. And smiling.

All right. And so she's at the edge and--

Up front--

On the very-- the very first row, there are just two children. Who are they?

That's my brother, Walter, who seems to be laughing his head off because there's another girl laughing. They must have told a joke or something. And myself and--

So you're next to your brother, there.

Yeah.

All right. And the girl who's laughing on the second row, is she next to your sister?

Yes.

OK. OK. So it looks like a very happy party.

Yeah, it's a happy party.

All right.

And Jews and Gentiles together.

That's what you see here, huh? A lovely photo. Thank you.

Yes.