

There will be a little red button. There we are.

And I'm going to say that this is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Helmut Von Schweitzer, conducted on June 18, 2020. Remote, long distance between London, UK and Falls Church, Virginia. We are doing this during the time of coronavirus and having a remote interview this way via Google Meets.

And I will start the interview with the most basic questions And we'll go from there. So my very first question to you, Mr. Helmut, is this. Can you tell me the date of your birth?

Yes. I can do that. And I thank you very much for the invitation. And my actual birthday was the 14th of May, 1926.

And tell me where were you born?

I was born in Gneixendorf, Austria.

How do you spell that?

G-N-E-I-X-E-N-D-O-R-F. Now Gneixendorf is now incorporated in the city of Krems on the Danube. K-R-E-M-S, the city university.

And tell me, what was your name at birth?

My name at birth was Helmut Alfred Karl Maria Schweitzer.

How is it that you had so many names?

Well, was from our founder, came from Italy, Maria was part of any name, with a man or a woman, Maria was the kind of, faith, thanks to God [INAUDIBLE]. The name-- Anyway, names change. And nowadays, of course, nobody in our family has Maria anymore. I think we, my two sisters and I were the last ones to have Maria attached to our name.

But the other names are, of course, the grandparents or nephews and aunts who were sponsoring the child.

Can I ask you were you born into a Roman Catholic family?

Yes. I was born into a Roman Catholic family, which wasn't a pure Roman Catholic family. That's another story.

Please tell me. What's involved with that?

Well, my grandfather who died quite young, in 1901 was Carl Maria Von Schweitzer. He was still Von Schweitzer then, [INAUDIBLE] Von Schweitzer, even. And he married this Swedish [INAUDIBLE], who was, of course, educated as a Lutheran child in Sweden. And then her mother was, in fact, an Austrian Catholic. But that's, again, a background story.

My grandfather, my Swedish grandfather, Count Carl Gustav Von Wrangel who was in the mid-'50s, last century, a young officer. In Sweden, there were no wars. So he came to Austria to join the Austrian army, fighting the French at that time in Italy. With -- who was the leader, the boss of Italy.

And he did well in one of the battles. But he also had an affair with his regimental commander's daughter, who was widowed. And then, the future father-in-law lay down the law. In Austria, there is no way that you can exist as an officer having had a child with somebody not married to. And he was ordered to leave Austria, was resigned from his Austrian commission, and settled with his wife, hopefully then married, in Sweden. And that's what happened. He did it.

So this is a story from the mid-19th century about your family?

That's right. I mean, my family started, in fact, in a fairly grand sort of way in Frankfurt a century earlier, in 1750, when this young Italian lawyer arrived from Verona in Italy, in Frankfurt, and married the only daughter of the Arizina family. And then became-- well, his name, his surname, but Suacaria, which was, of course, was for the German people peculiar and difficult to pronounce. So over the first 20 years before he was allowed to become a citizen of Frankfurt, he gradually sort of Germanized his name from Suacaria to Schweitzer, which means, in German, Swiss.

[LAUGHTER]

But explain to me this. And it's something I've always been curious about. How does one, in Germany, become a Von anybody. So a Von Schweitzer, a Von [PERSONAL NAME] a Von [PERSONAL NAME] and so on, and so forth. And then how did it become for your family?

Well, as I said, this grand founder of our family, young and bright, married the only daughter of the Arizina family. And the Arizina family were already a long settled Italian family. It was a whole community of Italian traders in Frankfurt. And the Arizinas had a very prosperous kind of business in French silks and French fashions and that kind of thing.

And so as my great-great-grandmother was the only daughter, the parents were anxious to completely have her husband in. So he then, when he was paying a lot of money to the Frankfurt community, made a citizen, he was then Arizina Von Schweitzer.

And of course, he was a very capable entrepreneur. And he made that Arizina business a very successful business during his lifetime, which the family then benefited for generations from the accumulated capital, [INAUDIBLE] certainly by the time of the First World War, had used it up completely. And that's when it became a different kind of story.

OK. Well, this is very interesting. It means that your family has roots, really, very strong roots to Italy.

Yes.

Because the beginning comes from there. And also to Sweden, because there is a Swedish line. And the connection in Frankfurt, in the mid-- what would have been the 18th century, it all starts in the mid-18th century?

Yeah, absolutely.

OK. And one becomes a Von, a more aristocratic person, in a variety of ways. And so this way was that he was allowed to be Von when he became a citizen. Is this correct?

No. No. No. It wasn't as simple as that. You have to make a much bigger contribution to become a Von if you were coming from nowhere, if you weren't already a titled kind of person. He obviously very much improved the business. And he was a good time in the late 18th century, his fellow Italians moving around from all the different markets all over southern Germany to sell all these wonderful garments, material, that he was importing from Italy and from France.

And then there was the king of Bavaria, who was then he was a king, who built all these astounding castles all over the place in Bavaria. He always needed a lot of money. And Schweitzer was the one, not perhaps the only one, who provided the king with the loans, and with the money to fund. So eventually, he became [INAUDIBLE] family became a Bavarian-titled family.

Is this the mad King Leopold that they talk about so much? Is this that particular king who built all those castles?

I think that is the one. I haven't checked up in my history books. But it certainly was at that time [INAUDIBLE] a great friend of Richard Wagner at the time, or later, and obviously, a bit manic.

Tell me this. In the beginning, it sounds like pure Italian roots. And when was there intermarriage with Germans or Austrians? And when did the family move from Frankfurt to the place where you were born?

Well, I mean, our family founder, he had 16 children and four boys. But because there was a lot of money and the boys wanted to become titled people in their own way, they had to join some sort of army as an officer to qualify.

And so the eldest son joined the French army. And the second son joined the Russian army. And those became their-- got their own titles in the process or in due course. The father's money was there to back them up in the meantime.

And then the two youngest sons were left to help with the business. Because father was a very activist person right until he was 90 years old, when he actually died, and gave up. And he was very enterprising.

He was a leading figure in Frankfurt. Curiously at that time, the Goethe family was in Frankfurt. The mother's parents were there. And the Goethe boys and the Schweitzer boys were sort of playing together. Goethe boys with Goethe-- Wolfgang with Goethe-- complaining that the Schweitzer boys were also always dragging him to various Catholic services. And he had to attend. He couldn't just run away. [LAUGHS]

And another story about Goethe was that there was a golden wedding. The parents-in-law of our founder had their 50th wedding anniversary, which in those days was almost a miracle with people weren't as old as that.

And being a kind of grand manager, he completely revamped a country seat they had near the Main River. And all the world was invited there. And young Goethe, who was then a lawyer, also was invited because of the family connection. And he got a medal. Everybody got a golden wedding-- it was a silver medal.

And then later on, Goethe had one of his moments when he escaped from the northern countries, and he went to Italy. And in Italy he did what he usually did, sketch some sort of interesting buildings. Happened to be a fortress. So he was arrested by the Italians. And then we reduced it through the golden wedding coin. And he was released.

Ha!

And he wrote about it in his memories, memorial.

Isn't that interesting?

Yeah.

So your family, it sounds like really was connected very closely with the epitome of German culture, with persons who became very well-known in German culture. Whether this was Goethe, whether this was Wagner, whether this was other people in that strata. And how did you learn of these stories? Who told you these family stories from generations past?

Well, they were all public stories, not only Goethe, but other people, particularly Frankfurt historians and so on wrote about it.

But the biggest problem was, of course, that these were Italians, you know. The Italians? I mean, Germans were really looking down at the Italians. OK, they were artists and that kind of thing.

But these Schweitzers weren't artists. They're in business. And that was part of the problem, why the whole Italian colony in Frankfurt was sort of-- they weren't treated like Jewish people, but they were certainly just allowed to be there, not to be too much engaged.

But gradually, of course they assimilated. And but the first few generations, they intermarried only. But then, Frankfurt became the center of a united Germany, in the mid-19th century. Some Poles -- [AUDIO DROP OUT]

Something's happened with our sound. Can you hear me?

Yes, I know. Sorry. that's-- go on now.

OK. Something happened to interrupt your thought.

Yeah. Well, no. There was a voice coming out. I didn't know whether you didn't hear it.

Oh, yeah. No, I didn't hear it.

The message.

OK. Well, what happens, you know, I think people in the future who will be listening to our interview will forgive us that sometimes this is not the same as an in-studio interview, that there are some technical glitches occasionally, and unexpected types of interruptions. So--

Frankfurt became the big center of the German renewal. And that was very much anti-Catholic, anti-Italian, anti-foreigners kind of movement in the 19th century. And so the Schweitzers were, and particularly our founder, was looked at with some sort of-- he didn't quite fit the German picture. And in actual fact, after his death, some Germans, a researcher, came up with the idea, which was then made official that our founder's father was actually a German called-- what was his name? I must think of it. At the moment I can't think of it.

It's OK.

Which was then Italianized in Verona to Suacaria. So in actual fact, our founding family was, in fact, a German immigrant.

[LAUGHS]

What a a convoluted kind of circular explanation.

But that was the way it was then. I mean, it wasn't only the Hitler time that started with Germany, on "we Germans are so much better, so much more cultured than everybody else." And so in fact there was also another. Our founder, of course, being also a very sort of outgoing kind of person. He built a huge Italian-style palais in Frankfurt.

And the town--

Does it still stand? Is it still in existence?

Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no. Things went from bad to worse. See, the sons, the younger sons who survived their father tried to get rid of it fairly quickly, because it just didn't fit the new mood in Frankfurt, and in their part of Germany. And it was too big and too formidable to use.

But a local butcher bought it and turned it into a famous hotel, the Hotel [PLACE NAME] And then, when in the mid-'50s, when all-- the king of England, the Austrian emperor. And everybody now stayed at this beautiful hotel, who had a decent bathroom, and-- [LAUGHS]

But then, these unity [INAUDIBLE] talks went on the rocks. There was a war between Prussia and Austria in 1863, I think. And still, the Austrians were beaten at [PLACE NAME] very solidly beaten. And Bismarck and [INAUDIBLE] the opportunity to occupy Frankfurt and annexed it as their border town, the southern border town. And of course, that was the end of the great time of Frankfurt.

But what did stay in Frankfurt, and I think the Schweitzers had a partner here, is that it was a German financial center. Of course, it will also be Jewish. People there. And Frankfurt still is the finance center of Germany. But--

Then--

Sorry.

Does this mean-- excuse me for interrupting-- does this mean that your family left Frankfurt after German reunification? And if my memory doesn't fail me, wasn't that around 1870 that Germany was unified?

Yeah.

Sometime around then?

Well, you know, obviously by that time, the Schweitzer family was a fairly widespread kind of family. Our particular ancestor left Frankfurt in 1850 to have a military career in Austria, because Austria was busy having these wars, and in Italy. So there was some sort of heroism to be gained in those parts.

But one of the cousins who stayed in Frankfurt, he was educated by the Franciscans in -- And as a consequence, he became very anti-religious. He became a lawyer. And he became one of the great founders of the German Democratic Party.

Which party? Would this be if we're talking current parties?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--now the 1860s. And he was the leader of the Social Democratic Party when Bismarck introduced a parliament-- a Prussian-German-- the new German parliament.

Well, that's interesting. That's very interesting. So this is the branch of the family that stays in Frankfurt.

One of the branches. Most of the branches sort of only survived not by the name of Schweitzer, but by the name of what the daughters married into. We are [? occupied. ?] By the First World War, our branch was the only surviving male line. And we were then, of course, In Austria.

Remind me again of the name of the founder of your family? I know you gave me the Italian name. But his first name-- and let's spell it out. And then the name of your direct ancestor. Was that one of his younger sons? And what that ancestor's name was.

Now I haven't got all my information immediately handy.

No, it isn't completely important. I just thought you might know off the top of your head the name of the original founder, and how we spell it.

The Suacaria?

The Italian. Yeah, yeah.

Yeah. S-A-C-A-- no. S-U-A-C-A-R-I-A. Suacaria.

And what was his first name?

Yeah, what's his name first? Can't even think of that now.

[INAUDIBLE].

No. I have to think of it, again. You know, but mainly his name is so uncertain. I don't know.

It's OK. It's OK.

I think it was Francisco.

OK. OK. And then your direct ancestor, was he, as I say, one of those younger sons who had stayed in Frankfurt, if it was through the male line? You remember that you said he had four sons, one who joined the French Army, one who joined the Russian, and two who stayed to help with the business.

No. My-- my ancestor-- our particular ancestor-- was, in fact, the youngest son. There is, in fact, a painting-- a huge painting-- that has sort of gone from generation to generation to the eldest son, which is about 1 meter 60 high, and at least 1 meter 20 wide, which shows the original Schweitzer family for part of it, that father Francisco at the back, with beautiful dress; his wife, Arizina, with a baby, holding a baby; and four other children who are dressed as soldiers, and that; and girls dressed in beautiful dresses around. A very detailed painting. People really sort of look at you. You feel they're looking at you.

The strange thing is that the painter of that is unknown. I mean, that painting came right down through the family to me. I had it even with us in South Africa.

But when we were coming back from South Africa, the Frankfurt museum were so anxious to have it, that they had been loaned to them by my stepmother in Germany after the war It's a unique painting in many, many different ways. And so I made it over to the Frankfurt museum about 10 years ago.

Then clearly it's part of their holdings. Has it been displayed? Do you know--

Yes--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

It's on full display. I haven't been back to see it there on display. But it's obviously a magnificent piece. And I mean, how we ever fitted it, particularly in the early post-war years, how my mother-in-law actually managed to fit it into all the different places the family then lived in is totally amazing.

I mean, she came from a well-to-do family. Her father was one of the greatest lung surgeons in Germany. And he was a very, very money-saving guy. So she had, in fact, did the whole painting-- what do you--

Restored. Yeah, restored.

Yes. Restored after the war. Paid a lot of money for it. I've got all the details of that. And so the Frankfurt museum they were only too happy then to have it, because it was done by somebody they would have also trusted to restore it, some artist in Frankfurt, actually.

What a unique and in many ways telling symbol artifact of your own family history, a painting such as this. And there are few people-- I mean, there are some. But there are few people who are so closely acquainted with the history and the personalities of their ancestors.

You seem to know much more about even those who would be great-great-great-grandfather or grandmother than many of us do way back into the 18th century. And not only that they existed, but what kind of people they were, that the founder was a large, magnanimous, successful, open kind of extroverted personality who has a 50th anniversary where he gives Goethe a medal that gets him out of prison. This is a story! This is quite a story!

It's an amazing story. It's an amazing story. And I mean, he did a lot of other things. I mean he introduced Italian ice cream to Frankfurt.

[LAUGHTER]

So then bring us more up to date. So your family settles. The youngest son joins the Austro-Hungarian Army. Do you need to pay attention to something else?

No, it's not the son. It's the grandson.

The grandson.

Yeah. He was the son of the youngest son of the founder.

And who is he to you. The grandson of the founder was your grandfather, or great-grandmother.

My great-grandfather. Or maybe even my great-great grandfather. I'm a little bit uncertain how to work it all out.

Let's see. So he's the one who becomes part of the Austro-Hungarian Army. And eventually does he settle in the village where you were born, or the town where you want?

Well, no. I mean he became an officer. I'm not quite sure whether it was a captain or a major in the army, part of the Austrian Army. And with that, he could then make a professional appearance in Vienna.

And in Vienna he was obviously looking for a wife who would meet his personal now new established standing. And so he met my great-grandmother, Ida [PERSONAL NAME] Her father was the first treasurer, or first imperial treasurer of the Austrian Empire. And then married him.

Her father, later, when he had retired, he bought up a Schloss-- castle-- no, not castle. An estate 70 k's outside Vienna-- Gneixendorf. And which was then a Schloss. Gneixendorf it was named for.

And with that, of course, my great-grandfather, he inevitably became, actually, co-owner, because his wife kept possession of her castle. But our family, their children grew up-- were born and grew up in Gneixendorf.

Tell me a little bit about Gneixendorf. Tell me what does it look like. Is it a village? Is it a town? Is it just a castle and some surrounding forests? Describe it for me a little bit.

Well, the castle and the village are sort of connected. I mean, in the 14th, 15th century this was a sort of a boundary area between Eastern influences, the Hungarian, Turkish-- I mean, Vienna, I think, was twice surrounded by the Turkish empire people. And the Catholic orders-- [INAUDIBLE] brothers-- the Catholic brothers-- were then sort of regaining the land.

And they [INAUDIBLE] building their [INAUDIBLE] in that particular area along the Danube there are a lot of these [? cloister ?] [PLACE NAME], [? cloister ?] [PLACE NAME], huge, enormous monasteries on rocks, you know, built. And this place in Gneixendorf, it was actually called Wasserhof-- Water-hof-- which was a rather ironical thing, because if there's one thing that was scarce up there, it was water.

[LAUGHTER]

So that was then established, and became. And obviously, a village grew around it with the people having their holdings, and having to make deliveries to the landowners that was first in monasteries. But when Napoleon reigned in the early 19th century, and all that was-- what do you call it?-- not naturalized, but definitely the--

Confiscated! [LAUGHS]

[INAUDIBLE] the nuns and the monks went back to their standard places. And it became then something to be bought by people. And this Schloss Gneixendorf was then bought by a guy called Beethoven.

No!

Yeah.

Really?

It wasn't a composer, but it was his younger brother, who had made a lot of money supplying all these various armies during the wars with their bandages and whatever medical requirements they had. So he was basically rich. So he bought Schloss Gneixendorf. And he invited his brother later in his brother's life actually to Gneixendorf. And that's another story that--

Well, I'm going to want to hear it so. So in other words, Ludwig van Beethoven was in your castle. Lived in your castle.

Yeah, that's right, for about three months. And then, of course, by that time he was already almost-- well, we was deaf by then, because it was later. It was 1826. And so every conversation had to be written down to be-- it was in writing, for him to be able to play a part in the conversation. And all those books notes have been left. And of course after Beethoven's death, they became a holy treasure-- not of the Schweitzer's, but with his associates in Vienna.

Unbelievable. Truly unbelievable. So the von Schweitzers have interactions with Beethoven, with Goethe.

I know. Yeah. Overwhelming.

So when did Ludwig's younger brother sell the castle, and when did your great-grandfather buy it? Do you know approximately when that was?

I think he brought it in-- I mean, I'm speaking now off the record. I think in 1847 he bought it. I can take it up, and we can correct it if necessary.

But I mean he was retiring from being the treasurer of the [INAUDIBLE]. But before he'd become the treasurer, he had been administrator of huge imperial estates in Moravia. And so he was a very experienced agriculturalist. And he certainly made his mark on the land, and of course on the village, because automatically he became the major of the village. And he sorted them out.

But then he died before his daughter-- his only daughter-- married the Schweitzer [INAUDIBLE]. So he then had that [INAUDIBLE], which of course ladies weren't allowed to do anything serious-- studying or learning, so on. So my great-great-great-grandfather wasn't also. I mean, he had no agricultural beginning.

But the father-in-law, having set it up well. So then they had some administrators to run it for them. And of course there was the money from Frankfurt anyway. So there wasn't any particular urgency to make money out of the estate at that stage.

But then my grandfather, unfortunately, he died very young. He also became a lawyer. Again, that was a Schweitzer tradition, that every other generation became lawyers. And some of the people I haven't mentioned, some of the brothers, became, after the first generation, second generation, became mayors and leading Frankfurt citizens. But gradually they were absorbed in the German landscape.

The gentleman whose daughter marries into the Schweitzer family, the one who buys this, what was his last name? The one who bought the castle? The Schloss in Gneixendorf? Because it wasn't Schweitzer. It was something else.

That's right he was a Kaleyle. He gave me his first name.

That's OK. How do I spell the last name?

Kaleyle-- K-A-L-E-Y-L-E.



Kaleyle. OK. I mean, we know much about the family. I mean, they originally pub owners in a village in Baden, on the Black Forest, on the [INAUDIBLE] other side of the Black Forest. That was, in fact, an Austrian possession. And so, obviously, it was natural for an upstart from a well-to-do village pub to go to Vienna. And he was then administrator-- in fact, there were two generations who were administrators for various archdukes, mainly in Moravia, which was a kind of honey or breadbasket of the Austrian empire in those days.

And so that's how the Kaleyles came in.

But they also became fairly renown. If you go to Wikipedia and so on, you can look up a lot of people, like grandfather, Count--

It'll come. It'll come to you.

It's amazing, the Frankfurt people. Yeah, Wikipedia, a lot of my records I got from Wikipedia, because there are official records or paintings that that obviously have been royalty of, -- including, of course, that painting of the original founder with the children. I mean, that [INAUDIBLE] itself, painting with children. I mean that wasn't done in those days. I mean children. [LAUGHS]

Only royal children. Only royal children were painted in those days. Not anybody else's. So this is quite unusual.

Being again head of the what you might call the Catholic minority of Frankfurt, which had a big cathedral-- emperor kind of cathedrals, from going back to the 12th century and all that. And the Schweitzer family had-- I remember as a schoolboy I went there-- had a huge tableau, a black big stone, had a tableau on one of the side walls, which was totally out of line with the saints, and the past bishops and so on, whose figures were all over the place too.

But in the war, the last war, this thing was damaged. So I remember when I went there after the war, there's a big crack right through. And then, when I went the last time to the cathedral, I couldn't find it anywhere. It was gone. But they had now a small little black in the main body of the church on the side where all the seats were.

So are you saying it was moved from one part of the church to another. This block, was it like a stone?

It was replaced completely by a small kind of-- not much bigger than a book-sized tablet, which more or less summarized what was on that big thing, and big golden figures.

So let's go back. We're getting closer to your generation.

Yes.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

So your grandfather-- yeah it's fine. This is interesting. This is really interesting.

So your grandfather is a lawyer. And he dies young.

He dies young. Well, of course, he became a civil servant in Vienna, or around Vienna. And he was looking around for a wife.

And he met this Lilly Wrangel, who was the daughter of that Swedish guy who had to take his kids back, because he developed and became-- you can look him up in Wikipedia-- he became a leading writer, journalist, and hippologist. He was one of the, just before the cars came, and the horses were being replaced, he published a sort of Europe-wide famous book called Das Buch vom Pferde, which had many translations, and many things. It's an astounding book. I've got it.

It means The Book of Horses? Is that what it is?

Das Buch vom Pferde, yeah.

Anyway, and so he was after. So very successful. Why he ever wanted to be a soldier, I wouldn't know. He was much better as a public person.

But it meant that his wife, let's face it, the marriage was sort of a forced marriage through his father-in-law, or the other father. It became too much for her. He was in and out of the country on heaven knows. I mean, he was a very beautiful man too.

Excuse me that I'm interrupting. I'm a little lost here as far as how the family tree is going. We are talking now about your grandfather, who married someone who was a countess von Wrangel. Is that correct?

Yes, that's right. Yes, that's right.

And then you talked about her father, who was from Sweden. Is that correct? Countess von Wrangel. And then you talked about the man who wrote--

Sorry, the original Wrangel I mentioned in connection with-- with what? He was the father-- he is the father of my grandfather-- from my great-grandfather. And then, of course, his daughter-- and that is what we are-- who we are talking about now-- was then brought by their mother back.

They were, in fact, three children-- two boys and my grandmother, Lilly. Came back to Vienna after the divorce. And the mother went back with the kids, who were then teenagers, back to Vienna. And they had to establish them in Vienna.

So this is when you-- OK, this is your maternal side of the family, is that correct?

Father's side.

Your father's--

Yeah. My father's mother was ex-Swedish Lilly, Countess Wrangel.

OK. OK. OK.

I mean, I have known my grandmother very well. And I have more to say about her a little later. But she was the immigrant. And of course his father, Carl's father, the guy who came from Frankfurt, and had married a [INAUDIBLE] lady, he was totally upset when the son comes and says, I want to marry Lilly girl Wrangel-- a Protestant. Divorce.

Shocking. Shocking.

And no money to bring in. I mean, [LAUGHS] Ah, impossible. And of course he walked out. He bought himself another Schloss next door to, or 5 kilometers up the road from Gneixendorf place, and sort of settled down there. I mean, he's sort of a [audio freeze].

But his mother-- I mean his wife-- she immediately said, you marry her, and I'll give you my Schloss Gneixendorf. You can live there. That's what she did.

So let's come now to your parents. Your grandfather has how many children? Your paternal grandfather has how many children? And where in that group does your father fit?

Well, my grandfather had two children-- a boy and a girl. The boy was Carl, who married then Lilly-- Lilly Wrangel. And she married into another sort of family, with an estate in [INAUDIBLE].

This is your aunt.

Yeah, my great aunt, yeah.

Your great aunt. And what was her name? Your great aunt's name?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Don't worry. It's OK. It's OK. Listen, I asked this simply because I assume you might have it at the tip of your tongue. But if you don't know, that's perfectly fine.

I've got it. All my life I've had a poor memory for names. And it shows up in old age even more than before. But I've got it written down everywhere Yes, and I will remember too.

Of course. Of course-- just five hours from now. That's the way it always goes.

That's right. Yeah. Can you bring that green book with the family -- ? It's right on top. You brought it already.

So your grandfather, when we're talking about your grandfather, his name is Carl. And he has a sister. And then your grandfather marries who, who becomes your father's mother? In other words--

He was introducing Lilly, Countess Wrangel, to his father. And the father then blew his top. About the daughter being able to divorce family, no money, and Lutheran. I mean, it's just impossible that in Vienna in the 19th century.

So she becomes your grandmother.

Yes. She--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

And she had a major influence certainly on my life too, because her husband Carl died quite young, probably about 33. My father was only about 60 years old at the time. And so she had to feed the family through without a father, because she didn't remarry.

Ancestors. The print --

So your father is an only child? Or did he have--?

No, no, no. They were three children. I can show you even a picture of them as young children, if I turn the laptop around. But I won't do it just now.

No, no, no. Then you have an aunt or an uncle? Or do you have two uncles, two aunts?

Well, I had an uncle and an aunt, yes. And my father was the youngest. Otto, my father, was the youngest of three children.

And what were the names of your aunt and your uncle?

Georg was the oldest. I think he was born in 1891. Then Matilda-- Tila, as we called her-- was born in 1892. And my father Otto, Otto Bernhardt, was born in 1894.

And when did your grandfather-- the one who was young-- died young-- when did he die? What year did he die?

1901.

So your grandmother is really left with young children to bring up, from 6 years old to 12, 13 years old.

Yeah, that's right. That of course before he died, Carl, great-grandfather Carl, ordained that a friend of his would be the male head of the family until the two sons will reach their 21 years old.

OK. And-- oh, I just had-- yeah. I just had a question on the tip of my tongue with your dad. What did he die of? Do you know? At age 33?

I think that my father wrote a complete story about the family, including that. Something to do with-- again.

It's OK. It's OK. I'm asking too many questions that are distracting, and forgive me for that.

Yeah, yeah. No, no. It's just that I have that poor memory, and I should have had these things at my side. No, the green-backed file with all the ancestors.

[someone in background - INAUDIBLE].

Oh, it's here. Oh! Thank goodness I've got the file. Yeah, thank you.

Anyway, I've got-- hello?

Yes, I'm here. I'm here. I can look things up now.

You know what I think we should do with that, is if later, if you have some sort of like family tree that is sketched out or something like that, if you can send me a photocopy, we can put it together with your file. And then people will know what are the names of various people.

Yeah, definitely. I think that's a very good idea.

OK. So shall we go on for the time being?

Yes, let's go on for the time being. As I say, I can give you now some details, look them up on these family trees that I've got here. But I don't want to hold up the actual talk any more than you--

OK. OK. Well, when you're ready, we'll come back, and I'll start asking questions.

OK. Right. Now where do we go? What's the next question? All right. You know, the three children sort of grew up in Gneixendorf. But again, there's enough money in the family left. They only stayed in the Schloss Gneixendorf during the spring and summer, a bit of the autumn time.

In the winter, they moved down into Krems, in a comfortable kind of house, because the castle was-- I mean, you had sort of stoves in each room. But there were big rooms. And I remember from my early use, I mean, in the winter in particular you would be-- if there's only one place you could be-- close to the stove.

Yeah. So I'm going to just repeat a little bit of what I understand from this. Your father is Otto. He's born in 1894. You had an Aunt Matilda, whom you called Tilly. And then you had an uncle Georg-- George. And Georg was the oldest, born in 1890 was it that you said? Or 1878? At any rate, there are--

1891, yes.

1891. And Tilda was born when? What year? 1892?

She was born in 1892-- 21st of April 1892.

OK. And Otto is your father. And your grandmother is Countess von Wrangel, Lilly. And her husband was Carl, who dies young, at age 33.

Now let's turn to your mother's side of the family. What was your mother's name?

My mother's name was Margarete von Mossig.

How do I spell her last name? Mossig?

M-O double-S I-G. It was a true Viennese family, that had worked its way up from being property owner in the city. And her grandfather, I don't know. Her great-grandfather--

Anyway, her grandfather became a very senior Austrian officer in charge of the fortresses of the Austrian empire. He retired as a field marshal lieutenant-- whatever that means. But he was a field marshal. And he was a very personable kind of person. I've got a very nice photograph painting from him.

He loved Italy. And he married an Italian-- French-Italian lady. Her father had been a consultant and doctor of the sultan of Constantinople.

Oh, my goodness.

And all this took place in Florence.

Did your mother have brothers and sister?

Yes, they had two sisters. But she was the eldest of three.

What are the names of her-- so she's Margarete.

Margarete, yeah. And the others were Evelyn, who was the second child, and then Helga was the youngest. Helga is still alive, lives in Vienna.

How old is Helga?

Helga's a bit younger than I am. But her husband was 96.

So you have an aunt? She is technically your aunt?

No, she's my -- Well, maybe I've got myself mixed up. No, she's my niece.

OK, she's your niece. So in other words, your mother has two sisters, one of whom is-- I forgot their names. Your mother's Margarete. Then who is the second one?

The second was Evelina.

Evelina.

And the third one was living -- Spain with her-- no, I can't think of the name right now. It's crazy.

Did you know these aunts very well?

Yes, very, very well, because they used to come-- I mean, when they were living in Vienna, in the summer they would

always come to Gneixendorf for their summer holiday. So --

And is Helga the child of one of these aunts? Yes, that's right. She's the child. She is, in fact, the youngest of all the children. Must have been born in 1929 or something like that.

OK. So your mother comes from a family called von Mossig. And when did she and your father get married? And how did they meet? Do you know much about that?

A lot. [LAUGHS] My grandfather, Margarete's father, apparently that's a kind of family saga. He ran away from home. He didn't like the Italian set-up, and he came back to Vienna, and wanted to join the cavalry. Of course, without the financial backing of his parents, he had a problem. So he married into a rich bohemian family, my grandmother. And to see if that sails through.

He was one of the best riders of the Austrian cavalry, which really, in the First World War, wasn't all that much of a necessity anymore. And the other thing is he was definitely renowned to be the best bridge player.

Always important. Always important.

Yeah. He just survived long enough to be at my christening. But then, very soon, died. So I haven't, personally don't remember him at all. Only from photographs.

So how is it that your parents meet?

Well, my dad-- because that's, of course, the other story. When the war came, my dad had just finished his university entrance exam at the Krems gymnasium.

So that means the First World War, 1914.

The First World War. So he joined the Austrian Army as an officer cadet. And Georg had already, being two years older, he was already a established lieutenant in the Austrian Army. So he was a staff officer. He was that kind of person. Staff.

But Otto sort of went out with the cavalry into Russian Poland, along the [PLACE NAME] River. And to cut a long story short, he was very soon a Russian prisoner of war. And he spent six years in Siberia before coming back.

This is your father.

My father, yeah.

Oh, my goodness. So that means he was in Siberia in prisoner of war camps-- Tsarist prisoner of war camps. Which also means that he was there during the Russian Revolution.

Absolutely. And I mean, that's why they were held up. I mean Russia surrendered to Germany in early 1918, before Germany surrendered to the Allies. And these prisoners just couldn't make their way back along the Siberian railway. And that took years.

And the thing is, when he came back, there's a photograph of him as he looked when he came back, in rags. His mother-- Lilly-- said, now you must sit down, and we write down the whole story of your prisoner-of-war [INAUDIBLE].

Did he do it? Did he do that?

He did it, and she did it too. We've got two versions of it. Did we ever find out? Not until my dad had died, that all these things turned up.

Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness.

I mean, it's an amazingly detailed day to day and week to week story of what happened, how they got on. And I want to [INAUDIBLE] here. I want it translate it you know It's a wonderful story.

Have you had it published? Do you still have the manuscript?

I've got both manuscripts. But it's a huge job. I was going to write--

But it's unique. It's very unique to be able to-- yeah.

It's totally unique, yeah.

So he comes back after World War I having spent six years as a prisoner of war. And he comes back in rags, you say.

Yeah. And I mean they had to make sure in particular the final stages, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, where they were finally released, he wouldn't be reported as an officer, because communists would take out all the officers and put them into their concentration camp.

Did your father ever tell you stories of Siberia when you were growing up, or this time there?

Not seriously. My father had some very great friends, and one was Kurt [? Weindorf, ?] from Germany. Also a German. His same age. The family were the owners of Pelican writing gear, which was, in the pre-war time, the place for pens-- fountain pens, everything you wanted to buy. And he came from that family.

And the two boys, I mean, Uncle Kurt and my dad, they were just wonderful friends. And for me--

Where they prisoners together? Had they been prisoners of war together?

They were together for most of the time. But at a later stage, the Germans were given some sort of priority. They were supposed to-- well, Kurt did get back to Germany, probably six months before my dad. Depended whether you were allowed on one of the few trains that were running. And the Germans were then unloaded first, and the Austrians stay behind.

So I ask again, did he, as you were growing up, would he ever tell you stories, or is it that you would hear him speak with his friend Kurt, and you would pick up things that way, through what they were talking to with the one another.

No, when my dad felt that we had to have some Catholic church attendance. And the local village in Gneixendorf had a church, but not a priest. And that was a neighboring village. And of course, neighbors don't like each other. No, those Catholics priests in those villages weren't exactly the most--

Christian!

[LAUGHTER]

But dad certainly, you know for formal occasions, we would [INAUDIBLE], - audio/video freeze which was a 2 kilometer walk. But I mean for Sunday service, when the weather was OK, we would walk down 4 kilometers to Krems, to one of those beautiful Catholic churches, yeah.

But then Dad would sort of-- my dad wasn't a big talker anyway. But then he would sort of talk about being a prisoner of war in Siberia, making windows, covers for farmers, and that kind of thing. But having now read the greater part of his story, the real story is quite different.

But he and Kurt [? Wandorf ?] definitely became a kind of technical workshop in the officer camp, making their own

home, and making theater arrangements, which apparently was a great thing. And the Russians were totally fake. They would fill the auditorium time and time again when these Austrians had their theater performance. And Dad and [? Wandorf-- ?] Kurt [? Wandorf, ?] were doing all the mechanical side of it. Making their own tools.

Well, they came-- I mean there's many aspects to this, and we won't go into-- I mean, I'm fascinated, but we won't go into the Siberian story here, only to note that there's an awful lot there.

But quite honestly we children didn't seriously know about it until after his death. He's died in 1891. No, your father didn't die in--

1991, sorry.

My goodness. That is--

A very recent kind of knowledge. I mean, we knew that he had been in Siberia, but that wasn't a subject that was talked about.

Do you think it influenced him? Because it comes at a crucial point in his life when he's a young man. He has just come of age, and then enters the army. And as he enters, he gets arrested and sent there.

I mean, when he leaves he's still a young man. He's still 25, 26 or whatever. Whenever he gets back, he hasn't yet hit 30 years old.

He was only 20 years old when he joined the Austrian Army. So he was, obviously, still 20 years old when he was caught, a prisoner of war.

What kind of personality do you remember your father having when you were a young boy? Was he someone who was more distant? Was he someone who was reserved? Was he someone who seemed traumatized now in hindsight?

He wasn't traumatized. I mean, he had two most fantastic wives, and two wonderful friends. I mean, sometimes friendships [that you know I stood in awe of. And one, of course, was Kurt [? Wandorf. ?] And the other one was a Viennese friend who introduced him to my mother.

So it was a Viennese friend who introduces him to Margarete von Mossig.

Yes. And he, I think he was also in love with Margarete von Mossig.

When did your parents marry?

1922-- November 1923-- just when there was the inflation, which virtually erased all money [INAUDIBLE] in Germany and Austria particularly.

And did they settle then in Gneixendorf?

They did settle in Gneixendorf. And Grita turned Gneixendorf around. She was a real Viennese girl. She was the first girl in her family-- don't forget, girls didn't go to school in those days. It was first generation. She was the first generation who graduated for university entrance in Prague of all places.

This is your mother? My mother, yeah-- Grita.

Wow.

Yeah, she is a very bright-- bright woman. And of course, when the war finished, and was lost, and her dad went back to Vienna, didn't want to go to work anymore. So there wasn't much money in the family.



She went out and created a club for society youngsters for reading books-- famous books, and generally sort of a social club. She was a clairvoyant kind of person. But nobody talked about it. We only found out, again, behind the times. But she was quite an amazing kind of person.

And of course, Schloss Gneixendorf was the ideal place. She would have paying guests and family guests. The house was always full of guests, and so on. And that's what I remember when I was just a little boy. Amazing, amazing people there, who were there for a time; of course, the regulars. And in particular, of course, that friend, the great inventor--

Don't worry. It will come. It will come.

It will come. He was a count of something. Riemesberg. Count Riemesberg.

He was a magic person, with photography. And of course, my mother loved being photographed, being a beautiful person. She also had a lot of painter friends who would paint. So they had all these paintings and photographs which to some extent still around the family. But she was a sort of heart and soul of the party.

And suddenly my dad, who was basically, as far as the rest of the family is concerned, he was the youngest. He had trouble getting through the gymnasium. So Georg passed, [? took ?] colors, and so on. He was a prisoner of war in Russia. I mean come on. I mean, what can you expect from that youngster? So he had a hard time reasserting himself. But Grita, his wife did a fantastic [INAUDIBLE]. But she was only there for a short time.

Tell me what happened. What happened with Grita.

Well, he was-- hello? Where are you?

Can you see me?

Yeah, now I can see you. He had, very quickly, four children. And then she died of blood poisoning when I was about three years old.

So you don't have many memories of her.

I have only got just a few. But I'm the only one of us kids who has any physical memories. But we-- particularly with my sister, Rosemarie, who is next to me-- a year and a half younger than I am-- we've been really in a way possessed by her. Not at first, because we didn't even know she died, because Dad was absolutely-- he ruled that nobody would talk about her. She just, next morning, she wasn't there.

Maybe my first clear memory was one evening, when at night my parents at [? least ?] nightly picked me up from the bed in the children's room, and walked me to their bedroom. And there was my mother was lying there in the bed. And she kissed me. She only kissed us on the [INAUDIBLE]. Kissed me. No words spoken. Dad took me back to the bedroom.

I am certain I can't say it-- I can't be sure-- that that was the night she died, because we didn't see her anymore. And servants were carrying on as normal. We were being fed and so on. The only thing is Fila and my grandmother would be much more around with us children, and Fila, of course, then took charge of Imgard who was only a few weeks old. And she, in a way, became her mother. The two children and her [? maid ?] were mother and daughter.

For a child, I can't imagine what it is like, because you experience, at that age, the world through your emotions, and completely through your emotions. So here is a presence, and then it's gone, and no explanation as to what happened. And this happens to you when you're three years old. And you had two younger sisters?

Yeah, two younger.

OK. One of them is Rosemarie, did you say?

Yeah, Rosemarie. Rosemarie and I were very close. And we were both, in a sense, realizing, as we grew up, that we, in some way, possessed our mother. It's very strange.

How do you explain that? How does it manifest itself? In what ways would you be--?

Well, OK. One of the obvious things, my sister Rosemarie, who was [INAUDIBLE] at the moment. She's made it a definitely ruling long, long ago that she'll be buried in the same grave as my mother in Gneixendorf.

We never really seriously discussed. I mean, she obviously collected anything that could be found from our mother, she would collect. And she was in Germany the whole time. So she obviously had a much better chance of me, who was staying after the war in England, and then in South Africa later.

But even without-- I could [INAUDIBLE] she would do something that I would have wanted her to do without having actually asked her. And it was that kind of thing.

And before we went to South Africa, I was working for ITT, huge American combine for the German-speaking countries. And we were living in kind of a medieval little town called Markgroningen, outside of Stuttgart. And Pam had insisted that our children would be born in England. And so our daughter was born before we left England. But Carl was-- she especially went back to that hospital, where she'd made friends with nurses, to have him. And then she brought the baby back to Markgroningen.

And then she persuaded the sister who was helping with the birth to live with us, looking after the baby, because she was going out to work. Pam was never one for staying behind.

And then she said she was a medium. So we said all right. One evening we'll have a session. We had this medium, this board, Ouija board or something. What's it called?

And so we have this session. And of course, in no time at all who comes up? My mom. And she doesn't stop talking about us being in Johannesburg. But Johannesburg, South Africa, were not on our program at all. We didn't like what was going on there.

And so in the end, I said to Mary, for heaven's sake let's stop. So we stopped. And two years later we were in Johannesburg.

Well, there are some of us who believe in things that we can't explain. It is part of Catholicism too, a kind of mystical-- I mean though most priests would not approve of any kind of Ouija board. But there's a mystical aspect to the faith of people who believe in things they can't explain, and other people who dismiss it as, well, this is all some sort of snake oil.

But for you, when you mentioned that your mother had clairvoyant tendencies, did your medium, when you spoke with her, this lady who took care of your children, did she know that? Did you share any details about your mother at all with her?

No, not at all. We didn't really know then that she was a medium. That only then sort of gradually emerged from there. And Rosie asked Dad-- our father-- some questions. And he said, yeah, she was a bit clairvoyant, but then changed the subject. It wasn't something the family talked about.

Then of course, when his sister, who kept diaries, died, we found all her diaries. She was horrified about Grita's ability to influence other people-- the fellows and so on. She never said it to my Dad, but she said -- Otto should never marry her, [INAUDIBLE].

This is your aunt Matilda.

Yeah, she wrote that in her diary that she certainly wasn't the person to stand up to Dad and tell him what he must do. But the boys told her what to do. And she didn't marry the guy who wanted to marry her. I don't know to what extent they were in love or not. But the boys didn't think he was the right [? guy. ?]

Tell me, who is your youngest sister? You had yet another sister. Is that correct?

Yes, Imgard. She was the one who was about six weeks when her mother died. And she and my dad have always been at, sort of, loggerheads, because she always felt that that Dad was blaming her for what happened.

Did he?

She talked [INAUDIBLE] psychologists about him and so on. But I think the real cause was probably the wound that I had.

What is that? What do you mean by the wound that you had? The real cause--

We had all these Victorian toys, which my parents had. They were sort of passed on to us, because they couldn't afford to buy us new toys. And a toy elephant that was on wheels, and heavy iron things. And I crushed my toe on my left foot.

And I got this osteomyelitis which in those days was incurable. I had two operations in the hospital in Krems, and footbaths forever more. But eventually did it did heel. The doctors-- the [INAUDIBLE] doctors-- said, I can't believe it. In post-war it would have been no real problem.

So was this, let's say, lead paint on that truck? Was there some sort of chemical that infected your toe that caused blood poisoning, like you said it was with your mother?

I mean, nobody was, at that time, trying to find out that. I mean my mother had blood poisoned, and the doctor couldn't rescue her, and that was that. And then my dad, the way he is, once a person is dead, don't talk about it.

That must have been very hard for children. For some adults maybe they can adjust, but for children, as I said earlier, there was a presence, and then there is no person. What happened to them? And particularly it's your mother. So it's a key person, if not the key person in your life.

Well, I mean, in a sense, our mother got-- I mean, or we got our own back-- because we were influenced by her all our life. There are plenty of other instances of Rosie and I, and also the way we sort of, without talking about it, she would do something that I would have liked to do, or vice versa.

I mean, I translated her latest book into English, just before she died. We together, over the--

Excuse me. Does this mean your mother wrote a book, or Rosie wrote--

Rosie. I mean Rosie became a famous professor in Germany.

What was her full name then? Did she marry?

No, she didn't marry.

So it was von Schweitzer. Rosemarie von--

Doctor Rosemarie von Schweitzer.

OK. OK. And the image that I'm getting of your father is that he was a little harsh, or a little bit cut off from emotions, cut off from whatever feeling. It must have been very hard for him to lose his wife. If he was the one who has been in

the shadow, and she was the shining star, and all of a sudden she's gone, it's like the shining star is gone, and it's very painful.

Yeah. Well, he fell in love with my wonderful stepmother not much more than six months after my mother died. OK. And it was not something that he deliberately brought about.

But he went to an agricultural exhibition in Germany. And he met there his cousin Rango, from one of her grandmother's siblings, who had married into the German family. And who was there? Ula Ripke. And the two fell in love with each other. And of course, there again, there was that kind of scene that her father said, if you marry this guy, we won't talk anymore.

So what was wrong with your father in his eyes, in Ula Ripke's father's eyes? What was wrong with your father there? Because he had three kids?

First of all, he was a Catholic. Secondly, he had already three children from a different marriage. And third, his estate sounded OK, but it wasn't particularly economically viable, which is all correct.

But she married him anyway.

Married him anyway. And afterwards he was-- I didn't have any real grandfathers. But he was a true grandfather to me.

How nice. How nice. So tell me about all--

He was completely, I mean, outraged. Because he was the sort of guy-- he came from Poland. And he came. He had, the parents again, village pub. Father dies. Mother has the pub now, suddenly.

She's got this. Only two children. One, the girl, gets married. She's got a son and three sisters. Look, that boy is so gifted. He must go to high school.

So she sells the farm to the pub. And so he can go to the symposium, to the gymnasium. He goes to the gymnasium, in Posnan. He goes off to Freiberg in Germany, becomes a young doctor. I mean he just went from strength. He was the kind of guy who was totally devoted to what he was doing.

When I knew him, he was on the point of retiring. He was heading a huge [INAUDIBLE] sanatorium on the top of a hillside in central Germany.

And he'd written books. He was contributing to medical periodicals. I think he's been translated. At the time he was probably one of the leading lung surgeons in the world. Of course, the war sort of cut everything off.

You're talking about World War II, now, or--?

Yes, World War II, yeah. But I went through, for one year, in 1940 to '41, when he was retired in Wiesbaden, in Germany. And that was the first time when I went to a city high school. And I had good marks on my local high school thing. But the headmaster said, I don't know what these countryside [? city ?] towns do. I think you got to take tests in all the main subjects. I said tests in all these subjects. I failed all of them.

So I went back to Grosspapa, and I said, look. I mean, this is terrible. I don't want to start with one year back in high school. And he said, no, we'll show them. Professor Doctor Ripke with me, headmaster bowed. [LAUGHS]

And the headmaster said, now look, we can reconsider, if you, a professor will see to it that your nephew will get the necessary study help, we'll accept him provisionally, and we'll see at the end of the year whether he'll make the grades, which is what happened [? with him. ?]

So this your stepmother's father--

[INAUDIBLE].

--who is like your Grandpapa.

Who violently argued against his daughter marrying my dad. But once the marriage was done, the typical Prussian way, then I was part of the family, no matter what. Did they have children? Did Ula and your father have children?

Not Ula. Funny enough, her mother was Margarete, and his name was Otto, exactly like my parents-- name, first names.

So you didn't have any stepbrothers and sisters?

Oh, no. They were our stepmother's-- they were siblings. They were four boys and two girls.

So you're saying that she had brothers and sisters.

Yes, we were the eldest child. And then there were three boys and one girl, and then [INAUDIBLE].

OK. OK.

Most of the boys died in the war.

World War II.

World War II.

How many years did you live in Gneixendorf? How long was your childhood there?

'26 to '35-- nine years. Well, eight years something.

And why did you leave? Why did the family leave?

Because as grandfather Ripke already foresaw, it just wasn't possible. And then it was 1932. It was still during the big world Depression.

And that definitely sort of finally killed over my dad's effort to-- I mean, he sort of turned the farm around into something American-style. Just be a huge chicken farm, and-- what's it called? [NON-ENGLISH]. What--

What was the word that you--

Combine harvester.

Oh, OK. Yeah.

Yeah. So it was really mechanized farming there. And then, of course, there was Ula Mutti is saying look, you know. I've got connections. She was a household teacher, trained household teacher. She was the other person, woman, in the family who had a full up to university education, for the first time in the family. And she was a very, very capable person.

So tell me about her personality a little bit. I mean, I hesitate to say it, but also did she replace the mother? Was she really like the mother?

No, she was totally different. But she was an outstanding mother, that's for sure. She made everybody work. Everybody had to do something. There was no let-up. You had to learn things, do things, so on.

I mean, but she was also a good entertainer. I mean, particularly also [INAUDIBLE] way she picked up from my first mother, all her relations and so on, she kept up all the relations. But she had that managerial ability, which I don't think my real mother had.

Was she kind?

Yeah, very kind. She was tough, but very kind. She involved you in it.

You had to do things with her, and run with her, and do this, and go, and so on, which sometimes, I mean, I often tried to escape it, to get into the library. Nobody was looking [INAUDIBLE] me. That was the thing. But there was no let up with her. She was a-- [LAUGHS]

And so you described the castle to me. You described the town a little bit, the village. And Krems is nearby. Did you have a lot of interaction with your neighbors, with the neighborhood kids, with people in both of these places? Or this world that you have describe for me sounds so full, and so many different adult characters with their very interesting biographies. Was that enough?

Well, in Austria, the thing was, of course, the Schloss people wouldn't mix with the villagers. But I took the liberty. I think I was the first boy. I just wandered out, and played with a [INAUDIBLE], and met boys and girls, basically children of our workers, and then the other children.

And then, of course, I had to join, for the first time again with the family, the local primary school. So again, met with a firmer, further kind of range of village people-- the lower village, not just the upper village.

I think that my sisters-- well, Rosie also had to go to the village school. So that was a break from the previous generation, that where we [INAUDIBLE], especially the girls, not -- only had home education anyway. Nothing proper schooling.

Was this an entirely Catholic place?

Yes. Yeah.

Did you ever meet any Jewish people in these years when you were living there?

[LAUGHS] Yes. I mean, when my real mother was, and she had all these guests in-- paying guests and otherwise-- there were Jewish people among them. I remember a Jewish artist who was making these small figures of people-- men, women, and children-- in traditional dresses, for Tyvol and different parts of the country.

My dad put one of his chicken stable things, and it had to sort of special [INAUDIBLE], which we pull along onto the tractor. He put that up behind our garden. And he had that as a studio.

Oh, so this person, he had an enlarged chicken coop as a studio?

Yeah, that's right. But this is a time when you were three years old.

Yeah, that's right.

And you remember. You have this-- yeah.

Back then there was another lady, a Hungarian lady, who was married to a local manufacturer [INAUDIBLE], to a manufacturer. What was her name? --

Anyway, she was a beautiful, black haired youth married to him. Anyway, and she was one of a family that my mother

had introduced to Gneixendorf.

And she was the sort of life and soul of the party, very lively, very, very much my mother's type person. And she gave Rosie a black doll as a present. And for some reason, that black doll meant an awful lot to Rosie. And when we were on the train to resettle in Germany, she was clutching her black doll. And the parents were getting more and more anxious before the German border.

This means your father and your stepmother?

Stepmother. And my stepmother had bought a beautiful white doll for her, and tried to sort of hand it to her. And she was refusing to hold her.

In the end, my dad, just before we got to the frontier, just grabbed the doll-- the black doll-- from her and took it away. And Rosie was so upset, screamed and cried. Can't believe it. And even as a university professor, she would come up with how terrible it was when that baby doll was dragged off. It was amazing.

A university professor saw this and came up-- oh, are you saying your-- Rosie becomes a university professor.

She had become a university professor. And she still was suffering from that blow. And Dad just grabbed that black doll from her.

Why do you think he did that?

Because of the German frontier. Could you imagine the Nazi kind of inspectors, what would they have done? I mean, they would have made a big scene about it. And we were trying to immigrate to Germany with a clean kind of ticket.

So I want to go back a little bit here. The one part that you told me that sounded so jarring is when you said that you had gotten some kind of infection and poisoning in your toe because of toys that had been handed down from Victorian era. And the reason why they're handed down is that your parents don't have enough money to buy new toys for you. Is that correct?

Yeah, that is correct. Because I mean with a big castle like that, and the economic situation, and my dad having to take over from people who were supposed to look after the farming side during the war, who weren't qualified, and who grabbed stuff for their own. I mean my dad said something, there were weeds all over the place. And it's in a terrible state, the estate, because there were no-- there was no man around to deal with it. There were servants who were supposedly looking after the estate.

So is this what you mean when you say that the founder from the 18th century had created a fortune that by the time you are born most of it has been dissipated. Most of it has disappeared.

Yeah, definitely completely disappeared. And then of course the inflation wiped out any sort of bank money altogether. So everything had to be done from square one again.

And of course they weren't used to it. That's the problem. And they'd been living, growing old, in a totally different place.

Yeah. You're right. I mean the whole transformation of one kind of society in the early part of the 20th century to a different kind of society, and how people were then going to make their living and make ends meet, it just completely went upside down. But if you were, for example, from a noble family, you didn't have to think about things like that in such a business way before.

The trouble is a noble family with money is OK. Without money it's even worse off than other people, because you haven't learned to work hard. But my dad of course, he had to carry this change, because Georg, his elder brother, was no good.

Why was Georg no good at this?

He was a know-all. He was a total failure. I mean, he was a kind of Nazi, but then we, the family, didn't know what he was. He was just a [? figure ?] man. But I mean he didn't have any children.

Did he not marry?

Yeah, he married. But he saw a beautiful girl on the tram in Vienna while he was studying law, which he never finished. And he fell in love with her just like that. She married him. And You know Tilla wrote in her diary, not our kind.

But aunt Emmie, as she turned out to be, was a wonderful aunt. I mean she represented everything that Georg didn't represent. And he [? stole ?] off my dad, and he just couldn't get on at all.

Was there any friction as to inheritance? Because there are the three children, and your father is the youngest. And usually the youngest does not inherit things.

Well, I mean, Georg had at least Langenfeld. That was his grandfather had decided, because he so disapproved of his son's wedding that he had made it a legal deal that his son, his children, would not be able to inherit Langenfeld-- Schloss Langenfeld. They could only utilize it. The first person to inherit it would be the eldest grandson when he reached the age of 21. And that happened to be me, that 21.

OK. Langenfeld is something that we haven't spoken about. So I'm a little bit confused. But the point of it, that you're saying here, is that there was another family property, and your uncle-- your father's older brother-- gets this property. So it means that he is not in line for the Schloss Gneixendorf. Did I say it right? Gneixendorf?

No, I think because he had the use of Schloss Langenfeld, he stepped aside for Otto to sort all the problem, which was one of the few good things he did in his life, because Otto was the person to do it.

Georg certainly wasn't that kind of person. He wanted to be a diplomat. He wanted to charge about Vienna. He became a Nazi.

He was imprisoned when Dollfuss was killed. He became imprisoned again, of course, at the end of the war. And the new Austria immediately imprisoned him.

And of course the Schloss Langenfeld was confiscated. There was no Schweitzers about to protest about it. And that was that.

So this is something that we're going to want to talk about later, in a bit more detail. But for our purposes right now, you've described a little bit about your uncle Georg. One of the things that is of interest to me is when 1933 comes around, and Hitler comes to power, you are seven years old. Is that correct? Six, seven years old?

Do you remember that? Do you remember any talk about that at home or in the neighborhood amongst people, amongst your father and your stepmother, your grandmother, and so on? Any kind of knowledge of what is happening there?

Well, indirectly yes. I mean, obviously, the Austrian president didn't want to join at that stage-- think it was.

I'm asking now about 1933. This is in Germany, not in Austria.

1933, obviously, Hitler took over Germany. But by that time, Hitler wasn't-- I mean I think the rest of the world thought, well, here's another one. You know, they had a whole series of changes. And then this Hitler boy, I mean, from nowhere, I mean, he hasn't got a chance. That was that kind of atmosphere.

Is this what you remember from the conversations at home? Or were there conversations at home?



Well, politics with not a subject the family talked about in public-- certainly not with children.

Did you know that there was such a thing as a Herr Hitler in Germany?

Well, later on, yes. But at that time, no. I mean, the whole family wasn't politically minded. So you know, it was a --

I mean, Georg was the political guy. But I mean, he was mostly in Vienna. And he would talk down, certainly not to children, for heaven's sake.

OK. Did you ever hear him speak to your father, and you witnessed his those types of--

They avoided speaking to each other as much as they could.

They didn't like each other, then.

No.

OK. OK. And was this personal? In other words, was it because they just never had gotten along? They were brothers?

They were just totally different people. And Georg had that habit of putting people down. He was the great guy. And you really, with Otto having a trouble to get his Matura at the high school, and being interested in farming, for heaven's sake.

And then, being a prisoner of war [INAUDIBLE]. And then losing his eldest son. I mean for heaven's sake, I mean Otto was just no good at all as far as he was concerned.

Who was the oldest son that Otto loses?

Gottfried. Gottfried was the first, my older brother. Again, he was never talked about. The family was having a big garden party, and suddenly Gottfried was missing. They found him drowned in a rain water collecting. Thing.

Sadly-- I've learned that later from different sources-- little boys are apt, when their face goes underwater, to stay under water and remain still, not to struggle. And that's happened just virtually around the corner, with the whole family having tea and chatting away.

So there were lots of things that uncle Georg looked down upon your father on.

It was from nature, you know, right from early youth. I mean, there was a huge letter from you know from Tilla which is written by Lilly's father. Lilly, one thing she did, when her mother either already had died or something like that, she got in touch with her father again, and said, we will come and visit you this summer.

So they went to [PLACE NAME] Sweden, Lilly with her three children, and stayed the whole summer there. And then, at the end of the year, grandfather brought her this amazing letter-- [INAUDIBLE]-- an amazing letter, saying what a wonderful experience it was to meet her again. Obviously, she was his favorite daughter. And all the weeks together.

But then he sort of says, well, you're lovely children, but he says, well, Georg, he's a very nosy and know-all kind of guy. He wants to be a diplomat, but really, he's got to learn to be friends with people. He found him very, very different.

Tilla, well, she's such a nice girl, but she's so lazy. [LAUGHS] She hasn't got any will to do anything. But Otto, when he comes in the room, everything is [INAUDIBLE], and it's wonderful. He is the most amazing, lovely child.

How interesting. How interesting. So this is from his Swedish grandfather, who had not met him before. And about how old do you think Georg was at that time?

Around 7-- 16.

Oh, my goodness that can be such a difficult age. When someone is 16 years old and they know everything. But it's telling. It's telling that this is something that you, that various members of your family see, the older generations, and then your own perception, and then your father's and your uncle's, you know, that they don't get along; they're too different of personalities. And that your uncle has some sort of arrogance to him, some abrasiveness, some arrogance do his personality.

I mean, to me he wasn't abrasive. But indifferent. I mean, we went with my stepbrother, we spent a summer holiday at Langenfeld, 1941. No. 1940. 1940.

Who is your stepbrother? I didn't think you had a stepbrother.

Yeah, Peter. My stepmother had also three children. So we were a total of six children.

OK. OK. So Peter and you spent a summer there with Uncle Georg at Langenfeld. I mean, it was aunt Emmie, really, we spent the time with. Uncle Greg, well, he took me, when he went hunting, he took me with him. But there was very little talk. You had to be quiet anyway, not to disturb the--

And he took me on a weekend I think to Vienna. He had a flat in Vienna. He never had a uniform. He was supposed to be a Nazi, but he certainly didn't talk about it. But, you know I was in the Hitler Youth then, in the Jungvolk, a junior kind of leader. But would he talk to me about it? Not for any thing.

If the whole family-- I mean, obviously, Otto and he wouldn't talk much. But the rest of the family, and aunt Emmie, who was a nice, talkative person, knew nothing too much about Georg. But I mean as soon as the Nazis were gone, he was put into prison.

You had mentioned that he was arrested when Dollfuss was assassinated. Is that right?

Yeah. He must've been in some way associated with the group who had, including that guy who actually shot him. I don't remember or know exactly what kind of guy it was we're talking. But it was obviously a underground, undercover Nazi group.

So this would have been in the mid '30s.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

I think it's 1936. I'll check it up.

One of the curious things, though-- so when your parents leave-- that is, your stepmother and your father and the six of you-- leave Austria, and you're on your way to Germany, do you sell the castle? Do you just leave the castle?

Well, the castle is yet another big story. The castle was actually sold, yes, to a Viennese paint manufacturer. And that when the Nazis took over, the paint manufacturer may have been a Nazi himself. I'm not connected or sure about it.

But when the Nazis took over Austria, the German Army took over Schloss Gneixendorf, and made a deal with this paint manufacturer, who really wanted the Schloss, because he had a lot of spare money, rather than actually live there. And so it was taken over by the German Army.

And they put a big water pump kind of thing from the Danube there. They put an airport or a airfield there, because it's fairly flat ground. And in the war, it was one of the biggest German prisoner of war camps-- that is Russian prisoners and French prisoners, [INAUDIBLE], and English. Americans in the end.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

The Americans in the end made a big movie about this camp.

Was it also called Gneixendorf?

No. It was called-- what was it called? I'll have to look it up. I'm sorry! [LAUGHS] But it was one of those big postwar monumental American movie, with, of course, American prisoners, or a couple of them, escaping and being [INAUDIBLE].

Wow. Wow. So another question that I have-- so in other words, the castle is sold. It leaves your family after having been in your family almost a century, not quite a century.

83 years.

Yeah. Yeah. And is it sold when you moved to Germany, or is it sold for or--? OK. OK.

When we moved. SO that was all sort of simultaneous. But then we moved in '36. And in 1938, Germany occupied Austria. You know, it was welcomed in a big way, of course.

And then built, made it in a big army station and prisoner of war camp during the war. And then, of course, at the end of the war, it was part of the Russian zone of occupation of Austria. And of course, the Russian Army occupied the place.

When the [PERSONAL NAME] family, what was left of it, got the thing back, it was hardly inhabitable. There was one of these obviously not the [INAUDIBLE] that they bought the place.

But one of the children, one of the sons, who was a bit queer, he had moved in there. He was a lonely kind of fella. The way he made things pay for him, he was looking after-- how you call it?-- mentally sick people who were strong enough to sort of, under control, live their own lives, rather than stay in a sanatorium. And were sort of disabled, as they called it. And they were moving around there. And that sort of gave him enough cash to stay there. But everything was obviously falling sadly to pieces.

And then we as youngsters went visiting there. He's kind of nice guy, if you could find him. But to see that place gradually sort of going to seed. And then eventually it was officially ordered to be-- I mean [INAUDIBLE].

What was his last name? You had mentioned it. The people who bought the castle from your family? What was their last name? This paint company?

Yeah, I know. It's so stupid.

It's OK. Listen, I don't want to make you feel bad about that. These are just details that come to my mind. And if you don't remember, it's OK.

I can easily look it up again. And I have to look it up to find out. But it all takes time, that looking up.

And you know something. What it will be is that we're going to have many parts of this interview. And so some of these maybe we can, after we finish here, before we have the next one, you can jot down, and we just mention them when we start up again.

Yes. OK.

So here's another question, before we go to Germany. And it's my final Austrian-related question, is-- was there any trepidation on the part of your father and your stepmother, Ula, and any of you to move to Germany, actually because of the political situation?

Not at that stage, because I think Hitler at that stage was successful. He sort of moved it back to the Saarland. He played a big, big role. He fully caused the employment to increase again. He built up the economy. Everything was sort of running in an amazingly, positive way.

Certainly our parents weren't-- compared with good old Austria, that was really the rock bottom at that stage, with Dollfuss having being killed, and neither was Schuschnigg, who was a make-do kind of leader. And of course the whole country completely divided between the socialists and the church, traditional conservative people. A kind of hopeless dilemma.

So in other words--

If you haven't got any better choice, Germany was definitely the place to move to.

So that means that it was in some ways the land of economic opportunity in the mid '30s. In the mid 1930s, it is, compared to where you're coming from, impoverished nobility, unable to run a farm economically, castle going down.

Yeah.

OK. So what kind of opportunity then presented itself in Germany for your father that he would go there? What was the specific--?

Well, to find a farm that they could [INAUDIBLE] in Germany, that could be a family farm in place of Gneixendorf. And with Ula Mutti and all her friends, and aunt Ellen Wrangel, who was very much involved-- she introduced my dad to Ula Mutti anyway-- that all these wise people would help to find a kind of ideal farm in Germany where the family, the Schweitzer family, could settle down.

Did they find that farm?

They found a farm. But it was another disaster. Everybody blamed everybody else of course. And so that's why it was sold in 1940, beginning of the war.

So in other words, you moved to this farm in 1935 in Germany. And you lived there for five years. And then it sold.

Yeah.

So I would say that perhaps we stop our interview here for today. We've been speaking for 2 and 1/2 hours. And it's one phase of your life where we covered wonderful aspects of your family history, of what you know of your ancestors, and who they were, and how things developed, who some of the great-grandparents were. And I found that really so unique and so wonderful to listen to, and to learn about.

And then your own early childhood in Gneixendorf. And now we'll come to a different phase when we start again.

Absolutely.

It will be 1935. And we'll talk then, the next time, about things that developed from there.

Yeah.

So I will say for right now I'm going to pause and turn the recording off.

Yeah.

And we'll come back to this.

Yeah.

And I've turned the recording off.