

We are continuing the session with Mr. Henry Billys, Mrs. Sophie Billys, and their daughter, Millie Korman. This interviewing session is part of the Holocaust archive project sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section.

We were at the point that you arrived to Vienna. And for people that didn't go through what you have experienced, all the traveling from place to place, back and forth, it's like buying a ticket and just traveling. It was a little bit different. How was it, getting from place to place then?

Well, you had to wait for a chance to get a ride, either by bus, by car, by wagon-- something like that-- because there was no regular schedule of trains, let's say. Or a train was passing by and stopped on a station, let's say--

It was cows'.

--it was a freight train-- they took you. So that's the way we traveled.

And from Vienna we traveled to Stuttgart. Actually, not Stuttgart, first we went to Bayreuth, which is near Nuremberg, to see her sister.

Furth, Furth. She was living in Furth. And I--

And then we went to Stuttgart, where we stayed for a year. And we waited until our quota will come through. So in May of 1948, we arrived in the United States.

What did you do in Stuttgart, all that time?

In Stuttgart, we had over there courses. They were preparing us for our life in the United States. If you didn't have a certain profession, they taught you to sew on a machine, to do some carpentry work-- the ORT had schools.

And they were feeding us. They had a kitchen, so we had over there-- the food was given us and also paid for our lodging. And that was a matter of waiting until you come. And that's when our quota came, so we left for the United States.

That's all we did in Germany. But we also did something else. We were traveling. We [LAUGHS] like to explore and travel.

So, in summertime, we took our knapsacks and we went to--

Berchtesgaden.

--Berchtesgaden, to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and to Schwarzsee-- if you know Germany-- very beautiful places. And that's all we did there, so just killing time.

What do you remember from this time?

Well, first of all, Henry didn't mention-- it sounds so easy-- took us only seven weeks, from the time we left Poland until we arrive Germany-- stay here, wait there. Once we went on a train, and the cows were the next door. So it wasn't that easy. But we managed.

Then, while we were in Vienna, they gave us a schoolroom where we put our luggage. Our bedding was our pillows, and our coats were our covers. And then who was lucky and could find a can could get a bowl of soup, because we have to have our own dishes.

But we managed to take some few packs of cigarettes from Poland. And for this, we can go to the store and buy fresh

pair of socks. Or once, I remember, we even bought the tickets to the theatre.

And we were sightseeing Vienna on a streetcar or just walking around. It's a beautiful city. And in Germany, Millie went to school. And then in a summertime we sent her to camp.

And we got a knapsack, and we were just traveling. How we traveled? Mostly hitchhike. And since Henry knows perfect German, they we were having lodging-- like in a barn-- have one blanket on our knees and a big coat to cover ourself. And they would even give us some milk and rolls. And this way we could see Germany.

And they thought that we are German refugees, displaced from the parts which were--

Henry, say about that place where we as your actor. Yeah. That's funny story.

Well, when we start traveling like this, [LAUGHS] for there so no hotels-- we didn't go to a hotel to begin with, because we didn't have the money.

Didn't have money.

But the hotels were all taken by Americans. They occupied, the forces.

And so I had to go to private places to ask for lodging overnight. And they thought that we are, as I say, displaced Germans from the east. They let us sleep-- either in a room-- they gave us a room. Sometimes we slept in a barn. This was summertime.

And they even gave us milk and bread, which was very [LAUGHS] dear at the time. And [LAUGHS] one little city-- I don't remember where it was-- by Schwarzsee, I knocked the door, and I asked for lodging. Oh, yes! And they expected evidently somebody, I didn't know that.

Oh, yes! They came in-- gave us a room, all prepared with--

With bathroom-- --clean bedding-- everything. And we went to sleep. We arrived over there in the afternoon-- something like that. We went to sleep.

At 7 o'clock, there's a knock at the door. See, somebody knocked at the door. [LAUGHS] And I said, yes?

You will be late! You will be late! I said, what are we going to be late for? For the performance! It's 8 o'clock start. [LAUGHS]

So they were expecting some actor [LAUGHS] to arrive. And they had lodging for an act-- [LAUGHS]

Prepared.

--and they fed us, and they gave us the [INAUDIBLE]. [LAUGHS] This was a funny, funny experience.

So of course, we had to pack and move out. But we found another one.

And I said, what do I owe you? Nothing, nothing. That's good. We are glad we could help you.

The German people are nice people. Well, hospitable, I don't know. But they are nice people. Polish people are more hospitable. Slavish people are much more hospitable.

Millie, you describe through your eyes the Russians and what you remember of that. What do you remember of these years, first Poland and then Germany, through the eyes of-- you were then about seven, eight? Mhm.

I was about seven and a half when we left Poland. And as I said, I remember sketches-- bits and pieces of the trip. I remember being in a truck, and I remember the train rides and jumping onto moving trains.

It's amazing, because from Germany on I remember everything that happened to me. So I don't know.

How was life in Germany?

Life in Germany was wonderful, except one respect. We lived in a very nice neighborhood. It was beautiful. The streets were gorgeous.

And the next street, in order to arrive at the street, you took a series of steps. It was, like, built on hills.

Stuttgart is hilly.

But I went to a school that was meant for children who were going to Israel. I remember singing "Mogen David." I remember the president of the-- not the president. Who was it? [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. I remember singing that song, [CROSS TALK].

There was no president yet, in '48.

Oh, this must have been David Bar Israel from history. But we were not allowed to speak Polish. We could either speak Hebrew or German. And in the year that I was there, I finally learned to speak German. But I did have one Polish very, very close friend, and we snuck around and spoke Polish.

The Red Cross took care of having inoculations. We had inoculations, it seemed, almost daily-- constantly inoculations. And I remember the wonderful second breakfast that we had, with hot chocolate and a roll, around 10 o'clock in the morning.

And since we lived in a non-Jewish neighborhood, and there was a girl with whom I played a few doors down, I tried to hide the fact that I was Jewish and was going to school on a Sunday-- because school was six days a week, including Sunday. And I had a knapsack, a book bag, that we all wore. So on the approach to her house, I had it on. When I was in front of her house, I took it off and put it to the left of me. And as I passed her house, I hid it in front of me so she wouldn't see, or the family wouldn't see, that I was attending school. I don't know if I ever told you that.

No. [LAUGHS]

But that's the first time I remember trying to hide what I was, only because I remember from childhood that it was not a good thing to be Jewish. Everyone hated the Jews. And so consequently I didn't want to be hated, because that's the thing that you did with Jews.

But I would like to tell you the story of when I found out that I was Jewish. Because throughout the whole time that we lived in Poland, I assumed that we were not Jewish. If we were, it would have been devastating to me. And my parents said, of course, since I was little, it didn't make sense to tell me, because I would somehow tell other children.

We arrived in Germany. And on the way down to the station today, I found out that this happened in Furth, where my cousin Anne lived, the one who was taken out of the ghetto over the fence, that my mother told you about before.

My father said, I have something very important to tell you. And he sat down in a large chair like this, which had a hassock. And he asked me to sit down. And I was very excited that he had something very important to tell me.

And he said, I want you to know that we are Jewish. And I said, we're Jewish? To me, it was the most devastating thing that could have ever been told to me, because Jews were bad, Jews were dirty, Jews were everything terrible, and I was very confused. And I loved my parents, so if they told me this then-- whatever.

But I do remember running out of our apartment, running down the stairs and all the way to my cousin's apartment, and saying, Anne? She says, yeah? Are you Jewish? She said, yes. I said, you are? So am I! And that made it all right. I came home, and I felt fine about being Jewish-- except when I say that I did try to hide my Jewishness.

You made also a conscious decision about that, because until then you were what you wanted to be.

Yeah. Well, I never-- if-- I said to myself, If I ever had to live it again, I would rather not live it through anymore. I wouldn't. Not only I don't hide any of my Jewishness since then. It's the other way around. Everybody needs a sense of belonging.

Also, I'm not religious. What I mean is I belong to a temple. I belong to all kind of different organizations and stuff. And I feel also a debt to the community, to the Jewish community, who helped us. And I mentioned that to you before, what we decided nowadays, now, to do. And we are proceeding with that. Which makes us feel very, very good.

How did you come to the conscious decision that you want to resume your being Jewish?

When we arrived in the States.

No, in Stuttgart.

We arrived in the States. I found out that Jews have no problems. Well, there is antisemitism. It exists all over. But nobody is hiding their Jewishness. Everybody belongs to a temple, whether he attends it or he does not attend it or just in the High Holidays, but it's a sense of belonging to a certain group of--

And I came to a conclusion that that's what I want. I don't want to be an actor. I cannot be an actor all my life. I know who my parents are, who my forefathers are, and I know who I am.

And also, as I said, religion is not exactly the most important part in my thing, but tradition and belonging-- that's what we want. And I'm very happy and proud that my daughter brought up her children also to be very conscious about their heritage. They all went to Sunday school. They all finished Sunday school. They were all confirmed. They had nice. And they went to Israel.

Each and every one was in Israel. As a matter of fact, once, my son-in-law who's a dentist volunteered for a month in an Israeli kibbutz, and the children and Millie were working in fields or whatever it is was over there. And they had a great time. And they had this thing which will remain for the rest of their lives. They know where they belong. You have the sense of belonging.

What about you, Mrs. Billys?

Well, our life in Germany-- I enroll in ORT. And I was learning how to sew and make dresses for little girls. And once they tell me that they're going to have a show in New York and we have to hurry. Somebody has to embroider a dress. I was working all night long, until I finish the embroidery with all kind of flowers and so on.

For belonging to ORT, we were getting a package a month. Since we didn't smoke, I had two packages a day! So Henry was busy playing bridge, and I was busy going to town and from one antique store to another, looking for something I can exchange for my cigarettes. I was always crazy about figurines and nice pieces, and I managed to have some. Of course, here was missing finger-- there, something else-- but I got it.

Then I found out about a old man who could fix them. Then, I was busy, every single day, picking up, taking to him, and he let me watch him. He even was teaching him. And this helped me a lot, because, when I couldn't find a job in United States, that's what I was doing. I was painting on china, and I was repairing china.

So that brings you to the United States.

Yes.

How did you get here?

We went by boat. We went to Hamburg and from there by Marine Flasher. It was a big boat-- converted military boat. And there were about 50 people in a room. I was sick like a dog for three weeks.

[INAUDIBLE]

And we finally got to New York. And in New York-- what is-- HIAS-- a Jewish organization was taking care of us. And they placed us in a hotel. And we call Henry's aunt in Cleveland, and he says, well, rush to us, because it's holiday. The fish might get spoiled. You have to come over.

And they send us money-- on a train, we should come to Cleveland. So--

That's where we--

--we arrive in May '48.

It seems that my life was all full of surprises. Because one morning my parents woke me up and, instead of going to school, they said we're going to America. And I said, why didn't you tell me before? And they said, you don't tell children these things, because they might tell someone else, and everyone in the school and in the-- was going to Israel and we were not. And when we were on the boat, one of my best friends was also on the boat, and he didn't know until the day that he was traveling, as well.

So you arrived at Cleveland.

We arrived in Cleveland.

How did you go about establishing yourself here?

Well, first of all, we had a place to go to-- my aunt's house. We stayed over there just--

Few days.

--a few days or--

Couple weeks.

--a week-- a couple of weeks-- whatever. And they found us a place to live off 105th Street, if you know where it is.

On Yale Avenue.

And we start looking for a job. And the Jewish vocational service helped us in that respect. We went, and they asked what you're doing, what you do, and what you know how to do, and everything. So for her, she gave a job sewing a machine. Me, they found a job with an electric company-- because I have something [LAUGHS] to do with electricity.

[INAUDIBLE]

And not knowing the language, what can I do? Sweep the floors, shipping, receiving, packing-- just like this. And this is the first and only job which I kept in the States. For seven years. I went-- I stayed with the people for seven years. Being such a long time, I learned the cycle of the business, completely through it.

In the meantime, I was not packing anymore. I was selling. I was allowed to do some buying. And also I've seen

electricians make lots of money, so I did electrical work and worked seven days a week, just killing ourselves just to save some money.

We bought a house, a very nice house, in Mayfield Heights. And Sophie got three jobs.

I can talk by myself.

And we making, we were saving money. One day, a company, similar to one which I worked, came to me and said, Henry, would you like to come to us as a partner? I says-- because one of the partners-- there were three partners. One passed away. And there were left two.

So one of the two who was running it stepped out-- couldn't get along with the other one, who was not active. He had his other business. So they were left without any management altogether-- only a couple of employees.

I said, well, Herb, yes, but I don't have any money-- it's not important. We will give you a little bit of credit, and you'll be paying it off-- whatever. I jumped at it, because to be [LAUGHS] on your own--

And I did go in and stayed with these people for five years.

[INAUDIBLE]

And I built it up a little bit, but I worked again-- I worked for-- there was a father and a son and myself. There were three of us. The son was not active at all. The father was sitting in the store, doing nothing. And I had to-- they went through the same thing what I went through.

After five years, the suppliers-- it's a lighting fixture business-- electrical light-- and this was the House of Light. After five years, many of the customers and many of the suppliers told me, Henry, why don't you go on your own? We will extend your credit, and you will do it. And we know you will.

So I came to the people, and I said, I want you to buy me out, because I am going to go on trying on my own. He said, you know, Henry, I'm not interested in that. My father is 72 years old. You buy us out! Turn it around.

And again, if you don't have the money, we'll arrange it. And we did. And September 1, 1960, I got the keys, and I was on my own.

I start working even harder than that I was all by myself. And then I hired a person that I had to pay. I did not have enough money to pay him and to draw wages. I did not draw any wages. I had my checks, thing.

And the times were good. This was the Korean War. Building-- this was indirect in building. You know, lighting fixtures are indirect building field. And building was booming. And I got all the credit I wanted-- not having any money, all the credit I wanted.

I bought a lot next door, which was an old house. I took it down. I built an addition-- made a beautiful showroom-- was the nicest showroom between Chicago and New York, my place.

I took in the most expensive fixtures, which you couldn't get in Cleveland. If a decorator needed something extra, he had to go to Chicago, to New York, to whatever. After I established that, they didn't have to go. The [INAUDIBLE], for instance, and Irving Company, these are very prominent decorators. And they said, Henry, we don't have to go to out of town. We get everything we need-- and not from the book. We had it.

And I really was doing well. And I hired more people, of course. And I had 14 families working for me.

And I paid my people much more than these others in that same field, because I always believed you might be the best coach. If you have a team, it doesn't play for you, you cannot win. And if I made money, I felt that I have to share with

them.

And I remember, every Christmastime-- because I didn't employ just Jewish people; as a matter of fact, I had most non-Jewish people-- I made a Christmas party or New Year's party-- whatever you want to call it. And I gave out you know, bonuses.

Bonuses.

One year was so good that I felt I-- let's say, the person got last year \$200. I gave him \$1,000. About this much. And when they got the checks, they didn't believe. They said, [LAUGHS] are you sure? I says, yeah.

Then Sophie told her, you are--

You see double.

You had too much to drink; you see double. [LAUGHS] Anyways, I established a place that the people were very devoted and loyal to me, because of that.

And I bought the building. And I established a retirement fund for everybody. And they had the authority to write checks-- two of them, out of three, two. If we went away every year for two or three times, two weeks at a time.

And my friends, my close friends, who were in my same situation, said, Henry aren't you afraid you'll go away and you'll turn over so much money that they steal from you? I said, look, if I have to think about that, I am a slave of my good business. If I am a slave of the business, the business is no good. Money is only--

That's my philosophy, all my life. Money is only good if you use it. You might have all the money in the world. If you don't use it, it's of no value.

So, when I was nearing 60, and I knew that I have nobody to turn it over-- because my daughter, she's the only person, and her husband is a dentist and had already a practice and-- well, he worked in the office until he finished school. But this has nothing to do.

So I decided to sell it. And I put out word. And I finally found--

It took some years. I was 60 at the time, and I sold it when I was--

In 1962.

'72. I sold when I was already--

62.

60--

62.

62 years old, yeah. And then the building, I-- what I did for my grandchildren-- the building, I turned over to-- made a trust. And the building is theirs, and the income is theirs. Sophie has one fourth, and the children have three fourths. And all the money which was accumulated, when time comes-- you know, education has the first priority-- there will be no problem, because education is very high, very expensive.

And this helped them, of course. And I'm very happy and proud and delighted that I could see it. I don't have to wait until I die, but I see what they have-- what they're using it. This was one thing which I did.

And in 1972, I sold my business. And in the meantime, prior to that, having contact with builders, I came in contact and I acquired some property. And only first-class property--

I was approached by in this Chester section where you can make 25% profit a year. I did not look for that. I looked for something very good.

And at that time, which, interest was low, like 6%, the income of the building was almost zero, because it was not filled and so forth and so forth. I didn't look for an income at the time. After all those years, of course, it changed. We paid off the mortgage. The rentals are going up every time you renew it. And it's all, as you know, Beechwood, as you know, is a good section.

And we don't have to worry about where the money comes from. And this is my only daughter, and she will not have to work a day in her life, afterwards, and enjoy it and go place and everything else. And that's what makes me very, very happy, both of us.

And as I mentioned that to you-- shall I mention again what we are doing, or--

Well, give first Mrs. Billy the chance to share her story about how she adjusted to life here.

Well, when we came to this country, first we were told that only tailors or whatever can have a right to be here. And I met one girl, and she said, if you knew how to sew by hand I can take you to the factory where I'm working. And I'm suppose to put, like, a chain by hand between the lining and the coat. But sitting eight hours on one place, I just couldn't do it. The next day, I took slippers and a pillow and just didn't help.

Then we finally went to the Jewish vocation, when Henry got the job he did. And I told him what I can do. Of course, I can work in any-- those I was doing in Poland, but I can paint. Can you paint on china? I says, yes, I do.

So I went to a factory-- paint on china. And after a few weeks, they notify us they have vacation. And I just wouldn't be able to be without the work. So I went to the public library and find out the addresses-- where are they making those figurines? And I went there, and I bought some samples.

And I was painting them at home. And Henry-- we didn't have a car, at that time yet. With suitcase, Henry was taking to put them in a kiln and, to different stores, giving in consignment.

Well, that was going on for some times, until his uncle decided to go to California. And he said, I have downstairs for room for a custodian, but I don't have any. If you want, you can use it on your own.

So I bought myself a kiln. I furnished that very nicely. And I made cards that I'm painting on china-- repairing china. And I was doing very well.

And one day, one lady who was living there, she asked me, oh, you have such a big place, and I used to have a beauty shop if you let me-- and I was just about closing-- use part of it, then we can be like partner. You can take on my customer; I can take on your. But what you have to do-- to get some license.

So she took me to a beauty school. And I took two figurines as a present to the lady. I pay something-- very little. OK, you don't have to come. You have to have something like 150 hours. I will put-- I will notify you when you have to do your examination.

After a few months, she sent me a note, I have to go to Columbus-- give a test.

Manicuring.

So I was brave enough. I went to Columbus. Since I knew how to paint, there is no problem to put polish on the nails. And well, it was my very, very broken English I couldn't speak English, after five years I was here.

And she says, well, I can push you to 70, but promise me you don't go any farther in a beauty school until you become citizen. I says, OK-- because she didn't know I was not going to use that.

We came home. And I was working. And the lady husband started painting the walls, and Henry put some lighting fixtures there.

All of a sudden, uncle comes back. He's going to put copper plumbing. We have to move out from there.

In the meantime, we bought that little house in Mayfield Heights, so of sure, nobody will come there. And I was sitting home doing nothing. Then my sister says, well, you have manicuring license. Why don't you try to get a job?

Well, it was a good idea, and I did. Portero at that time advertised that he was looking for somebody. He hired me. I was working for a while but wasn't too happy.

And I got a job with Filmar, lamp company. You have to make about 3,000 lamps a day. And I was making designs and putting in a kiln and getting out.

But over there they didn't want me to work more than 40 hours. So I was coming early in the morning, and working for a while, then going home. And for the evening, I had another job. Somebody was looking for a weaver, to weave cigarette burns, which he was paying very well.

So I was just going from one job to another and then working at home and painting, until Millie got married. When she married, I decided to be retired. But I am not retired, of course-- retired of working for somebody else, but I still do some ceramic, leaded glass, and all different other hobbies.

[INAUDIBLE] you got here at the tender age of nine.

Nine and a half.

Nine and a half. What was it like, arriving here a stranger?

Well, I was intrigued, number one, from the boat. We arrived at night, and we saw lots of silver sparkles. And I was told that those were cars on the highways. I'd never seen so many cars at one time in my life, so that amazed me.

And of course, I loved New York. We were there for a few days. And from New York we came to Cleveland.

I was enrolled at Coventry school for two weeks. At the time, I was very little. I was short for my age. And I didn't speak English, so they put me into first grade.

And in first grade, they were very nice to me. They said, this is ceiling. Say "ceiling"-- floor-- say "floor." And I was assigned to sit next to a little girl who was doing the paste-and-cut books. You cut a picture of a desk and put it next to the word that said "desk" or vice versa. And all I wanted to do was be able to cut and paste too, but, of course, I didn't have a workbook. So it was a little bit of a challenge, that I never had a chance to experience. It was frustrating for me.

From there we moved to Yale Avenue, and I still didn't speak English. We were just here a few weeks, and my parents sent me to Camp Wise. And there I went with a suitcase full of dresses, because I didn't own one pair of shorts. There was no such thing as shorts in Europe. I had a little silk dresses with matching underpants. The first time I went on the slide, zoop! There were my pants.

And it was very frustrating, at camp, the first year, because I couldn't speak. But then I didn't know that everyone had been there every year together and that they were kind of-- the children were very nice to me. And in fact, the counselor who was my counselor at that time turned out to be my guitar teacher as an adult.

Then I was enrolled in elementary school. And I became very shy-- whereas I was an outgoing person, but I think it's because I didn't have command of the language. So I was in a regular class. I found it injustice.

I probably would have done better at Coventry School, where they had experience with refugee children. But at Miles Standish, where I went, I was the only one. And the teachers had to put some kind of a grade, and so they had--

I had to take a test, and they said, just write anything. And there I would have a U for unsatisfactory in geography, because I didn't know what they were talking about. But within two years I knew the language very well. I had a lot of friends. And everything was fine, except that I still--

The Jewish part still was a big part of me. I don't know if I ever shared it with you, but it always bothered me, because some of my friends who were not Jewish-- I would say, you know, I was once Catholic-- as if to make me more acceptable to them. So it really bothered me.

And then, when we moved to Mayfield Heights, I was 13. I was going to be 13. And here, I ended up being the only Jewish girl in my whole class. Because, yes, there were Jews moving there, but they had two-year-olds not 13-year-olds.

And it was difficult for me, because my father drove me to Sunday school every Sunday, and I did have my friends there after a while-- not at the beginning-- and then I came back to the non-Jewish environment and I thought I should try to hide that I'm Jewish. So it really followed me, most of my life, until adulthood.

You are here now, and you're established. Looking back at the war years, what do you feel were your greatest losses because of that experience?

Losses-- well, losses were huge. You cannot replace, like the lives of my parents. I never think of what-- we were established in Poland. We always had a nice place to live and-- but I don't consider that a loss, compared with what we accomplished here. So--

We'll talk about that in terms of gains, but still it took away that from you.

Of course, well, after all, you know, all my life, my adult life, until I was 29, I lived in Poland-- born in Poland, educated in Poland, and had all my family, all my friends-- these are things are which you are missing. You can never get-- even if you start thinking of it, you get a sense of nostalgia because, after all, you remember those childhood days when you had all good times. We played soccer, and they start dating, and all those things. This all happened in Poland.

And then, all of a sudden, cut off.

And all of a sudden, now you came to a country-- and believe me, in the beginning I said many a times, I wish that Columbus would never be born, to discover America. Because we were unhappy here. We came, not knowing the language, not having no family, no friends. You felt isolated. It was hardship.

But later we met some people like ourselves, and we became very close, like relatives. Whenever we need the help, either financially or otherwise, you could always count on them. We do the same. We did the same thing. We reciprocated, of course.

So that's what it was. What we left behind, after all those years, now it's evaporated already. But we were lingering on it-- all those days in our youth, where we grew up and had those good times and-- well, the best years of our lives. I came here with 37 years old.

37 years--

And you had to start all over again, then.

Yeah.

What about you, Mrs. Billys?

Well, I will tell you that what we accomplished in United States, three lifetimes in Poland would never do it-- never. From grandfather to son and so on-- wherever they left. But here, we came without a penny, without anything, and just with hard work and patience we could do it. And of course, I left 40 people of my closest family-- my parents, their sisters and brothers and a few cousins only. We saw two cousins in Israel. They survive in Russia. And one cousin in South America. He lived in London away that time. And that's all.

What do you think, Millie?

I can't say I have regrets, because I really and truly don't remember my life in Poland other than isolated incidences and except for the whole fact that I was happy and I had a very good childhood. I do not have a bad memory of my childhood.

I think the fact that, as soon as I learned a language, I had to leave and change it probably made a mark. I think the fact that I had to change religions probably made a mark. I know that it did.

But as an adult, now, all I'm saying is I'm a product of circumstance. Because I was happy, whatever I did throughout my life. I really did not have bad moments, except for the times that I did try to hide my Jewishness-- which did seem to be a block for a while but not totally.

OK. So, in a way, you had what it took to make the adjustments. And you were able to make the best of any situation.

I feel I was. And as soon as I did become fluent in English, I became more extroverted, and I was not as shy as I was before. And the album that I have and I cherish of my prewar years, it's like a fairy tale.

When the war was over, I went with my older sister back to Poland. And we found a place where our parents were living. And evidently somebody was there and took the albums but took off some pictures, which we found. And among others were ours and Millie's.

Talking about looking back what happened-- when did we go to Poland? '74.

In 1974-- this was a project which was growing for two years. One day, Millie comes and said, you know, Daddy, my children start asking me, where do you come from, where were you born-- questions like that. And she would like to clarify and to let them know what it is.

And we were two years on it, and finally we left-- all of us, the whole family, including her husband, who was born in the United States, went to Poland. We came to the city of Łódź, where we were born. We went to the house where Sophie was born and showed everybody. We went to the house where I was born. We went to the house where Millie was born in Łódź.

And then we went to the house where we lived after--

We were married.

--after we were married. And then we went to the cemetery. We've seen, over there, where parents--

Parents' graves.

And then we hired a van, and we crisscrossed Poland. We went to the Baltic Sea. We went to the Tatra Mountains. We went to Warsaw, went to Kraków, went to Auschwitz.

And in Auschwitz-- I personally didn't want to go to Auschwitz-- didn't care to go. But, traveling, we have seen-- it was

only a few kilometers from Auschwitz, and she wanted to go. Said, oh, let's go. We went over there. And I'm glad we did go. And we've seen all the things.

And her oldest girl-- she was, at the time--

She was going to be 12.

--12 years old-- and over there, the signs said, kill the. Says to me, Grandpa, why did the German kill the Jews? Well, it's a very good question.

What did Grandpa have to say?

[LAUGHS]

Because they-- I didn't know the answer. I said, because they hated them. And that's all I could say.

Well, I knew, as she will grow older, she will find out more about it, and she did, and everybody does. But that comes, a question from a child who knows nothing about the Holocaust and asking why. What is-- must be a reason why they killed somebody, they stole, anything.

So this was a great experience. And you know what? You wouldn't believe how frequently those kids are reminiscing that trip to Poland. Because we still had relatives in Poland. Mostly are here now.

My elder sister--

The cousins of theirs and that. It's amazing, how kids can get along. These kids didn't know a single word of Polish, and the other kids over there didn't know a single word of English, but they got along so well. [LAUGHS]

Mhm

It was really a terrific trip. This was one of the highlights of my life, really.

So you feel that you have made quite a few accomplishments and that you--

I'm very proud of that.

You are proud of that. And you were telling me also that not only you are thinking about your family but also about--

That's right. I'd like to pay back. This will be a token, but this is something-- a token of appreciation. And as I am always-- I was and still am-- into learning, into education, which I think-- this is the greatest thing in life you can give to a child, to a person, is education. This can never be taken away from you. Hitler took away everything-- all your belongings, all your physical things, but not what you had in your brain.

Sophie and I decided that we will establish a scholarship fund-- Henry and Sophie Billys Scholarship Fund-- which will be a perpetual thing. Only the interest will be used, which will amount to-- that will create a \$2,500-a-year interest. \$2,500.

And we do it through the federation, which accepted it very gracefully. And I left it to their discretion. I'm not limiting to Jews or non-Jews or to colored. I think education is good. If a colored boy or a girl will grow up in slums and she will have a chance to get some education, she will be a better person. No question about it.

So I leave it to their discretion, although they said that we will consult you as long as we are alive. And then they will consult Millie. They usually give you two or three choices, and you might decide-- I'm not even interested in that, but that's the way they do it. It's fine. And we feel very good about it.

Since time is winding up, I would like you to think about the question-- you know, obviously the war years have made a difference in your life. In what way do you think that the war years affected you as a person?

They made me much tougher. I'm really-- I actually-- I'm too emotional, as it is now, but I probably was, when I was younger, much more so-- made me tougher. I face things, you know, they are easier. And hardship is no big thing for me.

When we came to this country, and we worked seven days a week-- but this was voluntarily. I wanted, because I've seen I can accomplish more. I can buy a better house or buy a better car. This was no big thing, because I was so hardened by the experiences during the war I've seen. And also, what also I believe that-- I think I became a better Jew than I ever was before, because of the feeling of the need--

[INAUDIBLE]

Of belonging, of belonging. And I have made many friends. We belong to several organizations, and--

[INAUDIBLE]

Well, so we have good friends. We have a whole bunch of good friends. And we are respected.

We feel good about ourselves. We live a nice life. We have a nice house. We dress decently. And we vacation at least three, four times a year now. We always traveled, but we travel extensively now.

And this is all what life is about, because we all know too well that nothing is forever. And when the day comes or the clock will strike the hour, we have to go. There will be no regrets. We did everything we wanted to do.

And we always come to the same conclusion-- money is only good if you use it. So as long as we were lucky to accomplish something, let's use it.

Mrs. Billys?

Yeah. Well, Like you say, I was brave. I was brave and tough. And if somebody asked me now, do you still ski? Maybe should I ski! I can still walk; why can I still ski?

And I just don't understand-- what can be on my way? The worst thing, I will die, and we don't die younger anymore. So we just do whatever we feel like doing.

We are blessed with good health, and this is a blessing. This, you cannot buy. This privilege great, whatever you do, you have to do that.

And I am the travel agent in the house, managing where we go, how we're going, and when, and so on. For instance, now we are planning a trip where, for two weeks, we'd be doing nothing in Switzerland but walking mountains up and down.

Hiking and scaling. And [LAUGHS] I'm go for the ride, you know? She's the [LAUGHS].

For the walk.

Millie, what about you? In what way have the war years affected you, you think?

Well, I'm choked up. I feel that my heritage has really given me a tremendous breadth and background. And it has provided me with such depth that most people don't have a chance to experience. And I'm very fortunate for that.

I don't know why--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

One thing, you know. I mentioned to you, we are not too religious, as far as religion is concerned. Millie is more religious. After all what she said, that she was trying to hide the Jewishness and something like that, this came natural because she was affected by that.

But in her house, Friday night, she was lighting candles; Sophie did not do that. But this is so great. The children, they will do what they want to do once they are grown-ups already, but--

Finishing.

--they show it.

Well, we have a few more minutes. And I would like you to think what it is that you would like to say to those that will be viewing your-- what advice does Henry Billys have to those that want to listen to what you have to say?

Understand the question.

What advice would you give--

Oh, advice! Just to be brave, and do what you really wanted to do, and try just work your way through.

I have two words, which, of course, reflect my father and our family and, I think, myself. And that's be optimistic and have a sense of humor.

That's right.

Because those two will get you through life, and that's what's gotten him through life. And I feel, for some reason I just never give up. When the same negative things happen, I think, well, this time it'll work. And I just keep after it, and I never think that it will fail.

Whenever I do anything, I just assume it could be done.

I agree with you.

Yeah, I think this is what the family has done.

Exactly. And when people ask me, you do this-- you do that-- why not? If you can do it, why can't I do it? For instance, we were on a skiing-- on the racing team of the United States. I was on the racing team. And at my age, I said, well, if he is-- and I was beating guys who were half my age-- half my age!

I said, if I can do it, if I feel like doing it, do. Be always optimistic, always positive. And one thing about the United States-- the opportunity is still here. If you have something and you work at it diligently, you cannot fail. It's impossible to fail in the United States-- even nowadays.

So we are very fortunate that that country adopted us and we adopted this country which we love. And--

And as we grow older, we just think the same way-- and do together everything.

Thank you.

OK.

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