

We are continuing on May 19, 1998, and you were saying about the story about another couple who came from Germany.

We had made some friends with a German couple, formerly German couple, and they tried always to get us together with people, introduce us to other people, made friends or whatever. They were LDS. That didn't matter.

It was a couple that, at first, the first day when they invited us, they talked only about the church. The men-- they talk only about the church.

And that's the LDS Church?

The whole evening. He picked-- come on-- came unexpected to pick us up for a cup of coffee-- LDS-- for a cup of coffee. And then the whole evening he was talking only about the church.

So of course, we had to invite them, too, and I did. Or we did. And I told my husband, if it's going on that way, forget about it. The second time in our apartment they came to us, not a word anymore, not a word anymore.

And this man, it turned out, if I had ever a question or we ever had a question, , he would answer totally honestly. You could ask him anything about the church. It had been a good-- they became good friends to us. But I could ask this man, this couple, any question, whatever came up, which most of the time you can't. But I discovered I could.

But now, coming back to the-- that they invited another couple that had come from Germany, were my age-- my age, I think, because they were younger than my husband, so they fit in more my age. The more LDS couple, our friends-- they were 20 years-- over 20 years older than we were.

All right. So they introduced us to that couple. Now, there was one thing that I, yeah, couldn't accept. The first thing she said, the woman said-- we didn't know anything about what was going on. It was a total giveaway to me.

Now wait a minute. Does that German couple--

But that's going-- yes?

This German couple, though-- they were not Jews?

No.

OK. So they met you, and--

We were introduced to them.

--they knew you were Jews. And the first thing they said--

The first thing.

--was, we didn't know anything about the Holocaust?

About what was going on.

In Germany?

In Germany.

Got it. OK.

That was the moment, unacceptable.

You just felt you couldn't hear that?

Anybody I get introduced, shake their hand, and get that he knew. Because that's a bad conscience.

That's true. It is. It's guilt.

My feeling.

It's guilt. Something's wrong.

It would have been marvelous if I could have made friends with my age. I mean, we were still searching, and a boy about the age of my son. But the moment that came out--

That was it.

Anybody else-- yes, we had quite a lot German people, friends that we got together with. I never had any trouble with them. Most of the time they didn't-- they weren't prepared for anything. And if they were American already, they were really-- they had no idea. They didn't question that.

You didn't feel that same feeling?

No. Only that feeling was-- the moment that woman-- I just say hello, and she says, we didn't know anything, that was difficult to me, to me. Even if they only questioned what was going because any normal person which question what was going on in Germany-- you have a store, a Jewish store. Today it's open. Tomorrow it's closed. Nobody there anymore. People left overnight or were picked up. What do you mean picked up?

Any normal person would say, they lived here 20, 25 years in the same area. Where have they gone without saying goodbye, without saying anything? So anybody would question what's going on, but they couldn't do anything. They couldn't do anything.

But the truth is the truth. We have here-- my husband worked for an outfit, a cleaning-- office cleaning outfit. They made very good money, by the way. And they were German, and they came after the war. I think in '50, '52, something like that. And they said, well, there was something funny-- they were from another city, not Berlin.

There was-- something funny was going on. There were people in the yard. You know, closed-off yard. And the people saw. They couldn't make out what it was or why. In other words, that was where they pick people up and put them in there, in the yard first, before transportation, things like that. But anybody with little brain have observed what's--

What's going on? There's something strange happening.

What's going on? If you don't say goodbye-- you had always some friends, they say goodbye.

Yeah. It's not normal to just disappear.

No, no.

Not normal.

No. So that people had to ask themselves, but they couldn't say anything. The danger was, if they would talk in their homes in the circle of their family, they weren't sure if that there wouldn't be somebody who would report it, their own children. That is the truth. That's the truth. That was the condition.

That was before I left Germany. That was the condition. Now, if-- I do not know how many people said goodbye or whatever, but there were several people that would at least know. My friend, girl friend-- she was a sister to me because we grew up together. She was about a year older than I, but we were-- from babyhood we were together.

She was probably Lutheran, evangelic. I was Jewish. There was never anything. So on the day that I-- we had made up our mind somehow. I don't know if it was a-- I don't know. It was a [INAUDIBLE]. But one day, I ran into the sister, my friend's sister, who was quite a bit older, and she was always friendly, nice.

And I told her, I said, [? Trude, ?] we are leaving to go to Shanghai. Oh, OK, goodbye, turned around. Now, she knew me from way back. OK? And it didn't sound right to me, so cool, goodbye, turned away. I pulled her by her arm. I turned her around. The face was wet with tears. So you had to always-- you had to say to somebody goodbye.

You had to say, [? Trude. ?] And I'm sorry to say, this woman, the couple, was childless, and they lived in our same building. And one day--

The German couple?

Hmm?

You mean the non-Jew German--

Non-Jew.

That you met that you decided not to be friends with?

They were non-Jews. They were Lutheran, American Lutheran. And I remember one time he was a streetcar operator, and one day-- but not politically involved, not at all, totally anti-Nazi.

So one day, I came up with him with my friend and knocked at the door that he opens the door. And suddenly I see a terrifying picture, Goebbels and [MUMBLES] what is his name?

You mean you went into the apartment?

Yes, going in.

And you saw a photo on the wall of--

Two photos.

Of Goebbels and Himmler?

A double-frame. A double-frame of Goebbels--

Himmler maybe?

--and that--

Goering?

Hmm?

Goering?

Goering.

Goering. On their wall?

On the wall. Now, the moment I saw that [INAUDIBLE]. I didn't put it there. My colleagues tried by playing me a [INAUDIBLE], and I have to keep it on the wall. But--

In America?

Oh, no, Germany.

Oh, this was-- OK, we switched back.

Back in Germany.

We're back in Berlin now before the war. Back.

In Berlin before the war.

And this was a friend who happened to be a non-Jew German?

That was the friend, my closest friend I had in Germany, kind of my sister.

[? Trude? ?]

The girl.

[INAUDIBLE]

Hmm?

The one you just talked about, about the Lutheran girl?

No, that was her little sister. That was my friend. She was about maybe 12 years old.

This was there house where--

No, in the house where we lived in, apartment house. And of course, I pulled back, you know? You could see it. He said, please-- it's not-- I hate it, but they'll [INAUDIBLE]. I have to put it on the wall.

Because he wouldn't go into any of the organizations. They couldn't get him into anything. And I'm sorry to say about I was in Shanghai maybe three or four months, and I ran into a woman that I didn't even know and found out that she had moved into the house where I lived in Berlin, a Jewish woman [INAUDIBLE] Shanghai.

And I said, how are they, the Kaufmanns?] She said, oh, he died. He died. The man didn't die. I would put anything on that, that he didn't die a natural death.

He was no Nazi. They couldn't do anything with him. And he was, well, I would say, that one, the wife was about 32, something like that. So he was about 40, maybe younger. He didn't die. He was killed, I'm sure.

And he was not Jewish?

No.

But he was just not willing to become a Nazi? And that's basically how much social pressure there was on people--

The pressure was on. He would become a Nazi, but he wouldn't. I knew that. That is it.

We're beginning this interview on July 15, 1998, and this is Hilde Israel. That's right. So your family's here in America. You basically kept on keeping on. Your son is now raised. And what do you have to say about all of this life?

All of this time? Well, all of the time I consider myself lucky because we made it. We are here. I do not have a number on my arm. I never saw a concentration came from inside.

That I lost my family-- that is something else. I don't know where everybody was. I do not have any idea. But the thing that I have to say is that I do not understand, like most of us, I guess, with all the fighting, with all the prejudice everywhere, Third World and everywhere, I don't think people have learned.

They don't learn. They think, all right, it's over there. It won't happen here. But that is what we have said. That's why-- I was there in Germany in 1938. You couldn't believe it. The Germans-- we called ourself German, German Jews, but German.

Right. You considered yourself one of the guys you were not separate.

Yeah, we couldn't believe it. We couldn't-- we saw so many things. We saw things, but it just didn't sink in that it could touch us personally, till, of course, not to the last moment in Germany, but until '36 and so on, when all the things were happening, book burning and all of that.

And picking up people in the middle of the night-- you didn't know where the next morning where the people were. It was unbelievable, and I'm kind of a skeptic. I hope it won't happen. With what's going on and the protection that these people get here also in the States, the Aryan and so on. It's the same thing. They think-- they think [INAUDIBLE]. We had the same experience.

Really.

Of course. Who would have believed it?

You felt that there were only a few fanatics out there.

Yeah.

That it couldn't happen to you and that's just the way it is.

Yeah. That is the way it works. There are just like-- I hate to say politically [INAUDIBLE] and this type people-- they only see their-- what they think this shouldn't be, not other people. If there is a right and a wrong way, they don't see it. They only think. They have blinders on. They see only what they want to see, and that is the same thing. They don't believe it that they are that way, but they are.

Do you think that at this point in history that the Holocaust taught us enough that if we saw the signs happening again we could stop it or we would stop it?

I'm afraid.

You're afraid? You're not completely secure?

I'm afraid. The people don't want to believe that it happened and it could happen again. They just don't want to believe. That's why that, supposedly, it never happened comes up. They don't want to believe that it could happen. But it did.

And the people who are the true victims are no longer with us to defend the truth. In a way, we're left-- we're left having to be their witnesses and their representatives, but--

No, but even--

--even that is remote.

It's-- now and 50 years afterwards, over 50 years afterwards. The youths-- I think that they could not feel that bad.

Even the Jews say that?

No, the youths, young people.

The youth? Oh, I see. Yes. They just can't believe it.

Yes. And the Jewish people in this generation, this newest generation that we're living with now who are teenagers-- do they believe it? Do they believe it? Or are there doubts? Or are they just sick of it? Or what do the young people--

I would think if they're hearing that from their elders they may believe it, but they think, too, could it? Youth doesn't want to hear. Youth doesn't want to, not Jewish, young people. They don't want to believe it.

It doesn't fit into their rosy world where everything's fine and everything's great.

Everything's fine, no. Yes. Financially, everything-- economically and so on. But you never know. Give it time, and wait and see.

I've often heard the expression people will say, if something really primitive happens or something, they'll say, what's the problem here? This is the 20th century.

Yeah.

As though we're supposed to have arrived at some level of achievement and morals that is superior to all the previous centuries, and yet look in the middle of this century, in the 1930s and '40s, this happened.

It's not that long ago.

It just happened right under our nose is in the alleged 20th century, the perfect century. Then this happened, and it's just amazing to me at times. And I believe--

When I was a kid--

--it's a warning.

--nobody would have believed it. I did not live in the Jewish community. I did not-- how should I say? We were not closed like an area like in New York or Jewish communities here.

Right. Like a neighborhood or something.

That I didn't live in it. I didn't grow up in it. So it was totally-- it was not even a question that anything could be-- true, sometimes you heard a remark. Antisemitism was always there, worse in Poland, and Russia, and also in Yugoslavia, that's all this countries. It was worse.

But where I lived, somebody said something to me, I went into my-- back to my parents and told them, and my mother was out to the parents. And the kids never would open their mouth again to me. You could undermine it, how far or how

long and under that time how these were already involved. We couldn't know, the kids, not the parents.

Well, maybe the parents were better at being sneaky--

The parents--

--with their politics and their beliefs. They would be more--

Yeah. They Told the children, hey, no way, whatever I was told, OK. No way. We don't say that. OK. It's like neighbors, people that you wouldn't-- parents were decent people. Kids were really decent, too, and were raised decently. But was there already an influence? They get the kids young, and that is the trouble.

And that is that shooting and all that and with the guns and so on-- that is thing that makes them-- they are the police. They think they have it. Youths-- they catch them with that kind of thing.

You are an Aryan. And are white. You are this. People will never be colorblind. I don't think that.

You don't believe?

No.

What do you think the answer, then, is to living together? What would help? What would help them? We'll always be different colors. We'll always be different religions.

Always.

What kind of teaching would help them live with that peacefully?

The only thing that I can see is if they learn to say, OK, the skin color is different, but they are people. They're the same people. They're just thinking-- fighting for life, raising their families. They want a future for their family.

They all are the same way. The skin doesn't make it different. But people can-- I don't know. I really don't know.

So possibly education to be tolerant?

Oh, yes.

Like tolerance is the way of life. Diversity is going to always be there. We just need to become better people and tolerant.

If you equalize the education so that everybody can get an education. We can get-- it's for possibilities for children. It doesn't make any difference. There is no race that is dumber than the other. I don't believe it. If they are not that much-- that educated, what do you expect? They have to learn first. That's my view.

So education could actually turn the course of the way we live together?

Yes, I do believe that if the-- speaking now of America, the races, colors-- it doesn't make any difference if they get the ability, the chance to get their education, to believe in themselves. That is what I feel.

I look at the way the Germans educated their youth, and they have-- historically, they have a very good school system. They have all of the resources needed to do a beautiful job with their education. And yet look at what happened with the Hitler Youth and how easily they were swept--

How easily they--

--along into the wrong thing.

That is what I say. They were swept away.

Yeah. And it's amazing when you think about--

Think about it.

--the power of education, that there is an example of a powerfully negative message that they put into those children, and the children came ride along. On the other side, you could put in a powerfully positive bunch of knowledge, and it seems like they would also follow along. It's a matter of choice.

Let's say it this way. There were in Germany in my time of growing up-- and there was lots of economical trouble. That is a time when Hitler came in.

Yes, yes. I know about it.

That's when they-- they made-- had [INAUDIBLE]. They promised work. They promised all of that, and power, and so on. And of course, they had to have somebody that they could beat up on.

Why-- that's a weird connection. Why did they feel this need to include--

It doesn't matter.

--the war against the Jews with their whole thing.

It didn't matter.

They just needed somebody to beat up on for some reason.

They were not only the Jews. There were also other, [INAUDIBLE] Gypsies. Gypsies were absolute scum. And so many different thinking that wouldn't occur under, they were. It was not the only Jews. And that it was. There were maybe six million Jews, but how many more non-Jews? That is the point.

The projection that they have now is anywhere between 10 to 12 million people altogether were murdered.

Oh, yeah.

Polish Catholics were a big target. They hated the Polish Catholics.

It didn't matter. Are you not with me, you are against.

And just--

That was it.

From the common man along the road to Gypsies, and homosexuals, and cripples.

Oh, homosexuals, yes.

Crippled people, retarded children.

Homosexuals-- I don't know if you ever heard the name Rohm, Rohm. It was one of the old guard, Hitler's close circle.



One day, the news-- he got shot. I don't know if Hitler himself shot him or one of the-- Goering, Himmler. He was from the Germans. They found out that he was a homosexual. They just shot him.

And he was part of the Nazi higher-up?

Yeah, close old circle.

The circle of major leaders.

Yeah. I don't know if they didn't find it out before or what, but they claimed, of course, whatever the claim was. But that was the reason.

He was executed?

They just shot him. And of course, anybody else-- if they were