

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back, and I am the director of the Holocaust Resource Center of Buffalo. This evening our guest is Dr. Ursula Falk. And she's going to tell us her story. Ursula, will you tell us where you lived and what your childhood was like?

Yes, I was born in a small town called Bad Mergentheim in Southern Germany, WÃ¼rttemberg. And I lived there for the first four years of my life. My parents owned a shoe store there, right in the center of town. It was boycotted. And when I was four years old, my family and I moved to another little town called Crailsheim.

Before you get to Crailsheim, was your family's business the only one that was boycotted?

Oh, no. All the other Jewish businesses were also.

So everyone had to leave their business and find--

Some other pursuit.

--some other pursuit then, I presume?

Right, yes. So that's where we started out, our beginnings.

You don't remember too much about your first four years, though, do you?

Oh, yes.

You do?

Yes, absolutely.

Were there grandparents? Was it a happy life? What kind of life did you have?

It was a fairly happy life. We had a beautiful home right in the center, right in the marketplace because Bad Mergentheim was a resort town.

Oh, "Bad," right.

Yes, where people came to take the cures. They drank the waters there. It was very busy and a buzzing kind of life. For a tiny town, it was fantastic.

So you have pleasant memories?

Yes, very pleasant.

And your father did well?

Yes, he did fairly well, right. Did fairly well there.

Did he sell men's shoes, ladies shoes, all kinds of shoes?

He sold shoes generally to farmers, set of clunky shoes, no fancy ones.

And the farmers would come into town to buy these shoes?

Absolutely.

So then I presume we're talking about the mid '30s?

Yes.

So it was a decree that nobody who was Jewish could maintain a business, so he left. Well, what did he do in Crailsheim?

Then he started another shoe business.

Well, didn't he have the same problem there?

Very soon-- it didn't last very long, maybe a matter of months, not a year. I know that. And he started the shoe business there. And it was boycotted also, which left him with nothing. And that was not a very good experience because my parents were breaking their heads how to feed their three small children. By that time we were three.

You had a little brother then?

I had a little brother.

We have a family picture. Perhaps you can tell us about the picture.

Yes. Well, we used to go and gather mushrooms in the forest. We had driven out into the forest. My father took the picture. My mother's to the left. I'm next to her. My cousin, Moye, is in the middle. And my sister, Ruth, who's two and a half years my senior, is on the right side. And it's our old car sitting there. And that was taken in Crailsheim, in a forest.

This is, what, about 1936, '37?

It was in the 1930s. I can't tell you the exact date anymore-- in the 1930s.

So you had some happy times though your father was struggling while you were in Crailsheim?

Absolutely, yes, good times.

Now, when the business was taken away, none of the neighbors protested?

Not at all. Oh, no, no. They came and they stole the shoes. They broke the windows and stole the shoes. And no one said anything.

And you couldn't call for police protection, of course, then?

No, no, there was no police protection for Jews, none at all.

So what did your father do then?

And then my father took some shoes over his shoulder, and he got into his ancient car. And he drove to farms and sold shoes. And sometimes he'd get eggs in return for the shoes, foodstuffs in order to keep the family going.

And we lived in a small house behind a large mansion which belonged to other Jewish people called the Landauers, who were a well-known family in Germany. And we were subletting their little house, their servants' house in the rear.

And you needed money to pay rent?

Absolutely.

So that was the struggle, I presume.

Absolutely. And there I had some horrendous experiences already because we were segregated. There I broke my leg on a bicycle. And no doctor would treat us, so I was made to walk on a broken leg, which, to this day, my legs are bowed from this because I never had a cast. And I was in excruciating pain. And never have forgotten that.

Were there any Jewish doctors that could treat you?

Not in that town, no more. They had--

They had been taken away?

Taken away-- they'd been taken away. So that was my experience. Some fake doctor treated this with some sort of earth. And, of course, that was useless. And that was one of the bad experiences.

Did you go to school in Crailsheim?

I went to school in Crailsheim for about the first two years of my life. And there, there was a Nazi who had his legs amputated because he had been shot in the First World War. And he would beat us.

I was a very good student. We had experiences whereby we had to say "Heil Hitler," but the Jewish children were not allowed to say it. But if we didn't say it, we were beaten. And if we did say it, we were beaten more. So you couldn't win. So you just stood there, a reject.

How many Jewish children were there in your class?

I think I was the only one in my class. And then this Kubla man, this so-called teacher, seated me next to a tubercular child on the same bench, which was terrifying to me because in those days tuberculosis was a life-threatening disease. It would kill you.

Strange that the child was permitted to go to school.

It was very strange, but the child was permitted to go to school. And the child was segregated from all the other children on the last bench, far from others, with me. And it was very frightening. The child coughed up blood. And it was horrendous. And I was petrified. I was terrified. I caught nothing. I must have been very strong. But I was very, very frightened.

Weren't the Jewish children segregated into their own schools?

Yes, we were then segregated into our own schools. And we had to leave. My sister and I had to leave town and be boarded out into another town called Niederstetten, away from my parents. And I was so homesick at the time. My fractured leg was slowly beginning to mend. And I was very, very frightened. And I participated in a turnverein out of town again.

What is a turnverein?

It is a gymnastics business, where I won a prize for eating 19 bananas all at once. That was my heroics.

That was your exercise.

My exercise. [LAUGHS] And I was so lonesome that on the way back I jumped the train--

Jumped the train in your--

--with a half-fractured leg, in my home town--

--in your parents' home town?

--and ran back like Lassie, Come Home. I ran back to my parents. And I didn't go to school. I hid. I did not want to go to school anymore. So that was that for a while.

And in the meantime, your father is struggling for income?

Yes, my father is struggling to make a living. And we're dividing the food among us. And we're going to the forest to gather mushrooms virtually, which my mother prepared. And we traded shoes for eggs and all such. We ate. I can't say we didn't.

What about family? You had no family in Crailsheim?

No, no we didn't, just our small nuclear family of five people-- a very young brother who was born a little ways from Crailsheim. He was born in a hospital in a small town called FÃ¼rth, where Kissinger was born also, I believe, in a Jewish hospital. And I remember that. That was a happy time.

And so my parents were struggling to make it. They lived off savings. And then came something called the Judenabgabe, in which Jews had to give up everything they owned-- their candlesticks, their rings, everything that wasn't nailed down. We were left bereft.

Furniture as well?

No, the furniture-- only what you could carry. Eventually the furniture went, of course. But at that point, the silver and the gold, whatever you had, and of course, monies-- whatever you had. And then the Gentiles got food stamps, but we did not. We did not. And you had to get whatever you could somehow. And my parents scraped together whatever they could.

But people were trying to leave the country at the time?

Yes, they were trying to leave. And some of the Jewish people wouldn't believe what dilemma they were in. They said, we will go with the last train. And they did. They went with the last train to Dachau--

To the camps.

--to Bergen-Belsen, to Theresienstadt, et cetera, et cetera. So that was what happened to them.

And your family, were they trying to get out?

Yes, very much. They rode all over the place. And my father had a stepbrother or some stepbrothers in this country. And he begged them to come out. And one of them gave him an affidavit, but not the rest of the family-- just one affidavit.

Do you think he could have given more?

We don't know. They were not wealthy. They were poor people. There was a depression in this country, as you know so well, Toby.

Right, yes.

In '39, there was a depression still. It was the tail end, wasn't it? '38, '39?

Yeah, many people hadn't--

They'd had nothing.

--overcome it.

Yeah. And my one step uncle had buried his little children in cardboard boxes, he told my father. He didn't have anything himself. Maybe they scraped the money together to give the affidavit, even though my parents never used anything. But they were afraid my parents would become dependents. But my dad then got out. And he came to Ellis Island, where they almost shipped him back.

Why was that?

Because my uncle didn't show up for some reason or other.

We're talking about 1939?

No, that was '38 when my father got out. My father got out in '38.

OK, so why did your step uncle not show up?

I don't know. I don't know. He just forgot to show up. But eventually he did. My dad was shipped to Ellis Island, and the uncle eventually came to get him-- his brother.

How frightening.

His step brother.

How very frightening.

He was very frightened.

And did you get mail from your father? Did you know what was going on?

We got mail. We were kind of afraid to write, although I kept begging him, please, dear Papa, get us out. Please get us out. And my father was very proud, begged the Jewish community in West Virginia, where he was eventually sent, to give an affidavit for the rest of the family, which they did.

But that took a while. In the meantime, you and your mother and the other children are alone?

We were alone. And then we moved to a town called Breslau, where--

That was a big place.

--my mother had-- yes, it was a big city in northern Germany where my mother had a sister. And we were cramped together with her in an apartment building. And we had an apartment with my aunt. And we all lived together there.

Did your aunt have children or a family?

No, no, no, just these cousins who she raised because their mother died when the boys were young. And so she raised these two boys.

Older than you?

Yes, who were like my brothers-- this Moye, whose picture you saw and another one, Martin, who ended up in Israel. But the woman who managed the apartment house threatened us. She said that if we didn't give her everything we had left, including one pair of ice skates that my sister and I shared, she would have us annihilated. She would give us up.

My cousins were hiding. One went over the border on skis to Czechoslovakia. And the other cousin went to Sweden. They're all dead now.

But they survived the war?

They survived, but they didn't live to a very old age. My one cousin died at age 49 in Israel. And my other cousin died several years ago in Cleveland. But that's what happened. We were in Breslau. And we were terrified.

Did you go to school there?

There was a Jewish school. I walked in one door and out the other. I really didn't. I was afraid.

Did your sister go to school?

Yes, my sister went to school. But I didn't. And then I had a little girlfriend who was killed in the Holocaust. Her name was Gerda Dachenwald. She came from Eastern Europe. And she was killed. Her father went first. He couldn't get an affidavit for the rest of the family. And she and her sister and her mother were killed.

And the father made it out?

And the father made it.

Well, these stories are repeated so many times. But how difficult it was for him.

Yes. And I had some harrowing experiences. Those were some of my worst. I want to go back for a minute to what happened in Crailsheim.

Please.

First of all, this [NON-ENGLISH] man, this teacher beat me incessantly.

Did you tell your parents, your mother?

Oh, yes, but it--

It wouldn't make any difference?

There was no-- made no difference. And then also, they beat us children. And my mother was pregnant with my brother. And so she ran to chase these Nazi children away, who called us Jew stinker. And she fell in her ninth month of pregnancy. And it was horrible. I will never forget the scene-- trying to protect us. And then also in that small town--

Excuse me. Did she deliver prematurely because of that?

No, no, she did not. She was very fortunate. But then something else. All kinds of things happened. I was locked into a room. They stole an Easter rabbit made of sugar, which I got, a red sugar rabbit. I can still see it. And they locked me into a room.

They? The kids? The children?

Children-- and wouldn't let me out. It was like a nightmare for hours.

And you were a little girl.

Yes, I was like in a prison. But anyway, those were some of the things that happened in Crailsheim. And people stole furniture from the Jewish people in Crailsheim. If they could have, they would have robbed us of our eye teeth if we had them. But anyway, those were those experiences.

Were you in Crailsheim during Kristallnacht?

We were in Crailsheim, yes, during Kristallnacht, which was in November of 1938. Yes. Yes.

Could you tell about that?

Yes. Men and others, but mainly men, were dragged through the streets at sword's point. And windows were shattered. Kristallnacht means Crystal Night, where the crystal, the glass was shattered. They shattered store windows and homes' windows. And the synagogue was burned. And books were burned.

And you saw all this?

We saw flames going up. And we heard the glass. And we hid. We were afraid we're going to be next. And my father had already escaped across the border to Belgium.

Oh, from Belgium he went to the United States?

And then he came back for a little while and then went to the United States, yes. And my mother was able to tap the underground because she spoke fluent Yiddish and wrote Yiddish. So she wrote to some Jewish people who were of Polish extraction. Somehow they smuggled him across the border, between night and fog kind of thing.

But why did he come back?

I don't know. I don't know.

Maybe he was waiting for that affidavit?

I have no idea, but he came back. Anyway, and we went to Breslau-- get back to Breslau. And in Breslau, the horrible experiences were that the Nazis came into our house. They came with sabers, took the sabers and cut the furniture until the guts came out of the furniture.

Looking for things?

Looking for things. There was nothing to look for. They knew there was nothing there. We had nothing.

Then one of the Nazis picked me up by the scruff of my neck, by my dress, and held me out of an upper story window three, four, five stories down. I cannot tell you anymore. And he said, Jew brat, I will drop you.

And down below the Nazis were marching in goose step and singing, when the Jewish blood spurts from the knife, life will be twice as sweet. [SPEAKING GERMAN]. And I remember that distinctly. And I held my breath. I was frozen. I can't remember screaming. I was like--

Where was your mother and your sister?

I don't know. I don't know.

You were probably traumatized.

I was just absolutely terrified. Then one time I walked out of the house. I must have been nine years old at the time. I came into the house, and there was a man that looked like a Nazi with an upside down swastika. And he was on a bicycle. And he stuffed a handkerchief in my mouth, and he raped me.

You were a little girl.

I was a little girl. And the worst thing I remember was that handkerchief in my mouth. That was like I couldn't breathe. It was going down my throat.

And then I came upstairs. And I remember my mother seating me into a tub of water for hours. I didn't know why. I do now. I didn't know. Good thing there wasn't AIDS at the time. That's all I can say. But I remember that distinctly.

My mother very innocently went to the police, and they just laughed at her. They had us looking through pictures of criminals. And they thought it was very funny. But that was the story.

Then I have to continue a little bit. When my father got the affidavit, we went across the border somehow. We went to Cologne first of all, where I had another aunt living. And she worked in a laundry in a Jewish hospital.

My brother was not allowed to urinate. He was a little baby. He was two and a half years old when he came to this country. I remember that. And they wouldn't let us go into the air raid shelters. And I remember screaming. And everybody said to me, keep quiet! They'll kill us all. Keep quiet!

You were screaming because you were frightened?

I was frightened. We were in a cellar. And it was very frightening. And I remember screaming at the top of my lungs.

Finally my mother went to sleep upstairs. And she said, we're in God's hands. It doesn't matter anymore. Forget it. What will be will be. And we heard bombs.

And this was in the hospital?

And this was-- yeah. And I don't know where the bombs were coming-- the Allies. Somebody was bombing. I don't know who. England? I don't know. I have no idea. I remember hearing the noise of bombs.

And this was 1939?

Yeah. And then we went to Cologne. And I remember the Cologne Cathedral and pigeons flying in and out. My mother said to us children, you stay here on the steps of the Cologne Cathedral. I will go to this travel agent. And then she came back. And she left the suitcases lying there on the Cologne Cathedral. She says, we don't need this. Let's run. We'll catch this train. And we went.

It was on Yom Kippur. My parents were very Orthodox. But we took the train on Yom Kippur somehow from Cologne to Aachen, which is a border town. And there were the Nazis. And they killed a man in front of my face.

I had stuffed two mark into my shoe, two German mark. I was an idiot, a child, an idiot. I stuffed those two mark into my shoes. And the Germans examined all of us. They examined everything, including our genitals. It was horrendous. I was just fortunate they didn't look in my shoe. They would have killed me on the spot.

That's why they killed the man, because they found something on his person?

No, the man had a wallet with his ticket to go to America. And he couldn't find the wallet because-- he said, my wallet! And the Nazis said, you bastard Jew. You're accusing us of stealing your wallet. And they smashed his skull-- I've never

forgotten it-- in front of me. There was blood everywhere. They smashed his skull with the butt of a knife or some instrument. And I've never forgotten that. And I thought, [GASPS] we're next.

And somehow we got through. On one side was Aachen, on the other, Belgium. And we got across the border. And then the Jewish community there treated us very well because my-- it was either my great-grandfather had founded the Talmud Torah of Vienna. So they knew the name.

My mother's maiden name was Neubauer, and her mother was Cohen. And they knew David Cohen, who founded the Talmud Torah in Vienna. So we were treated very well. We all ate together in a big place a Sabbath meal. And it was like a relief.

So you felt calm?

Yeah. But meanwhile, before that happened, we sat in Belgium on a train station. And we had nothing to eat. I don't know where that came in. My mother had the flu, very high fever. And my brother did too. And two Belgian soldiers, Flemish soldiers, came and took my sister and me by the hand and gave us big cups of coffee and white bread. I've never forgotten it. And that was very beautiful.

How long did you stay in Belgium?

Very short while. And from there, somehow we moved to Southampton. I don't know how all this went, but a child doesn't remember that. We went from there to Southampton, where the boat was to sail to America.

This was in 1939?

Yes, toward the end of '39, almost '40.

And did your father know that you were coming?

Oh, I'm sure he must have. A beautiful English lady put us up in her apartment, left the apartment to us and put us up there for six weeks.

Six weeks?

And had milk sent to us. It was just wonderful, the kindness.

Who was this woman?

A woman by the name of Johnson. I'll never forget that.

You don't know how--

A miss.

--how this came about?

No. She extended herself. And there were little balloons flying overhead filled with gas. I can still see-- that was in London. I can still see that. And in Southampton is where we were put up. But I could still see those little balloons in London and people with gas masks. And they told us where there were air raid shelters. And they were very nice to us.

And you used the savings, I presume. Or did you go to the Jewish community in England?

We had nothing. We had absolutely nothing. We were just fed-- I don't know how-- through magic somehow. This Gentile woman sent in milk and dairy products because we were kosher. And they were very wonderful. She was very

wonderful to us-- single lady.

And then came the revolution. Then the last ship across was the SS Washington. That was almost in 1940. And the boat was full. And they wouldn't--

It sounds like the name of that Swiss movie, The Boat is Full.

Yeah, they didn't want to let us on. And a man named Cartwright, who was a social worker, begged the ship's captain. I can still see him. He was weeping, and he hung onto the leg of the ship's captain.

Who was he? Was he a friend of yours? Did you know him?

No, no. I don't know how this all happened. He begged and he pleaded. And so that's how we ended up on the boat. We're sleeping on the floor of the boat where the post office used to be. They put up cots. We were like in heaven.

They said there were mines laid along the ocean. We'll probably all perish. We didn't care. We didn't care. We just-- oh, thank God. We're saved. We felt safe. We were escaping. And it was heavenly, lying there on the floor with hundreds of bodies. And I remember there are mines, there are mines. It didn't matter to us.

And this was in the fall of the year, I presume.

It was closer to winter.

Do you remember the trip?

It was almost '40.

I guess it was about a two-week trip?

I think it was eight days or so. It seemed eight or 10 days-- seemed like a long trip. And that's how we came across.

Was your father waiting for you?

Yeah, he was, of course. We were sent back to Ellis Island. He waited there. And from there, my dad had gone to Weirton, West Virginia, where he'd gotten a job, where the HIAS or someone-- I don't know-- got him a job for \$40 a month. That was not a fortune then either because my father paid \$35 a month for rent. So we had--

So how did you manage?

--\$5. My mother would pluck her own chickens. And he worked in [PERSONAL NAME] Dairy, a dairy. And he would get milk from there. He would steal the milk-- and this was a very honest man-- in order to keep us living. My mother would churn the butter from the milk. And then eventually she took in boarders. But we were in America.

Before we go any further in America, we have the passports of your father and your mother. Perhaps you can tell us something about-- this is your father?

Yeah, that's my father.

And this is when he left in 1939?

In '38. He left in '38. Yes, that was his picture, in '38, my dad. And that's my mother.

And you have the J for Jew.

Jew. Jude. Jude.

And I presume inside-- oh, no, at the bottom it says your mother's middle name is Sara, like all the--

It wasn't her middle name. All the--

But that's the-- yeah, why don't you explain that?

OK, all Jews were given the middle name of Sara for identification so that they were known as pariahs and rejects. And all men were given the name of Israel in the middle so they were recognizable as Jews, so that the Nazis could do anything they wanted with us. And that's my mother.

And where is your passport and the passport of the other children?

The children didn't have any passports.

You didn't need any?

No, no, no, our names were just added to the parents' passport. We didn't need any.

Oh, it was inside this passport. I see.

Right, no.

So your father, who had been a prosperous businessman, is now working in someone's dairy?

Yes, 14 hours a day. He kept the Sabbath, though. He wouldn't work on the Sabbath.

And what was your initial impression of the United States? What do you remember?

Well, it was wonderful to be here, but we were rejected. We were rejects because we couldn't speak the language. We were accused of everything under the sun. We were in a hillbilly town, West Virginia. And we found some antisemitism there too.

It's funny. I remember a little Gentile friend that I have by the name of Irene Markich, who used to say, acka-backa, stoner crocker, acka-backa boo, if your father chews tobacco, he's a dirty Jew. I remember that. So I met that also, the antisemitism there. It followed us. I don't know. It followed us.

Was there a Jewish community?

There was a small Jewish community, yes.

So you had a community? You had support?

We had a community, but we were rejected because we were foreigners. We didn't speak the language. Because to us, everybody seemed rich. They weren't rich. They were middle class people who had little businesses. And they would invite the children, like on Friday night.

And this one family, [PERSONAL NAME], would offer the three of us-- would say, would you like a half a stick of gum or a piece of peanut brittle? And we stood there deciding. And then they sang a little song to us, which made us feel very bad, about the gypsy life. And I would like to repeat that for posterity.

Please.

They'd sing, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], which means beautiful is the gypsy life. The only want to take and not to give.

So you took it personally?

We took it personally. We didn't go back there. Even as a young child, I did not go back to those people. They did this a couple times. When I caught on, I left them their peanut brittle and their gum. This is how foreigners are treated, of course.

Rather insensitive, wouldn't you say?

Yeah, it's insensitive, but that's how foreigners are treated.

But, I presume, very quickly you-- especially a young child-- and your brother and your sister learned English.

We learned English. And I've got to say that-- I'm bragging now but when I was in the sixth grade-- I came over in the fifth grade. In the sixth grade, I won the spelling bee for the school. I was very proud of that because I made up my mind--

Did that get you more friends? Did more people seem to be interested in you?

After a while, I was admired because by the time I reached the eighth grade, I was the valedictorian of my class, Nelson Smith and I. I forgot an American. And I didn't have money to appear. They even made a little-- in Weirton, West Virginia they graduated from the eighth grade. It was funny. And you would appear on the stage.

I couldn't afford it because at that time I had to do waitressing work in a bar in order to make a few cents. And I couldn't go to my own graduation. I had no clothes to wear, and I had no way of doing it. But I thought about it. And I was very proud and very happy.

And no doubt your parents were very proud of you too.

Yeah. They were too numb to be proud. They didn't care.

They were tired, exhausted.

They were tired. They used to say, don't go to college. My father used to say, refugee children have no business on college. Earn a living. Make money. And he would say that. But I didn't listen to my father--

That's good.

--in that regard.

In the meantime, were you hearing anything about relatives in Europe?

Oh, yes. My father got an envelope. I believe it was with ashes. And it said that that was his sister's ashes. And I remember the shock that he had and the fright.

What year is this?

I can't tell you anymore.

In the '40s?

It was sometime in the '40s. I'm not sure.

And the grandparents had already died [CROSS TALK]?

Oh, yes, long ago. My grandparents died--

Fortunately.

Fortunately-- my grandfather-- I didn't know my grandparents except one grandmother who died when I was four. And that's all I remember, my mother's mother.

Now, what about these cousins and the aunts and uncles? What was their fortune?

My aunt was sent to Theresienstadt and from there shipped off. We don't know where. She died in the concentration camp. She was killed. She was gassed to death.

Is that the woman who was in the laundry, with whom you stayed?

No, that was my father's sister. She disappeared. We don't know where. All his sisters-- he had many sisters, and they all died. They all died in the camps. They just disappeared. We didn't hear of them anymore. Nobody knows where or how. They were shipped out. And he tried to find them. And, of course, hopeless.

So no one survived of either family?

No. No, just our own little nuclear family survived. And that was it. My two cousins, who came out first, one through Czechoslovakia--

Oh, they went to Sweden and Israel?

Yes. Right.

Now, in raising-- well, we'll get to that later on. So you do go off to college. And you marry. And you have children.

Right.

And how about your parents? How do they fare? This is after the war.

My parents fared very poorly. They never accumulated anything to speak of. They couldn't speak the English language very well. My father spoke a mixture of German and English. He would say open the [GERMAN] if someone came to the door. Open the door.

My mother worked in stores. She sold draperies for a company in Cleveland. She worked for Schnitt and Immelman, who were Jewish people. She sold buttons in their store. She lost a number of jobs. Who knows why? She certainly did not look like a classy lady. She was a kind, honest, wonderful lady.

And they stayed in West Virginia?

No, no, they went to Cleveland. When the war started, my father got a factory job in Cleveland, Ohio. And he moved there first. And the rest of the gang came afterwards.

So that means you went to school partially in Cleveland too?

Yes, partially in Cleveland.

Was that better for you?

Oh, it was too big a city. We were lost. I felt lost there. And I worked in factories because I had to work my way through college. So from the time that I was 14, I worked. I started in dime stores. Then I worked in factories. I worked all night and went to school during the day. And I always worked my whole life. I worked and worked and worked.

And your sister too?

And my sister worked, but she was not as ambitious. She was very bright, very bright, no doubt brighter than I. But she kept saying, I went to the school of hard knocks, she said of herself. And she always felt rejected. We all did. And we do to this day because of our background, because of the German thing.

We were persecuted in Germany. They would yell after us, Juden stinker, [GERMAN], all kinds of horrible names. They would pull our hair. They would say you smell from garlic and all kinds of garbage. We didn't even eat garlic. But this was the order of the day. We were kicked around so much that-- what happens to you in childhood, I believe, follows you the rest of your life. And those--

Even with tremendous accomplishment and secure family, you still--

It doesn't matter.

--have those feelings?

It doesn't matter. It goes with us.

Do you tell these stories to your children? Have you told them--

A little.

--about your life when they were growing up?

A little, a little-- more so after we went to Germany.

Why don't you tell us about this German trip?

I was given a free ride to Germany. In fact, I wrote to the Buffalo News about this. They bought my story, as a matter of fact. This was this past summer in May. We went back.

To your town, not to your husband's town?

Back into the past, to my town, Crailsheim. I took my husband. I could not go alone and face it. In fact, my brother was asked to go too, and so was my sister. We all met there. And we were reunited there because we don't see each other very often because we're far away. We're far apart at this point.

It was a strange experience. The Germans that were nice to us, it was very unusual. I mean, they feted us.

We had real mixed emotions. We thought, how can we take money from these bastards? Food, rather. How can we take a ticket from these people? It was a big decision. And I always felt beholden. I don't like feeling beholden. I don't like accepting things from people.

Were you the only Jews who were invited at this time?

Oh, no, no, there were 39 of us-- oh, no, from all over.

How did they find you?

I'm not absolutely certain. But there was a man by the name of Schlecht, who wrote a history of the Jews of Crailsheim. And we had gone once before. We had made the return trip without letting anyone know. We tramped through Germany once before. But we didn't let anyone know, and we pretended to be Americans. And we did meet this man, Schlecht, and we gave him our name. And he said he was writing a history. Maybe through him.

Maybe that was it.

Yes. And I gave him the name, at that time, of my sister and my brother. But it was such a mixed emotion that we felt.

Did you have deja vu feelings, that you're recognizing buildings, people? Did you recognize any people?

We went back to Bad Mergentheim. Yes, I recognized not people, mainly buildings. But yes, there were some people. They made parties for us. And these people who had stolen my red Easter rabbit-- I remember that woman who said to me at that party that they gave for us in May how she stole-- she put it in a beautiful way-- the furniture of a Jewish woman who succumbed in the Holocaust. She said, I--

It was like she's doing her a favor.

She said, I still have that table. And it is in such good condition. And I remembered her. She was the one that stole my red rabbit and locked me into a room.

And you couldn't say anything to her?

No, I was like paralyzed. I went there with mixed emotions, mainly with hatred. I was full of anger and full of hatred.

Did you have the same feelings when you left?

Very mixed emotions. I wanted to send them my article, but then I refrained from doing it. It was perhaps my husband who stopped me. He said, don't do it. He said, they gave us a free ride. How can you do this? So I didn't send it to them.

And you express yourself in the article about your mixed feelings?

Absolutely, yes.

How many days did you stay there?

Oh, it was like six days, something like that.

So you really did not enjoy yourself?

Not really.

You were tense, I presume?

I was tense. And there were some old Nazis there who fell around our necks, virtually. Oh, it's so good to see you're still alive. And then my supposed old classmates that went to the first two grades with me-- how would I remember them? A Mrs. Ille, who was so sweet, she invited us to her house. I couldn't go in. I felt like-- I just couldn't get myself to do it.

Did you go into anybody's home?

Oh, yes. There was a wonderful family by the-- Bayer. And they seemed to be real and genuine. We went to their house. We spent an evening--

Are these people you knew before?

No, no, they had invited some other Jewish people. And it was just wonderful. It was a very simple home. They had a bakery shop. And they gave us some pretzels. And they seemed to be accepting of us. And I really cared about them. And I liked them. That's all I can say.

How about your father's store? Did you go to visit your father's store?

I didn't see it anymore. I didn't see the house where we lived because it was razed, because we had lived, toward the end, in this beautiful back of the house of someone. We had sublet a house. And we lived in this house that had a beautiful garden. And it had gooseberries and strawberries that we picked as children. It was all razed to the ground.

But we do have a picture of your father's store from-- I suppose that's-- is that Cologne?

That was in Bad Mergentheim, yes. No, that was in Bad Mergentheim.

That's the first store then?

Yes, that was the first store.

And when was this taken, this picture?

Oh, that picture was taken when we went there the first time through Germany. In fact, we went inside the house. And the people that now owned the house, who had the drugstore, took us and showed us through the house.

Had it changed much? Did you remember?

I remembered it. Even though I was a little girl, I remembered it. I swear it was like déjà vu. I remembered that house.

Was that difficult for you?

Yeah, it was very difficult. I remember he gave me a little thing of Kolnisch Wasser, which is some sort of cologne. And I remember it. I remembered it. And it was bittersweet. The whole thing was bittersweet. I'm not sorry I went back. It was an experience.

Maybe something that you had to do?

Yes, I felt that I had to go back, and I had to go back and give recognition that I was who I was.

Did they ask you to speak?

Oh, yes.

Was there a public forum of some sort?

Oh, yeah. For instance, a bunch of ladies who were supposedly my classmates had invited me to a Konditorei, which is a bakery, a different kind of bakery where they served cakes and tea and coffee. The woman, Mrs. Ille, introduced me and gave me a book of that part of Germany. And she says, this is the girl that we went to school with.

It's like going back into the past-- these 50-some-year-old women. We're all in our 50s. And this is the girl we went to school with, the wonderful little Ursula!

So I got up and I said, I'm not the wonderful little Ursula. You people hit me! You kicked me. You mistreated me. You made my mother to fall when she was in the ninth month of pregnancy. I said, that's how you treated me, not

wonderfully.

And there was this dead silence, all these women looking at me like-- [GASPS] they didn't know what to say. And I thought, what am I saying? What's coming out of my mouth?

But you had to say it.

I had to say it. I had to tell the truth. It bothered me. I can understand violence. I'm not a violent person, but I can understand it because it's like-- the mark of Cain is on you the rest of your life, Toby. And that's what I feel. I feel incessantly that I'm always rejected. [CRYING]

What do your children think about your trip?

I don't think they think too much of it. They didn't quite understand why we went. We were debating it back and forth. And I'm not sure now why I went. It's like going home, but there's no home.

But it's not really home. Maybe you went for your parents, too-- maybe something that you just had to do. Otherwise you would not have gone. Some people just don't go back and can't go back.

Maybe they're right. Maybe they're right.

And maybe it was a family reunion, as well. You were--

No.

--doing something together.

But my brother and sister were all so hyper. We were not a loving family at that point because we were, all three of us, so hyper. But I've become great friends with my brother since then. I've always loved my brother very much. And it brought us closer together.

So, thankfully this experience did do something positive?

Yes, because we had been apart. He was so busy working. And I work 60 hours. I'm always expecting to be fired. I expect this always because of the rejection again, wherever I am.

Yeah, it's this burden that you carry.

Yeah. And I work constantly. And my brother does too. So we don't see each other. But this was good. We saw each other.

You have to take--

It's a good-- it's good.

--a kernel of that positiveness out of it.

Yes. Yes, I like that. Absolutely. And my sister had-- she called it her adopted grandson. She's raised virtually a little boy, an Indian boy, in Alaska. And she brought him. And he was 10 years old. And he was wonderful. We just loved him.

Oh, so that broke the--

That was nice. Yes, her adopted-- she calls him her adopted grandson. And that makes it nice.

So there are some--

Some positives.

--good memories?

Right. Yeah, that was good.

I presume you didn't bring back anything tangible, materialistic?

No.

No, I can't see that you would.

Just some picture print that they handed us and some nonsense. And everything-- they keep saying, Jew, Jew, all the time. Everything had to do with Jew, the Jews, the former Jewish citizens, the former, the former. I felt like finally I'm a former. [LAUGHS] I'm gone. I'm dead. But that's what they constantly said-- the former.

I guess that's what you have to do. You have to laugh at--

Oh, sure.

--because it's really funny.

It was funny, what we used to be, our former Jewish citizens.

Did anybody mention ex-Nazis living in the town or the Waldheim issue?

Oh, no.

Did any of these issues come up at all?

They denied everything. They didn't know of anything. They were the good ones, but everybody else was bad. No such thing. Everybody's wonderful.

How about the other people? You said you were 39. Did you remember any of these people from before?

Yeah, one-- Landauer. I did. Oh, yes, and then I remembered there was something else. I had broken my leg. I think I spoke of that. And I wasn't being treated by the-- I couldn't get any treatment. I walked on this leg that was fractured.

But I remembered the man whose bicycle I rode on when I broke my leg. And the poor guy-- he was a little guy. He was some sort of a little misfit. He was a Jewish man. I loved him. And his name was Max Rosenfeld. And the Nazis killed him because he was not perfect.

And we met his cousin who had moved to England. And we also met one of the Landauer men whose house we lived in. And that felt good. I wanted to get closer to him, but it was tough to do so. It was very difficult because we were all so overwhelmed with so many things.

Where did they put you up?

Oh, in different hotels. The hotel we stayed in was very primitive. You had a shower that you had to use by hand. And I'm one that likes to take 50 showers. [LAUGHS] It was very primitive. But they were all very nice to us.

It was not the luxury that you see in America. In fact, they didn't have television in Crailsheim. They were just starting to get television when we came. It wasn't in yet.

That's really strange, isn't it?

That's interesting. They're behind the eight ball. They're behind the times. They're not America.

But it did cost them a lot of money to bring you all over?

It cost them a fortune. Cost them a fortune.

Sort of an abating of the sins. They must have felt they were doing something for themselves.

Sure, and that kind of angered me too. You see the ambivalence? I thought, how dare you, Ursula Falk, Ursula Adler Falk, allow these people to pay your way and to alleviate their sins by paying your way to Germany.

But you accepted it?

I accepted it.

It was a mixed bag.

Mixed bag-- and I was debating it back and forth. I wouldn't spend my money to go over there. I've traveled a great deal, but I wouldn't-- I once did go to Germany with our dear friend, the late Milton Plesser. But I would certainly not go back to give the Germans money. I've been all over. I've been in Israel, of course, in Alaska and Hawaii.

But this was something different?

Different. No. But I felt guilty accepting from murderers. I felt that very keenly.

I guess you had to go back.

Right.

Is there anything else that you want to say before we sum up?

Not really. It's a lifetime's experience. And nobody should have it. That's all I can say. We can do without that. And I have to keep saying that people in this country don't realize the good fortune they have. I have to say that over and over again. I think we refugees appreciate that ultimately.

Well, you have to lose something in order to understand what you've lost.

Absolutely.

If you don't lose it--

Then you don't know what it's all about.

Same thing you could say for us, for the Americans who lived here, and for your children as well.

Absolutely.

Except they lost all of their relatives.

That's right. Of course.

They must have asked for grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins?

Oh, sure, of course, of course. But it was a happening-- lifetime's happening.

You can only have good times from now on--

That's right.

--and pleasure from your children and grandchildren.

Right. Right. And my multitudinous jobs. [LAUGHS]

Yes. Thank you very much, Ursula.

OK, thanks.