

I'm Minda Jaffe. And today, January 30th, 1985, I'm interviewing Mimi Ormond, a Holocaust survivor. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, the Cleveland Section.

I've had an opportunity to drive here with this charming, charming person, who has a marvelous, marvelous attitude. Generally, I'm very grateful for having met you, Mimi.

Oh, well, my pleasure.

Aside from that, too, I'm very grateful that you volunteered to be a participant in this program today. Let's begin first with a little bit about yourself now. And if you want to begin telling me first your name and how old you are.

OK, I'm Mimi Ormond and I'm 59 years old, and lived in the United States since 1946 and have been residents of Cleveland, Ohio for 25 years, and came to the United States after the war. I married an American during the war, who, at present, plays in the Cleveland Orchestra. That's how he landed in Cleveland. We have three children. I've been a nursery school educator for the last 25 years and I'm newly retired this year.

Where were you a nursery school educator? What school?

At Carol Nursery School, which is a nonprofit nursery school that's been in existence in Cleveland for over 50 years and is run by parents and by a board. And then I came to Cleveland. I started right away after we moved here in the position of director of that school. And I was there--

How long have you been at the school?

24 years, which is a long time.

And your husband? Do you--

Well, we came to Cleveland because my husband used to play in the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, and then he got a call from George Szell if he'd like to come to Cleveland. And Cleveland, of course, is a wonderful, wonderful orchestra. So we didn't even think about it twice and we relocated in Cleveland.

And tell me about your children. How many children do you have?

We have three children. We have three daughters and one little grandson. One of my daughters was still conceived in Europe, but was born here in the United States. And then we have twin daughters.

And let's hear about what they do because I think some of them have some very charming occupations.

We are all sort of an artist family. My one daughter is a flutist in the Milwaukee Symphony and a piccolo player in the Milwaukee Symphony. And one of the twins is also a musician, a violist, like her father. And she plays in Chicago. She plays jobs and jingles on television, and things like that. She doesn't play in the Chicago Symphony. And my third daughter, the other twin, is an artist who lives in North Carolina and paints, teaches art.

I saw some of her work and it's a beautiful tribute to you. Truly beautiful. We had the opportunity to talk a little bit on the way down. Tell us some about your hobbies now that you're retired. I think that we'd like to hear about some of those things before you get into some of your past.

Well, my prime hobby is still children. I sort of help out in the Heights Parents Center and I've been involved in the local preschool organizations. That's sort of my prime thing. I do some sculpturing at the JCC. And this time of year I love to ski, which I did in my childhood back home, too. And I go cross country skiing and we do quite a bit of socializing. So music and children and sports are my hobbies.

It's encompassing hobbies. Very, very rewarding, I'm sure, because you do seem to be a very optimistic person. Let's go back now to 1939, 1938, and I would like to ask you a few questions about your background and about your life in that year, beginning with that year-- how old you were, then where you were living. And you tell me in a narration, and if I have questions, I'll stop you and ask you the questions.

OK. Well, why I'm saying 1938, because that's when everything I knew and stood for and had as my environment collapsed. That is when the Germans-- first the German fascists in my home-- I came from Czechoslovakia, in a small town called Marienbad. In Czech, it's called Mariánské Lázně. It's one of the Czechoslovakian spas, which tourists frequented, and it's in the mountains of Czechoslovakia.

The main population of the town was German. And most of these Germans, around 1936, '38, already were indoctrinated and had fascist leanings. So in 1938, after the Kristallnacht and all this happened-- it wasn't just in Germany, but the Czechoslovakian fascists came to the fore and smashed all the Jewish shops and burnt the temple.

I went to Czechoslovakian, to Czech-speaking schools. Most of the schools were German, but even the teachers in the German schools were fascists. And one morning, the teacher came in and said "heil Heinlein." And Heinlein was a Nazi leader in Czechoslovakia. When I came home, petrified, my mother took me out of the German school, put me in the Czech school. And then the night that the German uprising happened, the next morning, my parents were in a quandary whether to send me to school or not.

How old were you that night?

I was 12. And I did go to school. When I got to school, there was already a lot of-- everybody was upset and everybody was in a state of shock, because the night before is when they stoned all the Jewish shops and everything. And the teacher told us, midmorning, to go home. And as I was going home, there were already swastikas all over the sidewalks and the streets and on the bus that I took home.

And when I got home, my mother was already there packed and waiting for me to get there. And we right away went to the railway station and tried to get a train out. Well, the trains were so crowded with the Jewish and the Czech population of that town, we could hardly get on the trains. The railroad station was like complete chaos.

Let me stop, just for a moment, because I want to come back before you tell me about the station and the trains. I've made a note so I know where we're coming back to. Tell me something about your household and your family before you left. Did you have a brother or sisters?

Well, we were four. I had an older brother, who was in college at the time. He was not in my hometown. He was in Pilsen in college. I came from a family that had been in that area of Bohemia. There really has been no specific history of antisemitism, so my family has lived in that town for many generations. We owned the shop, a fancy linen goods shop that catered mainly for the tourists that came to my hometown, which was a spa. And that shop was owned by my parents and my grandparents before that.

Was the town considered a large town?

No, it was a very small town, like all spas. The nucleus of the population was-- I really don't in the thousands how many there were, but I would say like maybe just 10,000 or something like that. But then, being it was a spa, in summer, it grew, and it had a population that was enormous. And they had lots of theater and a lot of concerts and a lot of this type of thing because they had hundreds of thousands of tourists from all over the world that came there to take baths. They had mineral waters and stuff like that, and people came to find their summer cure there.

So the town tripled in the summertime, but in winter, it was almost like a little hamlet, really. And the Jewish population was-- I really, truly don't know. I would say probably less than a thousand, because it seems like the whole Jewish population knew each other. There was one section of town where the more Orthodox Jews lived, and they had all the kosher restaurants. And there was a lot of tourist traffic, also from Russia and Poland, and some of the Hasidic Jews held their conventions in my hometown.

And then they always settled in the more Orthodox section of town, where all the kosher restaurants were. And we were more conservative Jewish, so we stayed in a different part of town. But I think everybody sort of knew each other in the community. And there was a couple of shuls in that Orthodox part and then one big temple for the conservative or half-conservative, half-reform type of families.

Now you showed me a picture of your family's home. You want to tell us about that a little bit?

Well, we had a large house that was owned by my grandmother. And my grandmother and my maiden aunt, her sister, lived on the first floor. And then on the second floor, my uncle, who was my mother's brother, who was a lawyer in town, had his apartment and his office on the second floor. And the third floor was my family's. We were four of us.

And then the whole house, it was the custom in Czechoslovakia, we all had maids and cooks. And being my mother was a working person, we definitely needed somebody for the children. They all lived on the fourth floor. So it was like a four-floor house, and it was quite large. And in summer, being the whole town was flooded by tourists, we used to rent out a couple of rooms to tourists, too.

Would you describe your family as well-to-do, comfortable?

Yeah, we were quite well-to-do.

Can you describe a little bit your family life? Who made the major decisions in your family? How did you get along with your parents?

Well, I was really too little to have too many conflicts with my parents at that time. And as I said, my mother was in the shop from morning till night. And on the weekends, she just did a few chores, and we entertained a lot of the customers from the shop on the weekend. So my main relationship was with my governess. I'm really a great lover of nature and things and she taught me a lot of these type of things.

Really, I spent more time with her and with my brother, who I absolutely adored. He was five years older than I was. And he was really my mentor, and he was the first person that was interested in the Zionist movement, and I followed that. And my parents were pretty assimilated and they didn't want any part of any of this. But I just worshipped and adored my brother. I went to school and spent a lot of my time in the shop because my parents were always in the shop.

Your brother was a member of a Zionist organization.

Mm-hmm.

And when you became older, did you also join the Zionist organization?

Yeah. I was in the Zionist youth organization. It seemed like at that period of development, the young people were much more Jewish-conscious than some of the more assimilated parents. And the young people all wanted to go to Israel and saw what was happening in a way, probably, better than our parents, who were busy with their businesses and with their everyday life. I know my brother wanted to go to Israel before he went to college. He really always was dreaming about going to Palestine at that time.

Would you say it was more Zionism than religion?

Oh, yes, I think so, except there was only one rabbi in town, and that same brother of mine absolutely worshiped the rabbi. We used to go there like once a month for dinner on Friday night and stuff. And being it was a small town, everybody knew everybody. And in school in Czechoslovakia, they didn't have separation of church and state, so they had religious class in school.

And most of the class children were Catholic, so they'd say their "hail Marys" and stuff in school when you first came.

But while they had their Catholic instruction, we met with the rabbi. But being there were so few Jewish children, the whole school met for that hour with the rabbi. So we saw the rabbi every day in school. It was sort of part of our schooling.

What was the main language in your home?

We spoke German. My father came from the central part of Czechoslovakia, and his mother tongue, I think, was Czech, but he also spoke German. My mother came from Marienbad, which was our hometown, and she didn't even know how to speak Czech, so we spoke German. She spoke French and English, but she didn't know how to speak Czech.

What about the books in your home? Were there many books in your home?

We had a lot of art and music and books and that type of thing.

What about the kind of entertainment your family did? Do you remember going out together with your family?

Well, you know, it was a typical European town, and the thing everybody did for entertainment is to go and meet in the coffee shops. So my parents used to meet all the other relatives and all the other friends in coffee shops. And most of that was sort of-- I know my father was real active in B'nai B'rith. They had their meetings and stuff like that.

But on the whole, my personal entertainment, I liked sports, too. I liked to go swimming. And being the town was right in the woods, we used to go hiking in the woods, and we did a lot of that type of thing. Even the Zionist youth movement, they had like a mountain clubhouse and we used to go there.

Tell me about what kind of a student you were and what kind of--

Oh, I think I was sort of a medium student. I think I did pretty well.

Do you remember your favorite subjects?

I was never bothered. What bothered me a lot is that, at first, before the fascists took over, I used to go to German school. I had all my German little friends. And of course, I was too young to really realize what was going on, as far as antisemitism. So I was close to the kids that I went to school with. And then when the fascists came to power, my mother wouldn't have any part of me going back to that school. She was afraid, really, that I might get abused or something. So she put me at a Czech school, and I really didn't know Czech. It was very difficult.

Do you remember how old you were?

I was about 11, 10. It was a year before I left. And I had a very difficult time because I didn't know the language. As my second language in school, I learned English, and I really didn't know Czech. So I started learning Czech and had all my education in Czech, and it was really hard to catch up, and I resented being there.

Did you feel you had a sheltered life before that?

Yeah, I think I had a very sheltered life. I was an only daughter, and you know, everybody sort of doted on me, I think.

Tell me, were you aware that these were antisemitic reactions, or was your family aware?

I was aware slightly. But I was like all children, I wanted to be like everybody else. And I had deep feelings of wanting to say "heil Hitler" myself because everybody and all my friends did it, and it was very difficult. That was the first-- twice I felt really terrible about being in that class and being Jewish. First of all, in the morning-- every morning I had to listen to the "hail Marys" and the prayer that I knew was not my prayer.

So I said very quietly to myself, "Shema Yisrael," just so I'll end up in the right place, wherever we go. But you always

felt like an outsider. That's why it's so important, here in America, to keep church and state apart, because no matter how silent the prayer is, if you're different, you're different. And it was very, very difficult for me.

And being I liked skiing and I liked sports and I liked gym and all that kind of stuff, the Germans, of course, propagated that. That was their German youth movement, the philosophy. So all these kids from my class used to go on ski trips. And you know, it was difficult. So that was my--

You didn't go with them on the ski trips?

No. I knew they were Nazis. I knew they were Germans and I couldn't go, but I think I was more sad about not being able to go. And then I started to listen to my older brother, who was involved with the Zionist movement, and then that replaced my feelings of wanting to belong to the other. I started to go more with the Zionist group here and there. But there were only two children-- three children my age in the hometown, so it was difficult to have a Jewish social life.

Interesting. OK, thank you, because we really wanted to get some of that background before you left us at the train station.

Right. Well, that probably was the beginning of the awareness of what was to come and the awareness on my parent's part of also what was to come. So finally we got on the train.

Did you think of it that it's going to be a war?

We thought there'd be a war in Czechoslovakia. Of course they made all these diplomatic arrangements with England and with France. And everybody said, because Austria was invaded the year before by the Germans, they said they're not going to let Austria happen to Czechoslovakia, and that they would help defend Czechoslovakia. And of course, then they had the Munich Agreement and the whole defense went out.

But when we left that day, my hometown-- that was the last time I was back, I mean was there-- it was such chaos, nobody knew what was going to be. And we thought maybe the next day a war will start. And we were all on the train, and my brother, as I mentioned before, was in college in a different town. And then my parents' main concern was how to connect up with my brother, because the phones were all out and everybody was sort of in hysterics.

So we went to Prague, where my uncle lived, my father's brother, and we stayed with them for a few nights. And then they had blackouts in Prague and everybody was sort of ready for a war, which, of course, didn't happen, and the Czechs certainly couldn't take on the German army.

Then the whole thing somehow simmered down. And we stayed in Prague for a while, and then we found a little apartment in a small Czech town called Kolin. And from there, my mother went back to Marienbad during the day and tried to rescue some of our belongings. And every day, she'd take the train back there in the morning and then she'd come back in the evening.

And then one day she didn't go. And it was just fortunate that she didn't go that day because a number of Jewish Women did the same thing, and that day, the Germans came across the border. My hometown was right on the Bavarian border. The Germans came across the border and took those women and crossed the border, and they were never heard of since. And after that, my father said but my mother cannot go back anymore. And I remember to this day, my mother wanting to go back just one more time to rescue whatever precious thing she wanted, and my father absolutely insisted she should never go back.

That was all in fall of '38. And then of course in '39, the Germans occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia. And I remember the day the Germans came, the sky was just black with airplanes. And again, I think there was a feeling there might be a war, but there wasn't a war. And then the next day, the Germans came marching in in that small town of Kolin, and they were goosestepping up and down the streets.

And of course, this was a Czech town. So in a way, as being I was still a little girl, I had more comrades there because I

knew the Czech children my age were just as much against the Germans as I was, even though they weren't Jewish. So I had a little--

Any other family--

Pardon me?

Any of the family there with you besides your parents?

Right. No, it was just my parents, and my brother then joined us. Then the main occupation was really to try and get out and try and get papers to get out. My father was also in the socialist movement, so he had double trouble. He was not only a Jew, but he was politically against the German regime, of course.

So we tried to get out. But my father had four brothers and a sister, and I think he was the only one that knew what was coming and tried really hard to get us out. And then finally, he got a permit, as the Germans always did, on a children's transport, for me to go via England to Palestine. And they had all that arranged and they were hoping that we could all eventually go to Palestine together.

Then in between that couple months-- the Germans came in March and I left in May-- I think it was the beginning of May, the Germans came to pick up my dad, and they had his name and all. We had a little room over a bar in this little town of Kolin, and I always think of that room when I read Anne Frank's story. I always think I'm really the Anne Frank that survived by the skin of my teeth, more or less, because we were also in that little room upstairs sort of huddled together.

When the Germans came, the woman that owned the bar downstairs, who was a very simple Czech lady-- I mean, she wasn't particularly politically oriented or educated or anything. But she had a sense that when they came to pick up my father, that would be the end of him, and she just wouldn't let them go upstairs.

There were about three Nazis that came to pick him up, and she stood over the stairs and she said, he's not home and my mother is sick, and she's not going to let them up. Why don't they have some beer instead? Then they went down and settled down to some drinks and never came up. This woman really saved my father's life that day. If they would have come, I'm sure we would have never seen him again.

And then shortly after that-- I think it was about a week or two after that-- I left on the children's transport from Prague. And of course, I don't know if-- my mother and my father, I think, had the feeling that they'll never see me again, but I don't think I did. To me, I went with a bunch of children and I thought it was more like going to camp, going anywhere.

We got on the train and then we went through Germany the whole night, because then we took the boat from Holland to England, but to get to Holland from Czechoslovakia, you had to cross Germany. And all of us were just petrified. We traveled on that train all night. It was an overnight train. We kept on thinking we'll never get out of Germany. And in the morning, when it got light, we woke up and there we were in Holland. We saw people scrubbing stairs and all the little Dutch houses looking the same. I'll never forget the relief we felt that here we were in Holland.

After, we landed up in Hoek van Holland. That's the first time I ever saw the ocean. So then we got on a boat there and went to England. And there were Jewish children of all ages. There were little babies, two years old. I think there were many Zionist leaders that helped facilitate everybody on the train. It was a Youth Aliyah group that I left with.

And then when I arrived in England, we went to a farm in England, where we were supposed to get ready to move to Palestine. And we worked on the farm in the morning and then had classes in the afternoon. Of course, the war broke out in September, and I lived there from end of May till September, thinking that any day now we will get our permits to go to Palestine, and that was the main thing we wanted to do.

But the permits were always delayed, and of course, everything was chaotic then, too, because war was pretty imminent. And then we lived on this little farmhouse. And then in October-- yeah, so the war started in September. In October,

they tried from Germany to ship as many children as possible still out, so they had lots of transports of children come to this farm.

From Germany.

From Germany. And all of a sudden, we were about 50 or so than the first group that came there. But all of a sudden, we had hundreds of children coming and they had no place to put them. So I don't know if it was the British or the Zionist movement, got these railroad cars. And they put up this whole big, huge camp of railroad wagons, and we all lived in the railroad wagons.

And the farm house, being there were so many of us, the farm house was used for just eating, and our classrooms were held in the farm house. But all of us lived in the railroad wagons. In England, in October, November, is not exactly the most wonderful place to be. And the mud was unbelievable. And the only way we cleaned up the railroad wagons is with spades. Each wagon had a spade and we just shoveled out the mud. And it was very cold and everybody was sort of sick.

So each wagon had their own little patrol. And one day, I decided-- I was from Czechoslovakia and I knew about featherbeds, and I'm going to make myself a featherbed. Well, there was a lot of stealing going on. When you think, in this three months' transformation from a very protective upper class home, all of a sudden there we were, living in the railroad wagons, stealing pillows.

Well, anyway, I got myself six pillows and I decided I'm going to sew them together and heave them-- they were all bunk beds and I was on the third level up-- sew them together so I'll be warm one night and have a featherbed. Well, all the kids in that wagon helped me sew my featherbed, and they all thought that was a pretty inventive thing to do.

But those pillows were all just horsehair. I don't know what they were, but they were very, very heavy. So after we all worked real hard to get that, quote unquote, "featherbed" up on the third bunk, in no time at all, it all fell down and we were cold all over again. All I remember from that place is that we were constantly cold and wet.

Were you in communication with your family?

Very seldom because the war had started.

How about before the war?

- The only cards-- before the war started, we did get letters. And then the only cards we got was through the Red Cross. The Red Cross sent these-- I still remember these double cards. They had to be open for inspection. And they just said the minimum things, that we are healthy and we're still trying to go, and I hope you can get to Palestine, and all was oriented toward Palestine. It was a double postcard. The other side of the card was addressed to them, and so I used the same postcard to send back again.

And of course, this whole camp situation was supposed to be temporary because they were trying to relocate these children. Then I think it was December or January, they did find some British lords that had all these castles all over England that were really not occupied-- donated them to the Zionist movement to relocate these children.

So one night, we got a bus and we went to this-- it was called Glandyfi Castle. And it was just like heaven. It had bathrooms. It had water. It had all these things, you know, light. Just so really located in this castle. And years later, I found a friend of mine from the castle here in Cleveland. And his brother plays in the Cleveland Orchestra, and I have a picture of him when we first moved to the castle.

And our duties were, again, to learn agriculture. And we, again, had Hebrew lessons and English lessons and worked in that castle in the garden. And the leaders in the castle were also people from the Zionist movement, but the older people taught the younger people.

But the whole time was sort of a feeling of transition because we kept on thinking, we are just here for a little tiny while before we go to Palestine. But the war was in full swing by then. And we also helped dig shelters. We all had to dig shelters. And the British really at that time, they really didn't know what they were doing.

And it's an amazing thing that the Germans didn't just invade in the beginning of the war, and the whole story would have been different. Thank God they didn't. But we'd dig those shelters, and these British officials would show us how and what to do. The first day, we'd dig them and worked so hard, and the next day they were completely filled with water. They had these weird designs.

But anyway, then in 1940s when we got to this castle, then I didn't hardly ever hear from my parents, and neither did any of my friends there. And then one day I got a card with a boat on it and it said that we are on our way to Palestine. My parents got a permit. It was in January of 1940.

They took a train through Italy and got a boat from Italy. And they went through Italy. The day before Italy, joined the Axis, Germany, in the war. And they just got through Italy and got the boat and went to what was then Palestine. And I remember-- I'll never forget it.

Your brother was with them?

And my brother was with them. And he couldn't get to England because he was really too old. The Youth Aliyah group, they had to be between 12 and 15, I think. And when I got this card, I had such mixed emotions because I knew all my friends, they didn't get the card like that. I didn't know whether to be happy or guilty or sad because my parents got out.

It was very, very mixed emotion when you're really close and you live with these kids and you are so privileged. Certainly, I was really happy, and all I could think, I hope I can join them. But in a way, I didn't know how to share the news with the others because I didn't think the others were in that same position. So it was pretty dramatic. Anyway, and then the war just kept on and we kept on being there.

Did you see newspapers? Did you know what was happening?

We got newspapers some, but we lived pretty isolated. It was in a castle and we went about. We had speakers come from Palestine to push the Zionist cause, and they told us just to be patient and we'll get out. But somehow, we never did. Nobody got out. And then the British came-- I think I told you that when we first met-- and decided that the older people, the people above 16 or 17, were enemy alien because most of them came from Austria and Germany. And of course, Austria and Germany were the enemies, but it seemed to me the British must have known all along that these were all Jewish refugees.

But nevertheless, they came and arrested all the older people. And they first sent them to the Isle of Wight and then they sent them to Australia. And we lost, right in England with a war going, all our leadership. And we were stuck there, all little 13-, 14-, and 15-year-old kids on this farm. And then the Zionist movement, of course, in London was aware of what happened and they tried to send replacements.

And then Glandyfi Castle was in Wales and wasn't too far from Cardiff, and Cardiff had a pretty large Jewish community. And then some of the Jewish adults came from Cardiff and tried to help us with cooking and this and that. And then after a while, the Zionist movement sent people to us. But all this time, we kept on hoping and applying and reapplying for our passages to Palestine, and it just never happened. So then I was there for two years, three years.

So you got there in May of '39?

We got there in England. And then we were on this great engine farm, the one with the railroad cars.

Right.

I was there till January '40. Then in January '40 we moved to that castle.



And you were at the castle for two years?

No, not at that castle. We got bombed out there. The castle was near-- near the castle was an underground British airport. And the Germans knew that somewhere in this vicinity was this underground airport and they kept on bombing this area constantly. And we were up every night because of the bombs.

And I'll never forget, one night was sort of a quiet night and there weren't all these sirens going. I was in the bed next to the window and the searchlights all were on the single solitary plane right above my head. And there was a swastika all lit up by the searchlights right above my eyes. And everybody else was asleep, except I saw that swastika. And I think in all the war, that was the most scary moment I ever had. I was so afraid, I couldn't even make anybody up to go down to the shelter, because there it was.

And then after a while, the sirens started going and everybody started waking up again and we went down. And then we got bombed out there. Half of that house was bombed. We had to be relocated. We couldn't stay there. So we went to-- a very religious group was in another castle, and this was sort of a labor Zionist group that I was with. And we joined the Orthodox group in another castle, which was a pretty big castle, and stayed there.

Do you remember the names of any of these groups?

Well, one, the religious one, was a Mizrachi group.

And the one that you were in?

It was called the Maccabi Hatzair, one of the left wing Zionist groups.

So you went to that other castle?

To the other castle, and then we stayed there quite a while. And that was quite an experience, too, because that castle was an old Welsh castle that the Welsh built, I think, in the 13th century when they won a battle over the British. And it was just like a fairy tale castle. It was all towers rising up from the sea. It's the kind you see on the television.

But to live there, they had no bathrooms. They had no heat. The only heat we had was fire. And being the group was Mizrachi you couldn't do any work on the weekend on Saturday, so they let the fire go out. And the place was dark. And it was all stairs, being it was built on the hill. And our whole duty was to keep the place clean. And I think whoever owned the castle, that was his main concern. And it had a huge, huge marble stairway going from the bottom, the dining halls, and the-- what do you call it, those weapons? What the knights used to have, the insignia.

Armor.

The armor. Yeah, from the armor room and the dining room up to the other rooms were huge, huge marble steps. So instead of learning and working, what we girls did-- it was very sexist, too-- we'd scrubbed those marble steps. We had a crew every day to scrub those steps. I mean, the whole thing was ridiculous. And being the Mizrachi group was their first, they felt they owned it. And they knew we weren't as religious as they were and there was a lot of tension between the two groups. I mean, the whole thing was--

And meanwhile, I was getting older. I was by then 15. I had classes in English and I had classes in Hebrew. I had classes in World History and stuff, but I really didn't have any education. I thought, by then, that really, truly I don't think we'll ever get to Palestine. And the war was in full swing then.

So I wrote from that castle to my uncle-- my father's, my mother's brother settled in London, I guess, in '38, '37, maybe before-- if I could stay with him and go back to school. And he said OK, and they gave me a room. I had so many educational lacks. So there was a professor from Heidelberg University, a Jewish refugee that lived in the town, who was a friend of my uncle's, and he said he'll take me on as his private student so I can get back to school and catch up

with my everyday knowledge.

So for a year then I took classes from him in everything. He taught me history and a little bit of Latin and a little bit of this and that. And meanwhile, I took intensive English classes, because while I was on hakhshara with a Zionist group, we were so isolated from the British community and English was hard for all of us. I was in England for three years and I still didn't know English really.

So then we learned English in school, and then I went to school. And then I applied to go to college for early childhood education, which you could go to there when you were 17. And I took a course, which was government-supported at that time. I always loved children anyhow, and that's how I got into the preschool field, which I stayed with all my life.

By then the American army was in England. And I met my future husband, who was stationed in this town where I was, and we got married in England. Of course, that must have been just a terrible decision for my mother because I was only 18 and I was a minor, and I had to have permission from my parents to get married.

And of course, my poor mother hadn't seen me since I was 12, and in her mind I'm sure I stayed 12. And to allow this little 12-year-old kid to get married-- [LAUGHS]. But my uncle, I was sort of-- I was not wild or anything, but I had lots of dates. And my uncle, who I lived with, who I didn't communicate with very well, constantly felt that there is a sense of responsibility for me.

And every time I'd go out with another American soldier, he'd just be all upset. And he really thought I would be doing things that I wasn't supposed to do, which I really didn't do. But he was really happy when I fell in love with my husband and my husband wanted to marry me because then he felt he won't have that responsibility anymore.

And so he wrote to my mother and my father that my husband was really a very nice person, et cetera, et cetera. So finally they gave me permission to marry him. And then there was this problem of-- they gave me permission, but they insisted I have to have a temple wedding and I have to have a Jewish wedding. So then there was this problem of getting a temple and getting a rabbi.

This was a small-- this was a town of Cheltenham in Gloucestershire in the Cotswolds. And there was a lawyer and a doctor that were Jewish in that town, and there was a temple which had been closed for 30-some odd years, and there was no rabbi. So finally we found a British war chaplain in Cheltenham. And it had to be a British subject because in England, you had to have the permission of the chief rabbi of London and had to have a British subject to marry you.

So we found this rabbi who was on sick leave, who really didn't particularly want to do the wedding because he was supposed to be sick. And they opened up the temple for us. And being my husband was a musician and played in the local orchestra and knew the local musicians, the conductor said he'll play the organ for us. So the local music store gave us the organ free of charge. So we had a temple and we had an organ, and finally we had a rabbi.

And between all these times that we organized all this, the new Jewish community-- with lots of American-Jewish soldiers. That was the American headquarters, that town-- decided to get a rabbi of their own. So then when we got married, we couldn't very well ignore the local new rabbi. So then we had two rabbis instead of one. And we got married in this little town of Cheltenham. And we were very happy and all that.

And we never thought it was strange. We had an invitation that went out, being my parents insisted on this formal wedding. And the invitation read, "Mr. and Mrs. Schleissner of Haifa, Israel-- Palestine-- and Mr. and Mrs. Ormond of Newark, New Jersey would love to have the presence of the wedding of their son and daughter in Cheltenham, England at the St James Synagogue." And we never thought that was funny, either, that St James Synagogue, because it was on St James Square, next to St James fire station, and it was called St James Synagogue.

So anyway, that's how I met my husband. Then we got married. And with the wedding, I promised my parents that I'll see them before I settle in America. And then when the war was over, you really couldn't-- oh, my husband then-- a week after we got married, my husband went to France and I didn't see him for another year after that. And I stayed in England and I continued working in a nursery school.

Then after the war was over, he was shipped back, and I got pregnant. And there was no way to leave England. And meanwhile, my uncle, my one and only relative, went back with the UNRRA-- was a United Nations. It wasn't the United Nations. The UNRRA was United Relief Agency, whatever. He went back to Austria to help with the concentration camp victims, the relocation and all. So I was all alone in England. So I went to the Israel-- the Palestine consulate and tried to get a passage to Palestine. And I expected to have my baby then in Palestine with my parents.

Your husband was already back in the United States.

And he was already back in the United States. Well, he tried to get help me get the papers. So lo and behold, I didn't get a passage to Palestine, but I did get a passage to Egypt, and then took it. At that time, it was all British-owned, so I took a train from Egypt to Palestine, and saw my parents for the first time again since I was 12. Then as soon as I got there, I applied for my passage here. And being from the Middle East, there weren't that many people being transported back, so I got my transport and I came here in my eight months' pregnancy, and then my first child here in the United States.

What city did you come to here?

Newark, New Jersey, which was not-- my husband went back to college. He got his master's degree. He went to Ann Arbor. So the first place I went to was Ann Arbor. And then I went to Newark to have the baby because my in-laws were there. But it was difficult to just coming here right away and have the baby.

But I, of course, wanted to be with my husband to have the baby. And my poor mother, of course, had waited so much for me, and yet she really understood that I wanted to be with my husband and get settled in when I have the baby. So that's, more or less, the story of how I came here.

I'm going to ask you some more questions, just to have an idea. And then the overview, I think, we'll talk about in a few minutes after that. How long did you live in Newark?

Oh, we never lived really in Newark. I just had the baby there. Then my husband got a job with Indianapolis Symphony and we went that same fall to Indianapolis.

Were you a part of any organization when you first came here, any of the Jewish organizations?

No. I was very isolated because my husband, obviously, was an American who lived in a-- had lived here all his life, was born here, and his family. I really sort of geared my life around him and his family. And every so often, I wanted to have some contact with people from Europe. Being it wasn't part of his scene, I really didn't. And I really didn't get in touch with people until here from Cleveland.

I've now met about all the people, which is about five, that survived from my hometown. One is in Argentina, and I met him there. And one lives in Chicago and one lives in Washington DC, and we had sort of a reunion. But it was a small town and almost everybody was killed, really, that was my age, which was another thing that you really had to live with.

When you first came here, did you spend any time trying to look for family? Or did you know from your parents?

Well, from my parents. My parents sort of helped to find people. There was one cousin who went through all the concentration camps and survived it all and then came here to the United States. And when we first moved to Indianapolis, he came here. He's a very brilliant fellow, and he was sponsored by Einstein, I guess, to go to Princeton and study. He works in Palo Alto now. He's a scientist. He works in the space program. But he went through all the concentration camps and, by some miracle, survived. But he and one other cousin in Toronto are my only family here.

You went from New Jersey to Indianapolis?

Mm-hmm.

In Indianapolis, you had one child when you moved there?

Yeah, right. And then we went Indianapolis two seasons. It was just seasonal. Musicians, really, did not earn any money at all. So in the summer, we'd go from relative to relative. And my husband was on the GI Bill, so he went back to school, finished his degree. And then we went to St Louis, and really, that's the first time we got settled down, in St Louis.

Were you part of any synagogue in St Louis?

Yeah, we were in a temple in St Louis. But I always felt a little bit alienated and a little bit lost because my husband's background was so different from mine. And everything happened so fast and I was so young that it was difficult sometimes.