

--in Oswego with him.

You're kidding.

No. It was great.

You went to Oswego?

Yes, with him. It was great.

Where did you go there? Where the campgrounds were?

Where the campgrounds--

What is was left?

None of the barracks.

No.

All been taken down.

You know, as we would say, bittersweet, there was a lot of bitter, there was a lot of sweet, because we tasted the sweet of the freedom that we needed so bad.

You ready? Let me ask you about the sweet. The camp was really a microcosm of the world, of another community. You ate. You slept. You worked. Some of the kids went to school. You got married. Some people died. And some people were born. You had a daughter there.

Yes, a lovely daughter, a good girl. I have two daughters and a son. And Diane, she's very special.

Was it frightening to give birth to a daughter in this limbo situation?

Yes.

Tell me about it.

I tell you I realized that when I held in my arms that I swore-- I wanted to protect her and never let her go through a harm in her life. And I said, I do my most, I will do everything in this world, just like I tried to escape Germany. I will not leave America. And if they forced me out, I just will fight to the end. I made up my mind right there and then. I will not go back to Europe. I will protect my child.

There was uncertainty for a long time as to whether she would be considered an American citizen.

Yes. In fact, they had a session in the House for her, to decide, to make a decision if she was an American citizen or not. To me that was absolutely absurd. I said, isn't American soil? Pardonne moi. Is it France? Is it China? It's America. So what is the problem?

She was born here on the soil. She is an American. What is the government trying to do? I couldn't believe that they would have this as a legal issue. And I am not-- I was not at that time a learned person and I was unknowledgeable of the laws of the country.

But this basic did not make sense to my mind. And I could not believe that such a government of the United States

would question a baby born on their soil. Is it a citizen or not? I said, I have to laugh. I don't believe all of this.

It wasn't for several months, almost until you left--

It was exactly right. It was the decisions-- Ruth kept us-- she kept us informed. And we were asking, what's happening? What's happening? And the decisions were hanging.

And while they were pending in the air, like that, we went through the hell because we were totally confused of what the meaning of this was. That when a child is born in America, is there a question, is it an American citizen or not? We could not believe that.

Mhm. The Congressional hearings in June, do you remember those at all, when the Congressman came up from Washington and had hearings at the camp?

In the camp?

Yeah.

I did not participate in them. I think I was busy with the baby. No, I only remember that they were coming together and debating and making decisions and so on and so forth.

Let me ask you this, there was an unofficial theme song, an unofficial anthem at the camp. Do you remember what that was?

It was--

A popular song.

Something to do with the fence.

"Don't fence me in."

(SINGING) Don't fence me in.

Sing some for me.

I don't know. We used to sing it partly in German and partly in American, I think. But I can't remember very well. I know the [VOCALIZING]. (SINGING) Don't fence me in. Is that it? That is the melody I remember. But I can't remember the words.

Great. In December of 1945, President Truman agreed to let the Fort Ontario refugees remain in the United States. That must have been one heck of a party.

Oh, my God, when this happened, we went all crazy. It was, in fact-- it was another liberation again. We went through the process of being liberated once more. It was that intense. It was a feeling of, oh, we made it. We are here. We are alive. And we are free. So that part--

How did you hear about it?

I believe I was home with the baby. And someone comes storming in, guess what? We can stay.

And then, of course, we screamed. We yelled. You could hear the screams all around the camp. I mean, everybody screamed. We had to let go. We were yelling and laughing and crying at the same time. We all were so happy. It was a very emotional thing.

Now, more than 40 years later--

Yeah.

--the refugees have made tremendous successes of themselves-- doctors, engineers, musicians.

Yes.

And they've made tremendous contributions to American Society. What message does that send?

It indeed sends a big message to America, that they were the losers in not letting in the people that perished. American-- United States of America were the losers indeed. Look what we got in Einstein, Adam Munz. Do I need to tell you more? That has made America the better. But for the rest of them, how many Einsteins, how many benefits that the United States could have had if they would have opened the door a little bit to these people that perished?

How then should Oswego be judged by history? As a triumph for 1,000 people or as [DOORBELL] a symbol--

This is my doorbell.

OK.

Can you please?

Shall I get the door?

Yes. One more-- who is it? I'm in emotional uproar, Diane, right now.

OK.

As you can imagine.

I'll just--

Let me ask you this. Saying what you just said, how should Oswego be judged by history? Was it a triumph for 1,000 people, or is it a symbol of a failed US policy because more was not done?

You answered that question yourself. And that is-- that's what it is, you know? Naturally, more could have done for the benefit of the United States. It would have benefited them. There's no doubt in my mind. But what has perished?

But then a judgment in history, what good is it? It's past. It's gone. It is history.

But truly, it's a triumph for you?

It is for the few people that have been saved. It was worth it, I think. Don't you think? That at least a few made it.

Are you angry or bitter--

No.

--at the government for not doing more?

No. I am not angry. You cannot allow yourself to go through a process of being that bitter and that angry of things that you had no way of changing, number one. And number two, what good would it be?

And I'm also I'm in a position to say I'm grateful. Of course, I am grateful. I'm here alive, and I'm free in America. And that is something that nothing can replace.

OK. Wonderful. Good timing, Diane.

Look at this.

Oh, my goodness.

Ja, gar nichts.

Jeez.

Schlimm hier.

Did I do it right?

Yeah.

OK. And one more here?

Noch eins. Noch eins.

OK.

Gar nichts. Thank you.

OK.

no.

No, that's fine.

Your mom just said it, Diane, you're kind of famous baby almost.

I guess, yeah. [LAUGHTER]

Has this experience with your folks in Oswego had an influence on your life? It must have.

I think it has. I think because of it I've become more aware of what went on during the war. I think-- I've talked to a lot of my peers, kids that I went to school with that are Jewish. And the American Jews knew what was going on. I mean, they were aware of it. But I don't think they have the same sense that I do about it because my parents talked about it obviously when I was younger.

So because of that, I got a little more interested in my background and my culture and what went on during that period during World War II. And my position is that because I'm aware of it, I want to make people aware that history does not have to repeat itself if we can all be aware of it. And in fact, I'm a member now of the Anti-defamation League. And I think that makes me feel better that I know that I'm aware of what went on in the past, and I can do something, hopefully, change everybody else too.

Is it a yearly recurrence on your birthday for your mom to tell you the story of your birth in Oswego?

Yeah, usually it starts out, she calls me in the morning and says, it was snowing and it was so cold. And I know she's

going to talk about my birthday. I never thought about it much as a kid. It only was as an adult that I started becoming more aware of it and that there was a big deal about my citizenship. And it was kind of interesting. In fact, she gave me some articles to read.

I normally don't discuss it because it goes back so long. But it was really interesting. I've been real fascinated with the whole thing.

And now what do you do for a living?

I'm an annuity and tax advantaged type of investment agent. I do a lot of insurance and things like that.

The former refugees and the children of former refugees have truly made tremendous successes of themselves.

Mhm.

As a group I think that--

It seems to be that way from other people that I've talked to as well. There was a group here, as a matter of fact, in Los Angeles I joined called Second Generation, and also another one called Sons and Daughters of the 1939 Club. And they're all children of Holocaust survivors. And we all share the same kind of legacy. And it's interesting to talk to them and get feedback from them--

And see the--

We all share-- we all share the same experience. So I found it helpful to be part of that.

OK. Super. Good, great. Well, this was a bonus.

Come on. [SPEAKING TO BIRD] Come onto me. Good baby. [INAUDIBLE] Come on. Come on. An eagle, eagle. An eagle, American. That's it. Come on. Show off. Good boy. Give me a kiss. Thank you. Another kiss. Diane wants a kiss too. Give you Diane a kiss.

Oh, right on the lips.

This is my kiss. It is. [LAUGHTER] My baby. You know, when I cried, he did. I didn't want to rock the program, but that's exactly what he did. This is such a little [NON-ENGLISH].

Come on. Don't worry, he won't bother you. Come on. Just come on, we go back in--

He likes staying outside. He doesn't want to go back in.

Let me take one picture out of the cage. He looks nice.

OK. These are my babies. [NON-ENGLISH], come on.

Your mom is a special lady.

Yeah, she really is. Yeah.

And I kid you not, everybody we talk to, all the former refugees, [BOTH TALKING] that you might have met, everybody says, you must [BOTH TALKING]

A little shy.

And coming out was not so tough. Really, yeah, [LAUGHTER]

Yeah, I mean, this beach weather is really boring, right.

We got in early yesterday. And we did go to the beach for a little bit.

It's-- we really had some nice weather. Of course, it's nice all the time compared to-- what part of New York are you guys from?

We're up in Rochester, right near Oswego.

You live in Rochester. Isn't it cold? They brought me out here when I was nine months old. So I don't know cold weather.

During the winter it gets cold.

Really?

This year we had a very mild winter though. It was great.

Really? But to me, I love New York. I used to be a flight attendant. And I love--

You get that?

Mhm.

I love New York. I grew up in New York. I grew up in the city.

Yeah.

That's really home to me. I live in Rochester now, but I'm still a city boy.

I think I still have a bicoastal mind because if I had the money, I'd have a place in New York. I love it. It's great. Of course, you get spoiled from living in a nice weather.

Yeah, for sure.

Oops.

When did you leave Pan Am?

Oh, about six years ago.

Thank you.

Tired of the grind or--

No, I've always had a travel bug. I think I always will. But I wanted to do something--

[AUDIO OUT]

And the Alpini-- the Italian government had set up a border patrol there of a whole regiment of Italian soldiers. They were the Alpini, called because the gray uniform they looked like the Alpine Germans almost.

And they were very good to us. All we had to do is come twice a day to the police and write our name in that we are not escaping. They wanted control of us. But they were not harming us. And they were not deporting us. And we were left in peace in that village until Mussolini surrendered in 1943, in autumn. Mussolini surrendered and a chaos started to come over the countries.

The Germans were coming back from Africa, were storming into France. The Italians left the part of the Riviera, the Cote d'Azur, which they had occupied part of it. They left this little town where we were, Saint Martin [PLACE NAME] And all the Jewish people living there that had escaped and found sanctuary in Saint Martin left too. We were about also 1,000 people approximately. And as Ruth described it in her book, Haven, that was the part that I also went through and escaped from Saint Martin over the Alps from France to Italy, where we were caught up in a war again.