

We are grateful for your coming, Gisella. And if you'll state your full name, please, and give us a background of when you were born, and the town you were born in.

My name is Gisella Fry. I'm the daughter of Jacob and Regina Anger. I was born in Oldenburg-- in Oldenburg, in Germany, on September the 30th, 1920.

What occupation did your parents, or your father, have?

My father had a little clothing store in Oldenburg.

And did you attend public school?

Yes, I went to school in Oldenburg, yes.

Did you feel comfortable most of the time going to school? Did you have friendships with non-Jewish-- was this a mixed school?

Yes, it was a mixed-- not mixed. It was not a-- it was a girls' school.

A girls school. Of all religions?

Oh, yes. Well, there were not so many Jews in our town. So I only had one other Jewish girl in my class.

I see. So you actually did not feel any anti-Semitism of any kind?

Well, I was always the Aryan looking one. And because of that, for some reason, I-- I never-- I really didn't have any problems, and my father too, because he was very assimilated. No, although by 1935, when things got a little rough in Germany, I voluntarily left school because I felt I didn't want to be the only Jew in the whole school.

Did you have any sisters and brothers?

I had one brother, eight years younger than myself.

One brother. So then when you decided to leave the school, what was the undercurrent? Were there feelings of the war coming? Or--

Oh, not of the war coming, because if people had known there would be a war, I'm sure they-- more people would have emigrated. No, it was just-- it was just not a very nice way of living. I cannot remember when things were closed to us, like the movie houses and those things. I really cannot remember if it was '35 or '36.

I lived, in 1936, in Bremen for a year, and in '37 till '38, I lived in Berlin, where life was still not so confined. Our small town, everybody knew each other, so it was different.

Were you going to school in Berlin?

No, I had family living there. And my aunt was expecting a baby, so I helped her. And she had a bad time with her pregnancy, so I helped her there. And we can still move freely around.

Although, I had one bad experience. We had a park nearby. And in those days, they already had the yellow benches for Jews only. And as I mentioned before, I was very Aryan looking. And I purposely sat down on one of these yellow benches for Jews. And a SS man came up, and he said, what is a German girl like you sitting on this bench? And I told him, that's because I belong here. And he left with his tail between his legs.

Were your-- were your parents-- you said assimilated, but they did maintain Judaism in the home.

We were not kosher. My parents weren't, although my grandfather, who lived-- we lived in his house. He was a very religious man. And he used to conduct the services on Saturday, especially when our rabbi emigrated.

Did your grandparents live in the same town?

Yes, but my grandmother died already in-- I think in 1923.

So you did not remember her too well.

No, only from pictures, really. And my father's parents, they must have died of the Spanish flu in 1918. So I didn't even know them.

Were there other members of the family, like aunts and uncles that were living--

Oh, yes. I had my mother's brother living in the same house. And across the road, my father's only sister lived with her family.

So tell me, when you were in Berlin, what was life like in Berlin? You still say there was relative freedom.

Well, we still could go on the Kurfurstendamm in the afternoon, and sit down, and have coffee and cake, and nobody bothered us. And we lived in a very nice neighborhood. That was from '37 till the middle of September of '38. And I remember coming home for my birthday in 1938, and soon after, the problems started.

Because my family-- my parents were naturalized German citizens, but my grandfather and my mother's younger brothers, they were still Polish citizens. And my father's sister, who lived across the street, there were also Polish. So I was in my hometown when they were all shipped out. And I've forgotten the exact date. Was it October they shipped to Germany-- the Polish people back to Poland?

I don't recall. And it's really not that important to remember the date. But in other words, foreign citizens were deported at that time.

Polish.

The Polish citizens.

The Polish citizens were pushed back across the border. I never saw my grandfather again nor my aunt and uncle. And they insisted on taking their youngest child. And I never saw them again.

And they did not survive?

They did not survive, nor their other two sons and a daughter. Out of a family of seven, only one child survived.

So then did your aunt have a child in Berlin? When you were helping her--

Yes.

Did she have a--

She had a child in Berlin.

And you remained in Berlin until things-- until the war really was felt?

No, just-- I only wanted to stay there for a year. And I had applied to go to America. And I was hoping that-- I had received an affidavit, and I was hoping to get my visa to go to America. And I was going to wait the time out in my home town.

I see, so you went back to your hometown.

Right.

And everything was still normal?

Well, not normal. I believe-- it was 50 years that my father-- yes, he did still have his shop, but I believe the Germans were not permitted to buy from us. I mean, there was a terrible undercurrent. My best girlfriend, who lived in our house, hadn't recognized me for several years. She just didn't want to know me anymore. And it was a terrible blow to me.

A terrible feeling.

Yes.

In other words, someone you grew up with all your life suddenly did not recognize you.

Right.

Did you, at this point, have to wear the yellow star?

No. No, not as long as I lived in Germany, which was-- I left Oldenburg in May of 1939.

For America?

No, because America stopped-- they wouldn't issue any more visas. They said the quota was filled up. So I could not go to America. Do you want me to go on to Crystal Night?

Yes, please.

Yes. On the night-- I believe it was November 9th when they destroyed the synagogue, plus my father's [INAUDIBLE], and all the Jewish stores. We were all imprisoned that night. The men were separated from the women and children. My mother and I-- well, all the Jews were marched through the town and spent the night in prison.

The next day we were released. And the men were all taken to the local prison. And they were to be shipped away. So my mother quickly packed a little suitcase with warm underwear, because it was November and cold, and she gave me some money to buy some food for my father. And I went to the prison, and begged them to give this to my father. And he did receive it.

My father and all the men from our town were shipped to Sachsenhausen, one of the infamous concentration camps. The only way we could get my father out was by applying to get a visa for him to leave Germany.

Were you able to get him out of Sachsenhausen?

By producing a visa.

I see.

In the meantime, my little brother was-- what was his age? He was 10 at the time. We took the opportunity and let him go to England, because they had children's transport to England. And we decided this was the best for him, for him to be safe. So through my uncle, my parents obtained a visa for Cuba.

I, at the time, was 18 years old, and I was hoping to go to America. After six weeks, my father came out of the concentration camp. And I met him at the station. And he was in a terrible shape. He had pneumonia. And he was just a broken man. And then my brother was-- my little brother wasn't there. And that really finished him off. Although, it was wonderful that my brother was safe.

So he came out, probably in December, and by March, they left for Cuba. And I was left in Germany. Because I was--

Your father went along with them?

With my mother, went to Cuba.

And your brother?

My brother was in England.

Oh, he was in England.

And I was hoping to get my visa, which never came. So in the meantime, my uncle, who was shipped to Poland, contacted family in Łódź, in Poland, who had family in England. And they-- through their family in England, they sent me a labor permit. So I was able to leave in May of '39 for England. Otherwise, I would have been there for eternity.

So this was time enough yet, before actually Hitler's--

Yes.

--war machine really came down on the population. So in England, what was your life like?

Well, as I say, I went to this family of the family in Łódź to England. And I stayed with them. And I was engaged two weeks later and married six weeks later. By July 1, I was married. So I really-- life was good after that.

It was.

Yes. And I decided to stay in England. What made me decide to marry in England, because my little brother was there. And so we gave him a home. And, in fact, I wanted to take him out of the camp, but my parents wouldn't permit it, because then the war started, and I don't know when the bombing started. It was '40 or '41. Things were difficult. And he left for America on a convoy in 1943. Because my parents, from Cuba, two years later, went to America.

I see.

They arrived in the United States in 1941.

Were you able to correspond with your parents--

Oh, yes.

--while they were in Cuba, from England?

Yes, oh, yes. When the war broke out, of course, there was censure-- censorship-- excuse me-- between-- I think-- was there censorship between England and America? I believe it was. Anyway, when my brother, after two weeks journey, arrived in New York, they sent-- my parents sent a coded telegram that he arrived safely.

So they brought him out from England as well to the United States.

In 1943.

And you remained. Did you live in London?

I lived in London, yes. And my children were born there.

How many children do you have?

I have two daughters, Eve and Diana, and two granddaughters.

Wonderful. So did you marry an Englishman?

Well, he was born in Poland, but he came before the First World War to England. And he was a-- he was a dentist. He was in the-- he was in the First World War.

And what was his name, his first name?

Well, his name was Harry Freiburger, but that's why we are now Fry. They shortened it to Fry.

I see.

He came from Bedzin, in Poland.

So then, actually, the first years were relatively good for you?

Well, except I was only married two months and the war broke out. And my husband had his office near Piccadilly Circus, and he was bombed out. And we lived in shelters for two winters, till we got used to the bombing.

Can you tell us a little bit about how the feeling was when these air raids would come, and you'd have to run for the shelters?

Well, first we built a shelter with our neighbor, together, in their garden. You call it yard here. And we spent the-- I didn't have my children then. We sat there all during the long winter hours. And then we got tired of it, and we went upstairs to bed. And then the bombing started again, and we went to public shelters. And it was-- it was-- at least you could talk to people.

And I remember when the Germans started their offensive on the Eastern Front. I thought it was safe to have a baby. So my daughter was born in 1942, the first one. And the second one in 1944, but that's when they started with the flying bomb.

And I remember my daughter only was a day old, and she was sleeping in my room, and a landmine was dropped not far from-- from where I was in the nursing room. And it was a terrible noise. And I just threw myself over the baby and started screaming. Something I thought I would never do, but it was such a horrible noise when that thing came down.

And it was pretty rough, the bombing. And then we had an indoor shelter. It was called a Morrison shelter. And we used to tell my older daughter it was the vacuum cleaner going, and it was the bombs. So we survived.

When you say indoor shelter, inside of your--

Yes, we made room in our dining room. It was sort of a steel contraption, and it was big enough for several people.

I see.

And we got tired of that too.

But was it safe enough? The underground shelter was safer, I imagine.

Well, the underground shelter-- well, after so much rain in England, it flooded, so we couldn't use it anymore.

Was there a shortage of food?

Oh, yes, there was-- we were rationed, I would say from the very beginning. Funnily enough, I don't believe chickens were rationed, and you could eat out. But lots of things were rationed. And I remember lining up in the summertime for two hours to get some new potatoes and things like that. Yes, but it was a way of life. And you were young, and you could cope.

But actually, there was no starvation, so to speak.

No, I don't think so. Because people could eat rabbits. I didn't eat rabbits. We had meat rationing. And fish was not rationed. And so, no, there was no starvation.

Actually, as the war continued, things got worse, progressively worse, didn't they? Could feel that progression as time went on?

Well, it just seemed such a long time. And yet, we were thankful we were living and not in Europe.

Yes.

Things were so much worse.

What are your children's names?

Diana and Eve.

Are they-- they're, of course, married now, and you have grandchildren.

Only one daughter is married, and she has two children.

What are your grandchildren's names?

Karen and Hope.

And what is your daughter's married name? Hader-- Diana Hader.

So after living in England, when did you immigrate to the United States?

Well, my husband died in 1964. And my brother, who became a captain in the American Air Force, died nine months before that of a heart attack, in '64, and left two little boys. So when my husband died, all my family was in-- my remaining family, which was my uncle and-- my parents and my uncle, were in America. So I wanted to go to America and be with them.

So you came here with your children.

With my daughters, right.

With your daughters-- what about the two children of your brother? What happened to them?

Well, my daughter-in-law stayed in Orlando, Florida.

Your sister-in-law, you mean.

I'm so sorry. My sister-in-law stayed in Orlando, Florida, where my brother was based at the time. And much later, she remarried.

Were you still in England when the war ended, when liberation came?

Well, of course, I stayed in England till 1964.

Yes.

It was wonderful the day the war ended.

Yes. Was London much damaged from the bombing?

Well, the East end, Oh, yes, very much so, very much so.

Were you living in this area?

No. No, we weren't. In fact, my husband's office building was bombed. He used to-- he used to call the office every morning to see if the building was still standing. And this particular morning, he called, and the telephone rang, and he said, oh, it's OK for me to go to work, because we had been bombed the night before. But when he got there, his building had been bombed, and so there was no office.

So how was he able to earn a livelihood after this?

Well, his brother was also a dentist in the same street, Shaftesbury Avenue, in London. That is a street off Piccadilly Circus. And my brother-in-law gave him a room where he could practice dentistry. So till he-- after the war, he got his own office again.

So the war years was mostly in and out of shelters.

Right, when the bombing started.

In between the bombings, you sort of resumed a life.

Well, you had to. You had to.

What was it like when the war came to an end?

We were rationed for many years.

Afterwards.

Oh, yes, yes. I think till the-- well into the '50s, if I remember correctly. Meat was rationed for the longest time. Oh, yes.

Of course, that must have been a wonderful feeling to be free again, not have to go to the shelters.

Right. Oh, yes, yes. In fact, one bomb dropped in our street, and people who were watching what was going on outside the house, they were killed by that directly. Oh, yes.

Was your home or your apartment safe?

We only lost some tiles off the roof, and the government compensated us for that. Plus, of course, my husband's office.

And your children resumed going to school, I imagine.

Oh, yes, they went. Well, one was born in '44, so she never went during the war to school. Even the youngest-- no, I don't think they went to school until they were about five, so it was already after the war.

Oh, so they did attend school after the war.

After the war, yeah.

Did they finish their education in England?

Oh, yes. Yes.

Do your children have any kind of a profession?

No. Well, one became a dental assistant. The other one is a legal secretary. But, of course, as soon as my daughter married, she didn't work anymore. She was just a housewife and mother.

So when you came to the United States in, I believe you said, '64--

In 1964.

'64-- you came to some family.

I went to Miami. And my parents lived then in Miami and my uncle. We were all very close. And I went to school and started to learn bookkeeping. Because I was only-- when I was widowed, I was only 43. And I felt I just couldn't sit and do nothing. So eventually, I ended up with the University of Miami, and I worked for them for 17 years, till I came to Phoenix in 1983.

So you were able to make up for some of the education that you missed because of the war.

Right.

Yes. So your parents were living in Miami, and did they-- what kind of livelihood did they have?

Well, father was retired. And because of father's imprisonment and the destruction of their business, they-- they got restitution from Germany.

Are your parents still alive?

My mother is still living, yes.

Your father is deceased.

My father died in '71, yes.

Your mother still lives in Miami?

No, she-- I brought her to Phoenix. Because she-- she kept on falling, so I felt that I had to bring her. I brought her here because she wasn't able to take care of herself.

Is she living-- are you living together?



Oh, no, no. No, in 1985, I had a cancer operation. And at the time the prognosis-- no, excuse me-- 19-- yes, '85, I had a cancer operation. And at the time, they gave me a very bad prognosis. And I felt I had to-- that's when I brought my mother here. And when I also felt it was-- I couldn't take care of her because I didn't know what was going to happen to me.

So after she fell and broke her shoulder, and she couldn't manipulate her right arm anymore, very much against her will, I had to put her into a nursing home. She's still fighting it, and it's been five years.

My goodness.

Yes.

What brought you to Phoenix?

My children came here first. My son-in-law opened-- bought a business here. And so then I sent my daughter here because I felt if something happened to me, well, at least she would have her sister. And then I came also.

Well, I'm very happy to see that the prognosis were not as serious as they--

Well, it's my fifth year. So I'm hoping it's all right.

Yeah, that's wonderful. And how do you like life in Phoenix?

Well, the winters are wonderful. The summers are awful.

The summers are--

Bloody hot, as the English would say.

Do you have any relation or any correspondence with friends in England? Or is that a long time--

I have-- my husband has a daughter. And we are in contact. In fact, she's coming to Phoenix on her way from New Zealand in January. She's visiting her son right now in New Zealand. And on her way back to England, she's going to stop over, with her husband. Her husband also was a dentist. They're all dentists.

How nice. So both of your daughters live here now.

Right.

Yes. And so you have contact with your grandchildren, which is wonderful.

Well, they're at UFA, so I only see them doing holidays.

Oh, I see. Anyway, I'm trying to think if there's anything I left out. Is there any little incident that you might tell us about, that stands out in your memory, during the war or any other time?

No, I mean, I was fortunate enough, as I say, to spend my years in England. Although, they were war years, I'm so grateful that I got out in time.

Yes. How do you feel about the current events about East Germany?

I'm not happy about it at all. Am I still on the--

Yes.

I am?

Yes. You might tell us your feelings.

I'm not at all happy about it. I mean, we had two world wars with Germany. And I just feel-- I mean, how many people got killed? 50 million people. We shouldn't forget this.

Right. Right. This is why we do these personal histories. Because we don't want this to be forgotten. People had to escape from their homes, leave their homes. People who suffered during the war, this is why we do this. And if I might say, we hope that the two Germanies won't join again and won't united again.

I have been back to my hometown. And I always get a wonderful reception. But I'm very uneasy when I look at people, my generation. Because who knows what they were during the war, during those Hitler years.

Right. Since you mentioned that you were back in your home town, did you ever meet the young girl that you grew up with, who--

Oh, yes, she wanted to meet me, but I refused.

Really?

Oh, yes. She wanted to be my pal again, but I would have nothing to do with her.

You didn't want to face her.

No.

After the way she treated you.

She lived in-- just on the same floor as I, on the same-- I lived on the second floor, and she lived right next to me. And not only that, I understand the-- her mother knew the day when they were going to collect all the Jews to send to the-- to ship out, and they never warned us. In fact, not one person in our town warned us of anything. So I feel very bitter about that.

I also went to Auschwitz, where-- after the war, in '78, and to Riga, and Latvia, and visited the-- that memorial the Russians built there for the people that died there. And I had an aunt living-- I was very close to my aunt.

I even went-- in 1977, I visited Riga and Latvia, and I spent six wonderful weeks on the sea shores there. And I stood in front of my aunt's house, and I didn't have the pluck to go in. Because at that time, the Russians-- there was an undercurrent still there, and the Russians weren't friendly towards us. But I'd loved to have gone inside that house.

The house still stands.

The house still stands. My grandfather's house still stands. And I don't have the pluck to go in that either.

Tell me, when you went back to your hometown, did you find the-- your childhood house?

Well, in 19-- the year I had my cancer operation, the town made a-- they send every living Jew there the fare to come to Germany. They made a reunion. And because it was-- I was having chemotherapy at the time, I had to miss a wonderful reunion of my fellow Jews. And I was very upset about that, but I just couldn't help it. I couldn't-- I didn't want to chance-- I believe I was having chemotherapy every three weeks, and I just couldn't go to Germany.

So I went-- that was in May of '83, and I went in September of-- of '83. But I missed seeing all those-- my childhood friends, those remaining childhood friends, I should say.

So there are some survivors then.

From my hometown, yes. I don't know exactly how many survivors there were. But they invited even the children of survivors.

Were a lot of these, or some of these people that actually went-- who lived through concentration camp, some of the survivors in your town?

Some had emigrated before the war. Oh, yes, one of them, in particular. No, one, two-- a lot of them had left Germany before the war. A lot of them were-- during Crystal Night, were in the same concentration camp. And I don't know, it's-- only two or three came out of the concentration camps alive.

Just to backtrack a minute, it amazes me that you were able to get your father out of a concentration camp, even with a visa.

Oh, no, that was-- that you could do. In fact, my parents-- my uncle had sent down-- sent first two visas for Bolivia. And my mother didn't want to go to Bolivia. So they-- when he sent the Cuban visas, they-- they accepted those. And they came to Cuba just before the Saint Louis was turned back, the famous--

Yes, ship.

The infamous ship that wasn't permitted entry to Cuba.

Was there some monetary funds-- was that needed in order to get all this accomplished.

Well, you could only-- you could only leave Germany with, I believe, 10 marks per person. You could take some of your linens and-- I don't remember-- linens and--

If you were emigrating.

Emigrating, right, but you had to give up all your silverware. After Crystal Night, I believe, if you had any candlesticks or anything like that, you had to give it up. In fact, my mother sent me to Bremen to give it-- which was the nearest big town-- to--

To deliver these items.

To deliver, yes.

Interesting. As you probably know about this wonderful, precious legacy collection in Prague, where they collected all these precious items. Hitler was collecting--

Oh, yes, they were storing them somewhere, right.

He was going to create a museum of the people that were extinct.

Right.

And this was-- it was collected in Prague. And I had the opportunity to view a part of it that was traveling through the United States. They had it in San Diego. And you could see these most beautiful items that Hitler confiscated from all of your-- yeah.

Giselle, thank you very much--

Thank you.

--for telling us your experience--

Thank you.

--and taking the time.