

--to their thinking. So that is what I can't understand.

You mean, how people can be trained to--

Yes.

--to think--

Pours into.

--in such a horrible way?

I mean, the only-- the thing that bothers me most now is the Third World all over. It's burning all over.

Oh, yeah.

Small or large countries, it's burning all over.

Racial and religious tension. Yeah, I know.

Yeah.

Including the Islam.

Oh. I was reading, with Elie Wiesel's biography, how he was very upset with a man named Mauriac, who he was speaking with about writing. Mauriac was a great French writer. He visited him, as a reporter, and they started speaking together.

And Mauriac was speaking about the love of Christianity and what a loving religion it is and talking about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, constantly, while Elie was sitting there. And Elie finally got so exhausted by him and so sick of it that he just basically stood up and he kind of told the old guy off and said, excuse me, but I have been in the camps where I witnessed practicing Christians murder other human beings and considered themselves active and practicing Christians, at the time they were doing all of this.

The Christians--

So you can't do this to me. You can't tell me about Christianity. Goodbye. And of course, their relationship proceeded on.

And Mauriac, in fact, brought him out as a writer. Ellie didn't want to talk about it. And it was this man who urged him to tell his story on paper. And that was the beginning of Ellie's writing career. Well, that's a separate story.

But it placed, in my mind-- that conversation placed, in my mind, a stress. There's a terrible tension, there, in my mind, about, how could a person who was indoctrinated into Christianity-- which, in my experience, has been a gentle religion-- in my experience--

It's supposed to be.

--you know, passive, gentle, you know, turn the other cheek, don't kill anybody. Here are the Ten Commandments, straight from Judaism. These are your rules. These are the rules that God gave us!

Right.

All right? OK? So there's a relationship there. And I can't reconcile that tension of, how could these people, with all this Christian upbringing, do this and still claim that they were Christians and be proud of their faith, and--

It's just the opposite.

I don't--

They claim they act so Christian. They can't do anything wrong. Whatever they do is right.

So they've given themselves permission somehow, through their twisted thinking--

Right.

--to say, well, yeah, there's the Ten Commandments, but Jews don't count--

Yeah. No.

--or homosexuals don't count. They're not under that umbrella that is included in the Ten Commandments. We have to get rid of the scum, and then we'll have our perfect world or something. I don't understand that-- that tension, there-- how they could do what they did.

No it never can be one group of people that are totally wrong, you know, that don't-- aren't fit to, you know. That's the way that they put it. They are not fit to live. Right?

Yeah, that's the message, there.

That gives the-- that's the message they give the young people, now, the gay clubs and so on. You know-- gay are not fit to fit in the world.

I have known a few. They were not any different than anybody else, like decent people. And I couldn't say anything more about it. They never made their own move or anything.

But, see, somewhere in your life, there must have been tolerance training.

Yeah, I don't know.

Somewhere in your life, or in your nature, there is that tolerance. And you wish you could teach it, because I'm about to start teaching again in the fall and I think to myself, gosh, what did I--

Pass it on?

--pass on? What could I pass on, from all this knowledge you helped me come to? What could I do, to help these children kind of embrace each other? And where could I teach tolerance?

It is only-- it's really, if you are tolerant as a person-- you have children, you can only teach them. OK? People that are intolerant, they will teach their children the same thing. That's the way the world does this. That is the way it is.

So from your experience, do you have any hope for the future? Do you think the world has learned anything from what it's trying to do, to come to understanding-- I mean, even you and I sitting here with this tape machine is an effort to try to figure it out.

There always was time to educate the youth, the young people, and to clear their head. This is the way it was. And this is the way it should be. But in the people you can't say nothing.. You know, if they do have a young person that loves to kill dogs and cats, you can't do anything about it, because that's the way they are. And that are the people that when they

grow up-- oh, well, they're kids. OK? But then they're grown up, then you don't know what comes out of it.

That's true.

That's the way I see it. That is the way I see it.

What do we do with the bystanders, the people who stood by and knew that their neighbors were being taken away from their neighborhoods in Germany and shipped off to who knows where, probably to some horrible end? What do we think about them? What do we know about these people who weren't themselves murderers but who tolerated and allowed their lifelong friends to disappear?

What do we know about them? What do we think of them? What--

Well, I have to say, if you speak from Germany, people disappeared and so on, but they didn't dare to ask. They didn't dare to ask. But even [INAUDIBLE] were asking.

Why not?

Because they didn't want to be picked up.

They were frightened, too.

If people ask questions, sometimes you get an answer, but the answer may get-- be not what you want to hear. You will be the next one. They were afraid. In families, if they ever-- they were afraid to talk in front of the children, because they didn't know. OK? The children hear something, they go-- went right there and said, my parents said that-and-that.

They didn't know. The kids didn't know that they put their folks in danger themselves. They were so indoctrinated, indoctrinated-- that they didn't know anything. That was the way it had to be.

Mhm. Indoctrination was incredible. After the war, when the German people learned the true horrors of the camps-- which were far away from Germany, actually.

Yeah.

They were mostly in the East.

They were not that far away.

They told-- in a book I was reading, they were saying that they started to-- they started the concentration-camp system in Germany, but such an uproar came from the German citizens at the closeness of some of these camps and some of the things they were hearing and learning, and the smell, and they were just starting to understand that this was pretty horrible. But apparently the German citizens really hollered about it, and so what they did, after that, was they built most of their camps in the East, because the Germans-- it was far from them. It was far from their nose. They didn't have to-- they didn't really know, so they sort of didn't bother anymore--

They didn't want to know.

--and they didn't want to know, and all that. And it was--

The point was, they didn't want to.

Germany stayed neat and tidy, and all the dirty work happened in Poland and along the--

Where I was, it wasn't so far.

It wasn't--

That many of the camps were pretty close to population.

Right.

I don't say to German, absolutely--

Right.

--but Poland and on the-- over there.

But what did the average German citizen, who had fooled themselves into believing that the Jews sort of just disappeared, but they really didn't know the details--

No

--after the war, when they found out the details-- do you know anything about what these people thought?

No. I wasn't there. I couldn't say.

Were they horrified? Were they ashamed? You know, I wonder about that.

You wonder, yes. It's just some--

I'm talking about your average neighbor person, who was no murderer, just a normal person. Were they appalled? Were they upset?

I would-- I couldn't tell you-- for the plain reason, I wasn't there. There was nobody that I had a contact anymore in Germany. I wouldn't lie. If I could, I'd say they were upset.

You wouldn't--

I knew people that I would figure that would also be appalled by it. But I wouldn't know.

But you wouldn't know. Your mother never talked about that? She went back to Germany.

That was before. And my mother wasn't in the city.

She was not part of the street life anymore. So she--

Not at all.

--did she ever talk about the Germany after the war--

Not at all. Not-- she wouldn't have known anything at all. My mother was-- not Alzheimer's, but she was aged beyond her years.

She suffered.

She was an old, old woman. OK, when I saw her the last time, she was about 70 years old, but she was an old, old woman.

Mhm.

OK? So, no, she wouldn't anymore. And she would never know about it.

Do you think that-- how did-- the refugee population, coming out of this horrible time, the displaced people, the people who lost everything, did they do a lot of talking about it? Or were you surprised at how silent they were about it? Was there any kind of--

No, the people talked about it, but that was an experience that they couldn't just write out. So you had to live with it. Right?

Mhm.

And the people that went back, I couldn't tell you about it. OK, they-- the compensation was from the Germans, you know. They got them apartments. They get them-- I don't know-- jobs-- I don't know. Moneywise, they got the compensation and so on. But I don't know. I couldn't have gone.

I wonder how they lived in the same country that, only almost minutes before, had sanctioned doing this to them. I find it amazing, that they wanted to go back there.

Well, I didn't want to go back. So that's why it took us until 1970.

Wasn't it interesting, in that Oskar Schindler biography, that when he went back after the war and his story got out, what he was up to during the war, that the Germans themselves rejected him in shops and stores--

Yes!

--he got life threats. He got stoned in the streets sometimes. You wonder what it would have been like to be a Jew going back to live in that environment. I don't know what would attract somebody.

I do not know. I do not know.

And here he was a German, who had helped the Jews. You can see the antisemitism in the way they treated him!

I could not tell you anything.

It's amazing to me going back there and looking.

Yes, I just-- I had family-- my husband's family. That's why we went back to Germany, as long as they were still alive. But we, my husband and I, we would never have gone back.

I would be afraid. When I read the Maus books that you gave me--

Yes.

--the Maus II edition said that one of Vladek's friends after the war went back to his town and went back to his house, expecting to go home, and arrives to find a family living here that had appropriated all of his belongings in his home, in his world. And he basically walked up and said, hello, this is my house. Kind of a-- well, [LAUGHS] it's time for you to leave, kind of thing.

And they went crazy. And he made the mistake of trying to sleep in his own barn. And they came in there and beat him to death and hung him--

Yeah.

--in his own barn-- in his own house.

Well--

I just-- when I read that, I thought, what would all these people do? Where would they go? How would they go back to their property, when they had a hostile person or family living in that house? You'd just be-- that would be the end of it!

To the other people living there, it's like--

Like you're a ghost! You're a ghost, returning to your world and--

Let's compare to the Palestinian. OK? They say, Israel, that is our property-- where they live now, the Israelis.

Right.

It is safe. We lived there. That was our home before we [INAUDIBLE]. OK? So who is right? I--

My brother's fiancée, I told you, the girl, she wanted to marry [INAUDIBLE]. And after the war, I wrote to her. And she wrote back that the house where I grew up-- that means where my parents had the butcher shop and I grew up-- that was standing. She could get the apartment only back. I said, no, thank you. If I wanted to come back. No.

I didn't want to. Why? Everything was gone. I could only remember the bad things.

That's true. The house, in a way, was contaminated--

Yes.

--by what had happened.

I couldn't--

There was no way--

I think I couldn't have lived there.

I wonder if you could even ever feel safe in it again.

It seems, yes, my in-laws, my sisters-in-law, in that area Hamburg, they were pretty safe.

But I'm speaking of a different kind of safety, like--

It was not my thinking, I couldn't just--

Like it wasn't, really-- it wasn't yours, safely, really, anymore. It could just be taken away from you.

No.

You just experienced that, and it would be hard to believe in your own territory again.

No. I had the feeling, after I left Germany-- I grew up in Germany. OK?

Mhm.

I had friends, I had family, and so on. But I didn't have one day feeling of loss when I left Germany. I never had one day's homesickness. That answers you the question? Why should I go back to something that leaves me blank in my feelings? That left me blank!

Mhm?

I was 20 years old. OK? But it--

I think what gives me a feeling of community, wherever I am, is the people around me. And if all those people were deported and murdered, and it was a horrible memory of a place, I think I would feel the same way, like it had been erased.

Yeah.

The place was no longer.

It-- it isn't home.

Mhm.

It wasn't home anymore.

When you finally came to this country, did you sense the ability to have that feeling of home?

Well, the same way the wish and the hope that we can start anew. OK? That you can start your life over. If you're lucky, you can make something. If you're not lucky, you are poor, and you stay that way. [LAUGHS] But yes, that was, of course, our hope, naturally.

And now, years and years after you've lived here, do you feel at home, here--

Oh, sure.

--in terms of--

Oh, sure. That is my home now. I wouldn't even think about Germany as home.

Oh, yeah. That was-- past. Once, you-- to me, the people still wanted to tell it, oh my god, Germany was so beautiful and so on-- to me, it's something I can't understand.

Mm.

Because it wasn't [INAUDIBLE] beautiful. OK? I've personally, myself, I can only talk about myself. I haven't seen the concentration camp. I haven't been attacked. All right? But I knew what was going on. OK? I knew I wasn't safe. That's all I can say.

Why? I was a decent person. My parents were decent people. Yes, I had-- as a kid, I had a good life, you know, till that point. We never have thought anything could happen like that, but it did. So why should I be homesick or want to live there, build there something after? With-- if I had people there, maybe, but I didn't. If I would know where my families are, who knows?

How many relatives do you think you lost? I mean, you said you had older relatives around you, like the old aunts and uncles and things like that. Of all of those people, how many survived? Or you don't even--

I wouldn't know.

You don't even know what happened.

No idea.

It was a total loss.

No idea. Because I left Germany, and I went to Shanghai. Where, if they left, they're lucky enough to be all survivors, where did they go?

It's a staggering disruption--

[INAUDIBLE]

--of normalcy. I mean, when you look at how families and extended families live, to just suddenly have all those people disappear out of your life--

Yes.

--would be such a terrible shock.

It is.

And young people are more flexible than the old people.

Yeah.

And when you think of the old people, who had lived for years and years and had all this family and friends, I mean, it must have been the most horrible period of erasure of everything that they have built and known and--

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes, of course.

Utterly amazing.

I had a family. It was a big family. We weren't very close, but it was a big family. All right? Now, from the children, from my aunts and uncles, my cousins, I was about the youngest. So my cousin--

Some of the cousins, I didn't even know. I only knew of them, because they were already mid-30s when I was a 7 year old girl. All right? So-- what happened to them? Where did they go? Did they make it? Who knows? You just can figure that passed.

They're gone.

Yeah.

Well, you'd think that, after a war, anybody surviving would try to find everybody else--

If you are there, yes.

--you know, with-- with-- I mean, even in the newspaper listings or in the postings on the--

In the beginning--

--community center or the-- you know, the survivors--



--in the beginning, we didn't even know where to write to. You know.

Oh, sure--

There were organizations, afterwards--

Right.

--where we could-- in Shanghai, there were names lists. Every day, we looked-- names that were familiar. You know, we got lists there but [INAUDIBLE]. But there were none of mine.

And it's hard to know the data, too, like, all the old birth dates of these old, old people that you were just growing up with. And I don't know all that about my own family-- my own aunts and uncles. I don't know the exact--

We didn't know. We didn't know.

--year they were born, how to find them.

I didn't--

And research would be difficult, without more information.

Yeah. Well, I have a cousin. She got married. I don't even know her name. She went to-- I have a cousin, yeah. OK? So what good does it do? I know her name. I knew her only maiden but not her married name.

Mhm.

I don't know where she went.

Right. And when you're living a natural, normal, carefree life, like most of us get to do, you don't tend to write all that stuff down. You just live with them.

Yes.

They're just there.

Well, you have to bury it. You have to bury it in your mind, I think. If you want to live with it, you can't, you can't do it. For me, wouldn't [INAUDIBLE]. I have to-- I wouldn't say totally lose it, but you have to shake it.

You mean shake--

But you can handle it.

You mean, shake the history?

Yeah, you have to-- that you can handle it.

You have to figure out a way to live with it.

Yeah. If you have it all the time on your mind, [INAUDIBLE].

So how do you do that? How have you managed, after the war, what-- how did you go about rebuilding Hilde Israel into a person who could keep on and not dwell on--

The--

--that horrible period?

Do not dwell on it. If you dwell on it, you can't live. You can't live. OK? I could never-- I could never have said this is German. I don't want to have anything to do with them. As a matter of fact-- I think it talked about it. The first people that came, they were from Germany. But they had left Germany in, I think, '23. OK?

They were German. Now, should I push them away because they are German? I knew they were good people. I knew they were good people.

And if you know they were good people, OK, they didn't say, no, we can't do that or anything. But they also talked about-- about my parents up to the family in our house on the 9th of November, you know, with all that what's happening. I brought them up. And that was the day that I left Germany. OK? And I asked people there. But can I bring my parents there? Yes. OK. Bring them up.

But you know how [INAUDIBLE] this is. Bring them up. So you have people like that. I brought my parents up there. All right? I don't know how long my parents I had to stay with them-- maybe only a day or two that they could go down again. It was the same with them, OK? But there were people that took the risk.

And that was in Germany.

In Germany. That knew you from birth, OK, and took a risk. But my brother's friends next door, next house, family was not a very rich family or anything but were a good family, very blue collar, as far as I know. But there is one, I told you. They packed my mother's suitcase [LAUGHS] and took with clothing-- whatever we could pack-- and said you are leaving tonight.

Right. They rescued their own friend.

Right.

So you would meet all times.

They risked it. One, here's my brother's friend that was [INAUDIBLE], the guys, was in uniform, military uniform. What do you think could have happened to him if they caught him? All right? You had all kinds of people.

And I tell you, they didn't have anything out of it. OK? Like in the Maus books, there were people that risked everything for the money. OK? But these were people that didn't have anything out of it.

No profit from helping.

Nothing. So, what do you-- what do you want to make the people responsible-- everyone? You couldn't do that.

I can't say say I wouldn't go to Germany. This country, I don't want to see. It is a beautiful country. I may not like all the people, but it's everywhere.

You know, if you-- how should I say-- if you come to the States, like it's going now the big questions-- immigration question, yes. OK? They want to [INAUDIBLE]. Why? The plain reason is because the first and second generation is usually the ones that comes back. They work for it. They strive to get somewhere. OK? Because that's this. And the American-- once they are settled as American families, OK, really I don't know how many generations back--