

So this girl was upset that you were leaving. And you were three or four months in Shanghai when what happened?

A couple that I didn't even know that had moved into our building, my parents building, into that building. I said, how are-- the Kaufmans was their name. The man was a streetcar driver. They wouldn't join the communist party. No way. And he was maybe, I would say, maybe mid-30s, maybe a little bit closer age difference between the sisters.

And that's it. I asked how they are. He's dead. That man didn't die. He was killed. They couldn't get him into the party. They couldn't get her into the [FOREIGN WORD] the woman's organization.

I remember that I came up with my friend to the apartment one day. And they opened the door. There was a picture, a double frame, of Goebbels and Goering, you know them, in the frame. I'd see the picture of course and I almost ran back. Hilde, please come in. That is what my co-workers did to me.

I had to have certain ones. They gave it to me because they knew they couldn't touch him. He wouldn't join the party. He didn't want anything to do with them. Three or four months afterwards, after I was in Shanghai, he was dead.

So would you believe that he died, a man in good health? So were not only the Jews. If you were not with them, you were enemies.

And he was a non-Jewish German?

Non-Jewish, no.

Any political enemies were in danger too.

Totally. If you were not with them, you're against them. If you opened your mouth the wrong way, you were gone.

So really, it sounds as though everybody was afraid. Like the Jews were afraid for one reason. The non-Jewish Germans were also afraid of not supporting the Nazis. And the Nazis had everybody afraid.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Everybody-- nobody dared to open their mouth. That was the trouble.

And people were afraid for their families, probably, too.

For everybody.

If they were to say something and protest something--

Yeah.

--their whole family could be taken. If they were in danger, it's the family was endangered.

Oh, my.

I was lucky. I didn't see a concentration camp from the inside. Also not my younger brother or my parents.

Now, you had mentioned before that you lost aunts. You've wondered about aunts and uncles--

Yes.

--and what might have happened to them, they're gone.

I didn't know, were missing.

They're not. And you don't know anything?

Not at all.

But you learned recently about Herman. I found that out now thanks to you. I found that out now, that he stayed and died there. I didn't know that til now.

Now, didn't say, too, that you knew that he was sent to some really long-named place? Didn't you say that you had heard that he had been sent to some place, but you didn't know?

After 1945, after the war was over.

You learned?

Yes. I had written to his fiancée, the one he couldn't marry, that had followed him, I told you about. She had followed him. And I remember, the address for her parents. I hardly knew her. I remembered that. And I wrote to her.

And I got an answer back to Shanghai. And I think it was to Shanghai. I don't for sure I was here already. Anyway, she wrote back that she had been taken in.

And it took her seven months after she wouldn't join the [INAUDIBLE]. It took her seven months from one prison to the other, from Holland in Amsterdam to Bremen-- seven months. And then she was warned not to get in touch with my brother.

And she was a non-Jew. She was a non-Jewish German. And he was Jewish. And the government was punishing her for her involvement with a Jew?

Yes, because in Holland, she followed him to Holland. I told you, my brother picked her up on my 16th birthday.

I remember. And that was the last time you saw him.

Yes. This was the last time that I saw him. And he told me that he was picking her up. She was waiting for him. He was picking her up that day. She wanted to follow him because they wanted to get married in Holland, but they couldn't. That was the law, contract, whatever you wanted, against it.

As in Holland, they couldn't get married either, so they lived together. But she wrote in that letter that he was picked up in '41, I don't know what month in '41. And he was taken to concentration camp. I didn't remember, a very long name. But there were two names.

Could it be Sachsenhausen?

Sachsenhausen, Bergen-Belsen, or--

You can't remember which one, though?

No.

Because those are the longest names I know.

Yeah. But the first one is in [INAUDIBLE], to Auschwitz. It's a big compound.

And he died on August 10, 1942--

Yes.

--according to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Yes, yes, which I didn't know up till now. And it does not quite jibe with the dates that I got from the Germans because I was informed that he only lived three months after he was picked up. That would have been '41. But as I said, when I heard he lived only three months, I was glad about it because that was in '41.

We hope that that's the right information.

Well, I mean that this was, I figured, till '45 in concentration camp.

No. The date that the museum gave us was 1942.

Yeah. Yes.

So it would have been just a few months over.

It would have, maybe. Maybe it was.

Maybe six, three to six months is there.

Somewhat longer than I got the information from Germany.

And that information, the museum told me that they had referenced that from the Netherlands. The information came from the Netherlands.

Yeah.

They had some kind of record of those arrests that was given to the museum as a gift the reference materials. And that's where they took that from.

I see. Now, my brother, he lived with a Dutch couple. And they treated him like their son from 1933. And this couple, and my almost sister-in-law. They begged him to go underground. He says, why should I go underground? If they want to kill me, they will.

He just couldn't imagine more than that.

No.

That seems to have been typical of a lot of people. They just couldn't believe it. They just could not.

No, they could not believe it.

And your imagination doesn't want to go that far. You just say, oh, this can't be happening. They wouldn't do this.

You don't believe.

I know, yeah.

I mean, in Shanghai, there's quite a few people that were in concentration camps. You don't believe as a people, woman, told that they went through.

The things they told.

But you can't believe that the babies or what, newborn babies were caught. They can't survive. They tore them apart. Would you believe it that human beings can do that?

No.

That is hard. That's hard. It was true. All those gruesome things they did.

The more I read and learn, the less I understand.

You cannot believe that people, normal, decent people would be that way, could be that way.

No. It's a frightening thought, isn't it?

It is.

And you would think that things like that would happen with a person who was insane. or a criminal mentality.

Yes.

But to take normal people and turn them into murderers, it's almost inconceivable. You can't even think of it.

Yeah, you can't believe it. You can't believe it. The animal in human beings, you can't believe it.

Can you?

I can't.

The more I read, the less I understand.

Yes, it's true. That's true. That's true. See, I told you, too, that my friend, my sister, as it would be, I sent one letter to her from Shanghai. I never got an answer. But then it dawned on me, if she gets a letter from me from Shanghai, why do you get that kind of letter? From whom do you get it?

She was not living a free life.

No. She couldn't do it. She couldn't do it.

Yes, I understand.

I could hardly agree with that. I had to use my head. But even the second letter that I wrote-- I wrote a second letter. I knew what the danger was. You didn't get the letter. That is a private thing. And they would come to you. And they would claim they weren't interested in the stamps. And then you were in for that thing.

That you lost all privacy. You lost your privacy.

Yes, totally.

Your private life.

Everybody, everybody. Everybody.

Now, when you got to Italy and you got on the boat, you were safe, basically?

Yes.

Did you feel safe?

On the boat? Yes. The moment we crossed the Brenner Pass.

The moment you crossed the Brenner Pass, you felt a relief.

Yeah. At that time.

At that time.

And as it happened, my brother, he got his passport after me. And my parents-- his ticket was a ship, which you had to have, had all three names on it, my parents' name and my brother's. So when he came to the Brenner Pass, he was told he couldn't leave. He has to have his own ticket.

So I think he went back to Innsbruck and sent a telegram. And my parents did hear, and so on, so on. And they got that all right then his own one, you know? My parents still didn't have their passport.

And then he came back to the Brenner Pass. Well, he had been there. And one of the customs guys said, that's the guy. That's the guy. There was one guy who went. He was going through the customs and went over to the Italian side and opened his mouth, his trap, right.

But the part in Germany, [INAUDIBLE]. They put it here in that because there was only [INAUDIBLE] involved. He didn't use his head at all. And that time, this guy says, hey, that's the one to my brother, calling at him.

And later on, I met this man. And he looked totally different from my brother. He was blond, my brother had dark hair, bilack Now, no one's here. And I believe, funny enough, my belief is the same customers officer the borders over the border in this way. And somehow, I believe that was the same guy. Said, no, this guy is long gone. This man had nothing to do with it.

God.

That would have meant my brother would be ended up in a concentration, maybe even not ended up there . This customs officer said, no, this guy is a long way gone already through the part [INAUDIBLE].

He brought my brother over to the other side. He gave him the name. He told who my brother was, and said, if he run into this guy, just [INAUDIBLE]. But he doesn't know what he did, what's going on. He didn't know what he was doing.

Anyway, in Genoa, of course, we were spending our time as good as we could. The Jewish community there gave us a room where we could stay and a boarding house where we could eat, very decent.

But anyway, always somebody went to the station to see if other people were coming. And who was at the station? My brother came. This guy. This guy picked my brother up from the station and brought him to the boarding house.

I don't know. I don't know if he ever told him anything. But I remember my brother standing at the door there. It was no time. And we spend there our time too. And my brother was a big room, a very big room in that house. And that was on the other side. And still today, when I think about it, you know, I feel suddenly like a mask come over my face when I saw my brother.

Now, there's another thing that we did. And that made me-- I don't want to wash people clear. But my brother was stupid. When he got his passport, he didn't want to leave yet. Supposedly, he wanted to wait for my parents. He just didn't want to leave them. And there was something going on that the Jews were fined so many million marks. They had to come up with that.

They were fined for Crystal Night.

I don't know if it was from Crystal Night.

I read that in a book. They were fined for all the damages and the cleanup that had to be done.

Oh, that was why fined.

They were fined as though it was their fault. I remember that fact because it seems so ridiculous.

I know. There was-- of course. Everything was ridiculous, whatever they pulled out of their head. Anyway, so that was going on. Now, these two boys that took us, one, the age of my brother. The one was a little bit older. These two [? girls, ?] you won't go? He had gotten his passport. You don't go? Ah. And my brother's friend-- I mean, we grew up with him. He was in the army in uniform. They picked his clothes.

Now, this was German soldier friends of your brother's?

Of my brother's.

These were non-Jewish Germans?

Yes.

These were non-Jewish Germans who were friends with your brother and made sure he left because they cared about him.

And not only made sure he left, they packed this clothes. They brought him to the train. I mean, they bought the ticket. But who paid for it, I can't tell you. But they bought the ticket and made sure that he was on the train. They were friends.

They were friends who were in the German Army?

Right. One was.

Isn't that something?

I don't know.

Isn't war bizarre and strange?

So there were people who--

That were just normal, good people who got swept into the craziness.

Now, I told you, I didn't have time to do anything preparing things, clothing for myself. I had so much fabric there, you don't believe it for all, to get ready, and the fabric for my mother's clothes. But she needs, my mother would tell me, she couldn't just go and buy a dress. There was a sister to them who took us. She had made the dress for my mother. She made the dresses that I couldn't make.

Now, that was made by?

By the sister of the one, the guy that was in the military.

So this was a German woman, non-Jewish German woman helped your mother? Your friends.

They had grown up together. They lived in the next house.

Of course. Isn't that something?

And so some people didn't lose it, their humanity, even that they knew what was going on. So my mother's dresses, when she came to Shanghai, I had to take them apart because they were terrible, with big stitches. Only that she had dresses that she didn't take the materials with, only dresses to Shanghai. But that meant a lot.

These were two brothers when we got out. I mean, they grow up together, especially with the one in the army was my brother's close friend, same age. So there were people, there were people that has sense

So this, I believe, that there are always some people that are decent. Some did it for money. Other ones did it just for the goodness. But you didn't know.

You didn't know. There was so much fear in the air in every direction.

In every direction.

It would be hard to know who to trust.

Look, it was not only the terror. The odds were, if there were kids, you would talk in front of your child what you don't like. If the parents did that, kids would go to the party and tell them. Didn't take long for [INAUDIBLE] to beat that. They were taught, first is the party. First is party. Family didn't count.

I wonder how the children felt when their parents were picked up.

Hard to say. At that time, the things [INAUDIBLE]. They really-- they had it in their mind. They had them so--

Brainwashed.

--yes, brainwashed that this, they thought, for sure, they did the right thing. That was their duty. So you could not, even if you close the door one room to the other. When they heard, there could be an answer. There would be an answer. That was the horror.

I had a funny experience when I was in school, professional school. You know, in Germany, when you're an apprentice, you have to go to school twice a week, professional school, from till 2 o'clock, or something like that. And they knew that I was already ticklish, very ticklish.

so in my class too there was one girl who would take that was you know, that would you know talk about students . At that time, I still could open my mouth because I didn't think. I was only maybe 15, 16.

The funny part was it was a pretty big class. Half of the class I knew-- not so sure. And there were very good friends in that class too. You had this friend that way. And then the teacher wouldn't say a word. We debated that there weren't any. I didn't know I could do it. But later on, I knew I debated. And I just didn't hold back.

Then the principal of the school was standing in the doorway. At that time, otherwise, she would have been supposed to shut me up. But didn't answer me at that time. But I wasn't bright enough to think about that.

There, I had several teachers and the principal standing in the doorway not saying a word. Even there, lots of people talked. You know, the people talked. I say, would it be Nazis, they would have taken me out of school. These are things that you remember.

But this girl, she was totally Nazi. At that time, they were on that get used to that. So then I'd sing sometimes. One day,

if you looked back, you knew the words. You were doing something that you didn't know did. You were. You were because this [? girls ?] were all.

Anyway, that school was till 14. Because these girls were all between 15 and 16. But you were still not for the party. We were very [INAUDIBLE]. But they didn't do.

But you knew this way and that way. If I could be in that house where I grew up, could go in into that house and see he stood there and wait for me, I'd say that was in this clear. Well, I don't have to be afraid in this house.

You felt very safe in that home--

Yes.

--with all those neighbors and everything.

Yes. I mean, there may have been--

You were a Jewish family.

--well, besides us, but I don't even remember. But what's it called? What it called here-- five stores, you know. But it's not [INAUDIBLE].

Five stories?

Yeah, five to six stories at the Berlin house. So it was a big house.

And it was home. Yeah. It was home. I was 10.

It's an amazing thought to think that later on, had you stayed there, it wouldn't have been safe.

No. No.

Even that house that you grew up in would no longer have been the safe place that you knew and felt.

Well, you have to think that was in 1938, when I left my parents with those things.

And things, I guess, didn't go completely crazy until '41, '42.

Well, no, even earlier.

Was it right in there?

Earlier.

'40, so like that.

Yeah. I wasn't there anymore.

That's right. That's right.

But it was earlier, especially the people got scared. There were people, yes. He was a couple that I know of from then, Germans, that came to States after the war. And my husband and the man were pretty close friends and yes, they told us . They were not on that thing.



I don't know where they came from, a little town. But they saw from the house from the window, across the building, there were a yard. And there were things going on that they couldn't figure out. People in town, what they picked up. So they saw. But they didn't know what was really going on, why the people were there.

Right. They weren't thinking past that to what was really happening.

No, they couldn't understand it. They couldn't understand it.

Well, at first, as I've been reading, they couldn't believe it.

That's it.

Even when people told them, this is what we heard happened. We saw this. We heard. This person told us this. They still would say, nah, you can't be serious.

They couldn't. They would not. Not us. We wouldn't do that. No, that was things that were beyond anything. I mean, these people couldn't figure out.