

Sometimes I think it was just yesterday.

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Ursula Guttstadt McKinney. This is track number two, and we were talking about the end of the war and the mother coming back from Auschwitz. Any other memories of that particular time we can talk about.

So people came back, you know? You never knew. You never knew, and you never trusted any of it. But we got that death certificate from Vati. And you see, my father was a civil servant. He worked for the Reichsbahn, which is now Bundesbahn, which would be the federal, you know, railway system.

And then when my father-- when they kicked him out in '36, they gave him a special assignment. And then in '38, certainly everything was over. And so they paid the pension for my father. Only, we never got it. The Gestapo collected it. Because the German railroads, they thought we cannot-- we have no reason not to give it-- send it. We have to have a disciplinary thing if he murder somebody or something, you know? So they paid it. And the Gestapo collected it.

You had said that you were hoping even in '45 that your father would come.

Back, yeah.

Did you go looking for him?

No, we-- no, we didn't look for him. But my mother walked-- my mother walked to Frankfurt Oder. She didn't dare to take Brigitte and me with her, because this was all occupied by Russians. And she walked because there was no train and nothing. And she walked to Frankfurt Oder and looked if our house was still there.

That's about what, 60 miles or so?

Uh-huh. And then she-- and then she went to whatever government there was in the city of Frankfurt Oder. And so they knew very well that she was there, that she was alive and she was there, and they had her address. And my mother for a while administered the house.

She stayed in--

No, no, no, no, no. She stayed in Berlin. Because then after '45, my mother got us an apartment. But she was the one who collected the rent for a while and was responsible for it. But then she gave it up. It was too difficult with the East and so on.

But the city of Frankfurt Oder. After, you know-- this is called "Grundbuch" in German. It's a registry for all the properties. And there was at first Richard Guttstadt. Then it was crossed out. Then it was Richard Israel Guttstadt. That was crossed out. Then it was the Third Reich. And then this was crossed out in '45 and it became poverty of the city of Frankfurt Oder.

And the person who rented then our house was a physician from Silesia. And he had his practice on the first floor and lived on the second floor. And so it was in very good condition, because as a physician he also got electrical repairs and all of that. So it was maintained very well.

And then he died in the house somewhere in the '60s. And then a family came who rented it, and they wanted to buy it. And they asked the city of Frankfurt Oder and said, look, it is Wessi property-- You know, West German people who had escaped. They didn't know that it was Jewish property-- they had escaped. And so we want to buy it.

And the city of Frankfurt Oder said, sorry, it's not for sale. And it's not Wessi property. So that was our salvation. So my sister and I got the house back.

You did?

Mm-hmm. My sister got a lawyer through friends. And he only took 10-- 15%. Much less than the other outfits did. And--

What year was that, that you got the house back?

After the wall fell. You know. After the wall fell. Because-- and then he-- because then we had all the papers. My mother had always a little suitcase during the war, where the papers of the house were in, the death certificate of my father and all that. And we carried-- she carried that said wherever she went.

And then when my mother died in '81, I had it. So we had all the papers. And then the city had my father's name and everything. So-- and we sold it to the people who want to buy it. But we didn't had all these difficulties, because you see-- and for God's sake, Frankfurt was very destroyed, too. But the registry was intact. You know, because if this would all have been gone, then it would have been very difficult. But this was all there. And you know, you could trace it.

And so my sister and I got the house back, and then we sold it. My sister wanted to move back. And I said no deal.

[CHUCKLING]

And so on. And so we didn't. But we got it back, yes. And we sold it to the people who had it. So my mother, really, went she went in '45 and she walked to Frankfurt Oder. She wanted to make sure that the house was still there, and she wanted to make sure that they know where she is. So if Vati would come, he would find us.

So when did you finally realize that he was not going to come back?

Pretty soon.

Pretty soon.

Pretty soon, pretty soon. Yeah.

You stayed in Berlin?

Yes.

With your sister and your mother.

Yes.

And what did you do then, when the war was over?

When the war was over, I tried to get my Abiturium, which was awful. And I went to a school which was-- we were all Jewish or half-Jewish kids who wanted to finish high school. And anytime there was exam, we all blanked out. It was awful. We just couldn't function. And nobody ever thought that we need any help.

One person one time said to me, you know, you are like somebody who walks along a corridor and sees an open door and runs in, in this open door and says, oh, no. I don't want to be here. And then she keeps on running. Next open door-- and you know, but it never occurred to them that I really-- number one, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I never knew what--

You know, I mean, it was OK, though it was over. They said, OK, fine, it's over. Now you start your life again. But how? How? You know? So--

Did you talk about your experiences with the other students?

No, no.

Did you all exchange?

No, nobody of us talked. We didn't talk.

Between each other?

No, we didn't talk. We didn't talk.

Because you were all numb.

We were all numb.

Numb, yeah.

I mean, sometimes someone said something, and you realized, you know, they were in hiding and so on. Most of them were kids who had been in hiding, and so on. But no, we just-- we just blanked out, you know? My sister was a little bit more lucky. She had her abiturium, so she could go to the university.

But I had-- it was very difficult to get back to a normal life. And it kept on-- you know-- and you felt somewhere-- then you felt maybe more an outcast than before. Because before you were so busy trying to survive all that, that you couldn't even think about anything. And then suddenly life was supposed to be more normal again. And as I said, my mother got us an apartment.

But then you were in danger again. You know, because I couldn't-- my sister registered with the IRO. You know, with the International Relief Organization. And she came over with a coal boat. You know, one of those boats which brought coal over and went back empty. But I was-- she then had a temporary visa for West Berlin. Because in '48, they opened the Free University in West Berlin. And my sister was in the-- East Germany had only one university in Berlin, the Humboldt University, which was in East Berlin.

And so she could go to West Berlin. And she got a temporary visa. And on this she registered and could get out. But I was in East Berlin. And any time you registered with the IRO and were in East Berlin, the Russians would arrest you as a spy. So you couldn't do that. So--

Let's go back a little bit. When you the coal boat, the boat going from?

Oh, there were the boats after the war, which came from America. They had coal in and so on. They brought it to West Germany for these people. I guess it was part of the Marshall Plan. And then they went empty back, and they had refugees on going back.

I see. I see. So she went--

She went at first to the Freie University, the Free University in West Berlin.

Yeah.

And she studied there, and then came-- her major was history. And there came a professor from the United States, who was a German Jewish immigrant originally. But he was, in the meantime, an American citizen and a professor of history. And he talked to my sister. And he said, I get you got a scholarship to--

An American college.

Yeah, so he did. So she went to Sweet Briar.

So she was able to get out.

Mm-hmm.

And she came to the United States.

And she had no sponsor. My sister had a sponsor, the world [? churches ?] were her sponsor. So IRO got her a sponsor, which was very impersonal.

And this was in '48?

No, my sister-- no. That was for between-- really, between '49 and '50. That's all.

Yeah. And you said goodbye.

Oh, yeah. I said goodbye to the-- when my Jewish relatives went to the concentration camp, I went and said goodbye. We always knew. I had all my aunts. I went-- they had the papers. I know where they're going, and I went there and I said goodbye. And I always knew I wouldn't see them again.

How do you say goodbye in such a situation?

It was very-- it was very difficult, because one of my aunts said to me, "you know, I'm going to go to the concentration camp because I'm Jewish. I don't know why I go there. Because I don't believe in anything. I never go to the synagogue or anything. But I'm Jewish."

And I felt so bad for her. Because I thought, if she would believe in it-- and during the camps, the Orthodox Jews were off the best, because they had a faith to set against that horror. But people like her, they died off very fast, because they had nothing to set against it.

And I said to so many of them, we said goodbye. You always knew when they went-- we had a young-- one of the cousins, and they had-- and they had gotten the baby--

[PHONE RINGING]

I can take it off the hook. They were-- you know, they all knew that they go to the concentration camp. But they couldn't-- and many of my relatives were really in Posen. You know, Poland was partly German, partly Austrian, and partly Hungary-- partly Russian. And after the war, Poland was united again.

And my relatives lived in the German-- many of them in German part, which was then Poland. After World War I, they could either opt for Poland or for Germany, and they opted for Germany. And then they were shipped back. But they-- somewhere we all knew that-- and they knew about-- they didn't think that they're going to leave a camp or anything like that. They all knew that-- at least my relatives all knew that was the end.

Yeah, and that young family, you know, who had that little boy, Berl, and he was supposed to be born in the United States, except they didn't get in. So he went.

You said that you had known even in '42 about the camps.

Sure.

When did you learn the real extent of the camps?

Oh, naja, this, I guess we knew about the camp. My father knew about that camp, and he told us about it. And I had-- but the extent of the-- I guess we only learned, really, after the war how ma-- but we knew that they had chambers, that they died and so on. And we knew that people didn't had a chance to come back, except very few.

Some way through the grapevines, you know? There were always some people who got news out of it. You know, like this one train which went into Auschwitz. One time the Swedish Red Cross came in, and they said they put linen on the beds and everything, in order to make it look good. And then they said there will be a train going to Switzerland the next morning, and hardly anybody went because nobody believed it. But one of the German-- Frankfurt Oder Jews did. And it went.

The Germans, in some ways, sometimes you had a chance. And that train went almost empty. Because people were afraid. They said that's a trap. But then these people talked. So you heard things. And so you knew. I mean, we didn't know how many camps were there. I mean, the number of camps, this we didn't know. And we didn't know the extent of how many people really were--

I mean, how really is the capacity was of this. But you know, there is a place where-- there were certain places already within in Germany, where they tried out some of these things on the mentally retarded.

Right.

And so then the medical profession somewhere heard about it and so on. So I think something to that extent, it was very difficult to keep it completely secret. I never quite understand how people can say they never knew about it. I mean, didn't they see the carts coming in? And didn't they smell all this and so on?

But the trouble is that Hitler got in power when the Depression was. And people were out of work, and he promised them work, and he built factory, prepared for the war. And he built the Autobahn and all this, and people had money. Suddenly had money. And by the time they realized politically wasn't everything that great, they were trapped.

That's one reason I'm some way afraid of this country here. That's the way how it goes. How bad can it get so many people to come to these things. But so it was a bad time. And then there was so many people who really didn't know any Jews. So Hitler, when they talked about them, some people will believe anything which is written black and white.

So it's very difficult. And I mean, there was a curfew after the 20th of July. You know, when they tried to kill Hitler, Stauffenberg and these people. There was a curfew. You know, you could see there were before-- when the Jews, still before they were all more or less disposed of, there were signs on parks, "No Jews allowed" and so on. So it was very obvious. And people can read. All the Germans could read. There were no people who couldn't read.

But I guess many of them-- and some of the people who were very daring, and nothing happened to them. We had a high school teacher who taught us maths and physics and so on. And he was one of these golden Partei members. You know, people who joined before '33. They had a golden rim around their party member-- party thing. And they [INAUDIBLE] and so on, and were enthusiastic about it.

And then he sent in '38 or '39 or something around there, he sent his membership back. And he said, that's not the party I joined. He always kept on teaching. Nothing happened to him. Absolutely nothing. So some people, though, it was-- there were always some people had a loophole or something, they got through.

The majority of my high school teachers were not party members. But I guess they didn't have enough teachers there to keep them.

[INAUDIBLE]

Yeah. When they kicked me out of school and I was walking the street in Frankfurt Oder, one of my former classmates, which was really 100-- 300% Nazi, and so was her whole family, she stopped me in the street. And she said, I'm sorry

that they kicked you out. I said, oh. I guess for her, I was just another classmate.

What's it like to feel to be an outcast?

It feels awful. When I was standing-- I remember that one time when Hitler's birthday was, and everybody came in uniform, Hitler Youth uniform-- everybody. So being a member of the Hitler Youth, that didn't really mean that you were a Nazi. They were all members. And I was there private. It's an awful feeling. I always thought, you know, I would feel like I'm the only Black in a white school.

And nobody harassed me or anything, but I came home. And I said Mommy, next time I'm not going. So then I started, when anything like this was going on, I didn't go.

Did you feel inferior? Or just angry?

I was afraid more than I was feeling inferior. Maybe-- a certain extent, yes. Because when I went to-- when I went to physical therapy school, you know, before I immigrate to the United States, I became-- I went to the University of Frankfurt and became a physical therapist.

And one of the things I said to myself, I want that the people need me, that they want me. Because before nobody needed me, nobody wanted me. I also went then back to the university, to American U and Catholic U, and I got two master's degrees, and I was a straight A student, and I got a summa cum laude and so on.

And people say, oh, you were so ambitious. I said, no, but I had to prove to myself I can do it.

That you're not an outcast.

Yeah, that I can do it. You know? So in some ways, this all stuck to me all the time, yes. Yeah.

Let's get back just a little bit to the post-war. So your sister left. You stayed with your mother in Berlin.

Naja, I went illegally to West Germany.

Yeah. Illegally?

Oh, yeah. Sure. I danced. I took-- I went to ballet school in Berlin. This was my big-- I danced. I danced when I was in Frankfurt Oder, and I was on the stage at the Stadttheater. And then they kicked me-- they told me you couldn't come anymore. You are half-Jewish. And that was very hard. That was more difficult for me, really, than to be kicked out of school. Because I love dancing.

So then in '45, I went back to ballet school, and I wanted to become a professional dancer. And so I joined a group, and we traveled-- and this was-- you know, at this point there was no wall, so you could go very easy from East Berlin to West Berlin and so on. And so then we went to West Germany. And every time I had to go to the police station and they put on that I was illegally there.

So but there was in Hamburg a woman who took pity on me, and she was in this office where they give you housing. Because you know, the cities were destroyed, so first you had to wait until you got something. And so she said, all right. She said, keep in touch. Send me sometimes a postcard.

So I sent her a postcard. And one time I was in Goettingen, which isn't too far from Hamburg. And I got a postcard, "come to Hamburg as soon as you can." I said OK. So I took the train and went to Hamburg. I only went in-- and you were so trained in those things, you didn't say "boo." And I only said, "hello." And she said, oh, I'm so glad you came, because it's no good to walk around without the identification card. I said, mm-hmm. And then she gave me a form, and she knew where I were, you know that I had this East German card in my pocket. And in this format, that I lost my identification card. It was not written if it was East or West. So I got the best German card.

And on this, then, I could register to immigrate. Because then I was legally in West Germany. I was always a little bit of afraid then when I-- and one of my uncles in New York sponsored me. But I was a little bit afraid when I then registered, when the Americans would find out that I'm not really, really in West Germany. Or they didn't care, whatever. But then, you see, I was legally in West Germany. And then my sister was already here, and she had switched from history to sociology. So she became a psychotherapist.

And she said, you know you always liked dancing and gymnastics. Why don't you become a physical therapist? That's very much needed in the United States. And you see we got restitution from the government. And so I did. And then so I did, and that's the reason I didn't come until '56. Because I went there first and got my degree. And then I worked one year, because it takes some time before you get all the immigration going.

And you were living with your mother?

No, no, no. I was living in Frankfurt Main. I was in West Germany. My mother was in Berlin.

And she stayed in Berlin.

And she was still in East Berlin at first. And then she got a card from the post office. Oh, no. She was already then also in West Berlin without me. She left that apartment. Just locked it up and was gone. And then she got a card, which said that she and I should come to the post office. There is a letter which is registered. We should pick it up. We never went there.

Because the East Germans were as bad as the Gestapo. And so we never went there. But then my mother was in West Berlin, and she got herself an apartment there. And then when the wall came, then she went to Hanover, because she was afraid that they would cut us off, cut her off from my sister and me.

And then how did you come to the United States?

Naja, then I've had the physical therapy degree.

And you worked for the year.

And I worked there, and then I registered. You know, I put in an application. And one of the cousins of my father, Uncle Hans, he sponsored me.

He sponsored you.

Because my sister couldn't sponsor me, because she was just in graduate school then. And so she didn't have enough money. You had to put down \$5,000 in order to-- so Uncle Hans sponsored me, and then I came over here. And then I stayed in Alexandria with my sister here.

And what did-- and your mother stayed back in--

She stayed back in Frank-- in Germany. She got the pension restored for my father. My mother was very good. She got-- she got the restoration and so on. She wrote all these letters and so on. She was very, very good in that. And she got a lawyer to help her and all those things and so on. And so she-- she stayed then in Germany. She came over here all the time.

To visit.

To visit. But she didn't want it. Number one, the exchange rate at this point was 1 to 4. So her pension would have been very small, and she didn't want to be a burden. And so then to the end, really to the end-- my mother died with 95-- she said, I wished I would have made the decision to come. Because then we always traveled forth and back, and so forth.

And I was there when she died.

But she was-- then she regretted it. But then she also was, you see, the trouble is just foreign language. One of my uncles, not the one who sponsored me but one of my other uncles, when he was in the Jewish home for the aged in New York, and when he-- he suddenly only spoke German.

Yeah.

And he was fluent in English. And my mother was afraid that she said, if I get sick, I can't communicate. And we had a patient at GW, where I worked as a physical therapist, who had a stroke, and who can speak German. Who [? again ?] speaks German. So I said, OK. So he couldn't speak a word except German. And then he recovered, and he spoke fluent English.

And then we all said, ah! But he couldn't. And that's the deal. So Mommy was very much aware of that. And she said, I didn't want to be a burden, and I don't want to lose the ability that I can communicate. She was very independent and in control. And so she didn't want to have this happen to her.

How fluent were you in English when you came here?

I was better in English English than American English.

[LAUGHTER]

I took-- I mean, I had in high school English. My first foreign language was French. And I was much better in French than in English. And then the second was English, and the third was Latin. But then before I immigrated I took English lessons again. And then I came here, and I couldn't understand very well the Americans.

Because the English is so much easier. You know, the pronunciation is so much more distinct. The Americans--

[IMITATES AMERICAN ACCENT]

You know? But I go a job. At first I worked at the office of three surgeons, orthopedic surgeons. And then I came to GW and so on. But if you learn-- if you're always surrounded by it and you don't hear anything else but English, you get-- and then I also didn't make-- I read books. Like Agatha Christie is good to read because there there is so much dialogue in. Which is important.

And one of the things you should never do-- have a dictionary beside you and if you don't know a word, look it up. Then the next, look it up. You never get anywhere. Just say OK, in this context it must be meaning something like that.

Yeah.

Because if you start to do that, you never get fluent.

Yeah. So you stayed with your sister, and you worked at GW, George Washington Hospital? And then?

Then I met my husband.

Oh, then you met your husband. OK. And he was American?

Oh, yes. Yes, and he spoke also-- [IMITATING AMERICAN ACCENT] I mean, I could-- by then I could understand that. But all our friends, you know, anybody who came over, they all had trouble to understand him. Because you know, he speaks like that.

He was-- my husband is from Altoona, Pennsylvania. So he also had-- when we dated, we were sitting at the railroad

tracks, watching the trains going by. Because his father worked for the Pennsylvania railroad, and my father the German railroad.

So when we came back, we lived in an old house, in old town Alexandria. And then we also had another roommate, which was a classmate from graduate school for my sister. Jean. And she said, oh, you are lying. And my sister said, uh-uh, I don't think so.

[LAUGHTER]

So what year did you get married?

'58.

'58. Mm-hmm. And then you continued on working?

Oh, yeah. I worked all the time. Yeah. But then I went back. Physical therapy, I was a very good therapy. But the trouble with physical therapy is, you are involved in the whole family, psychological. And you work mentally with the patient and physical, which makes it very difficult. Like I had-- I had one patient. I worked also then for the visiting nurses. And so we went to the homes.

And there was one lady, and she lived near DuPont Circle. And the house was several levels. And she was in the bedroom upstairs. And they had put in an elevator on the stairs. And she was frightened to death. And I said, you can do it! I come after work, and we do it. And you make sure that your husband and your son is there. And so on.

So they were. And I said, OK, you can do it. And so you had to be-- and she was much taller than I am. And you had to be very strong to convince these people. I wasn't so sure if she can, but you can't let them know. So she did. And she went down. And then she had a Martini with her husband and her son. And then we went up again. And so on. So she can do it.

And then I flew down the stairs, because I said, ah, I wasn't sure if we managed. And so the husband then said to me, yeah, my wife told me that you don't walk down the stairs, you fly down. And so one time my mother was there, and John and my mother and I, we went to a party. And everybody was there, and then they couldn't find me.

And then I was sitting in one room. At this point, I was the chief therapist of the Easter Seals Treatment Center in Rockville. And they couldn't find me. And then they found me in a room, sitting on a sofa sound asleep. Because as a chief therapist, I always thought if anything is-- I told the other therapists, OK, you take it easy, and I took an extra patient. And I was just plain exhausted.

So my husband then talked to the librarian at this point, at the bureau of standards. It's now the National Institute of Standards and Technology. And he said you always loved books and so on. So I talked to her, and then I took an exam with the civil service in translating German into English. And after-- so that I could work as a translator. And it was the National Bureau of Standards.

And after I was finished, I thought, gosh, if I would be a few years younger, I would have flunked my old native tongue. Because it was all in German, old German script. Yeah. And I came home, and I said, John, they still have it in the old German script. I was--

And so then I worked as a translator in the library at the National Bureau of Standards. And I realized that you don't get anywhere in a library except you have that master's degree. You can have 10 PhDs or whatever. You have to have that master's degree in library science.

So then I went to Catholic U and got the master's degree. And then I had to [? side ?] pass, because I didn't have enough-- I had all these medical courses. So I didn't had enough liberal arts courses. So they sent me pick to undergraduate school. So I went to undergraduate school. And in order to get it faster, I said, OK, I take German

literature. And so I graduate-- and art history, because I had both in them background.

So I said, OK, so I got this. And then I went there. And then I worked as a librarian, yeah. And I worked first at NBS, and then I worked for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission as a reference librarian and I worked-- and then when I retired, I worked there as a consultant. And I had all the foreign documents coming from Vienna, you know, the National Atomic Energy Commission and all of these places. Yeah.

So I worked until 2005. And when my husband collapsed, I said, my gosh, I wish I had my job back. It's the best thing you can have is a job. You have to function. And something-- also as a physical therapist, you know, like with that lady-- when I was with the Easter Seal, I had an old lady. Then I thought was old. Was 80 or something. She had a hip operation, and she walked with a cane.

And she said, "the doctor told me I would be like new, and here I am walking with a cane." I said, "now if I'm in your age and just have a cane, I think that would be very happy." And she said, "you have good talking. You have nothing ever experienced wrong." I said, "you really want to know?" And I told her my past. And then she said, "oh, I think I'm very happy to have a cane only."

But you learn to smile. And people don't expect that you have anything like this in your past, and so on. And at first, I never really talked. You know, you didn't talk about it in any case, and so on. But one thing, neither John or I could have-- we couldn't have children. I couldn't put any-- I thought it was so awful, that I would never expose any child to the world. Who knows if not something like this happens again?

And John was drafted with 18, and he was at the Battle of the Bulge. And he came back very badly wounded. He has a Purple Heart and everything. He lives in-- he is buried in Arlington. And we both made a decision, we don't want children. Because he thought it was so awful, and I thought-- and I always think, how can all these people have children? I just-- I just couldn't. I just couldn't.

And I confronted my mother one time, when Hitler was on. And I said, you know, only because you and Vati wanted to have children I had to be born. And my mother told me that later, and she said she was horrified, and so on. But it was so awful for me. It was so awful. And I was in school, and I had classmates, and I had friends, but I always know that somewhere there is no-- it will hit me. And I just couldn't see to have anybody putting into the world. But most people did. And I don't know how they could manage.

Did your sister get married?

No, my sister never got married.

She never got married.

No, no. No, she never got married. So I don't know. I just-- you know-- and Mommy's family was-- you know, they were all-- Mommy. Mommy, my mother had one brother, and they were very close. And when Vati died, he refused to see her. And it was awful.

So when he died, John and I were actually in Germany. And it was awful for my mother, really. But I said, I can't go to his funeral. I just can't pretend. I'm sorry. Yeah, so I didn't go.

Let's talk a little bit about Germany now. Do you feel very German?

No.

Do you feel American?

Yes, yes, yes. See, I'm a docent for the National Gallery of Art. And I give tours in English on weekends. I'm a weekend docent. They drafted me to give tours in German, because there are only four of them, foreign language docents. And

one has ovarian cancer, and one has some kind of another intestine problem. And so there are practically only two left which give tour--

So I give regularly tours in German. And somewhere, each time I have to jump over my own shadow to give it in German.

Psychologically, you mean.

Mm-hmm.

Why? What are your thoughts about?

I don't want to speak German.

You don't want to speak the language.

That's right. I've always said, naja, here in this building, as I told you, German conversation, they're almost all German survivors. I mean, Holocaust survivors. And they speak German. And then I speak German. And I always-- one time-- next time I think I ask them. Because at first, they didn't know. They said, you know-- I said, OK, I come one time, and I thought that would be one time I would come and that's all. And then realized that they are all more or less Jewish, and so on. So I have been going from time to time.

But I don't know. They don't seem to have that problem. But I don't want to speak to them. I also dream in English. And I count in English. And when I go to Germany, I go in a store and count, one, two, three, four.

Purposely or just naturally?

Naturally.

So you go back to Germany frequently or?

I was-- while my mother lived, when she was very old, I went over there quite often.

Yeah.

Yeah, I was there when she died and so on. When my mother died-- and you know, my mother lived in a senior citizen home. And the people were all very nice to me. And I only read English books. And I said, I don't want that they are nice to me. I don't want that they are nice to me. I just didn't.

And my husband spent a year in-- was sent from NBS to England. And he was supposed to be one year in England and half-- and the other half-- half a year in England, half a year in Goettingen. And I told John, OK, I come visit to England, and then I go home and you go to Goettingen.

And needless saying, he didn't go to Goettingen. He extended his time in Germany. But I couldn't live for half a year in Germany. I couldn't.

He extended his stay in England, you mean.

Yeah, he spent the whole year in England then.

Well, what are your thoughts about Germany? How would you explain that to somebody?

Naja, I don't understand. I mean, I can now-- I can go to Germany. I can talk to the Germans. I can't-- especially the younger generation, when we come to Germany, my sister and I all see, for example, from my mother's family, the

younger generation, they all come and want to see us. You know, the aunts from England-- from the United States and so on. And they are all Aryans. You know, they are all very nice to us and so on.

And I can talk to them. I don't feel that I have to hold this all against them. They were not even alive then. I don't think they have to apologize for what their parents did, you know? who knows how they would have reacted? Maybe different, maybe not. I don't know.

But I can go to Germany now. In the beginning, I couldn't. But now I can go to Germany and talk to the Germans and so on. But I make sure I have only English books to read. And when my sister and I talk, when we go together, we talk English.

You do?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. And we were-- one time we went to the Lake Constance, and we were in a train. And there was a young lady. And she finally asked us, and she said-- you know, because you realize that when we talked to her we spoke German and so on. And she said, but you always talk English to each other. And we said yes.

And I think I do more than my sister, even. But then she is two years older, which makes slightly different maybe. I don't know. But I-- sometimes how Germany recovered and so on, it's really remarkable. You know, but I feel more East German than I feel West German, if you see that. And it is very sad what's going on in East Germany.

Do you feel Jewish at all?

Yeah, because all my-- most of my friends are Jewish.

Really?

And I don't know how it happened. The people, most of-- naja, the majority of people here are Jewish. But the people I have dinner with-- I skip dinner very often, but the ones I have, they're all Jews. And my best friends, like Renata [? Chernov ?] and so on, they're all Jewish.

Is there anything today that reminds you of the war? Times, sights or sounds or smells that bring a flashback?

Naja, when I see the-- when I see the wars, pictures, you know, from Iraq or from Afghanistan and so on, yes. A war is something awful in my eyes. It's awful. And you always hit the civilians. You know? I mean, in Berlin when they bombed, there's a whole part, which is Siemensstadt. Siemens. The Americans never bombed Siemensstadt. Because they wanted to have all their patents.

They hit us. You know, I always say, why didn't they hit Auschwitz? I mean, it was awful for the people, but it's better to be over with. They never hit it. Why didn't they? They knew that Auschwitz existed. And you know, this one boat, when you go to the Holocaust Museum, you know, they show you the boat which went to Cuba, and they didn't let in, and all the lengths--

The St. Louis. The St. Louis.

And they didn't let them in. You know? And they knew. I mean, sure, and my cousins, you know, the ones who immigrated, who made it out in 30-- in '39, really, over in London they came here, and so on. And [? Loni--- ?] and they are now all going to the synagogues, and we go to the bat mitzvahs and all these things when it happens in their family, and they have Jewish weddings and everything certainly. But Loni said we never prayed for the Jews in Germany. She said we didn't. No, we never did.

And then I feel you can't get mad at civilians. I feel that they abandoned us in Germany. Yeah. And it was almost impossible to come out. But the people who went over the Himalayas, like the widow of Mahler the composer and so on, all these, the top people, they got out. But the little ones, the Jews, they were stuck.

So then, you know, it's the Germans were awful. But then the people who came back out of the concentration camps, many of them, when they went back to Poland, the Poles killed them. So are they better? And the Ukrainian guards in the camps were worse than the German guards. But nobody says anything about it.

So sometimes, you know, I think-- and the whole world looked on. And America didn't go in the war until much later. By then everything was rolling. And they knew about it.

You think it could happen again?

Yes. Maybe different, not with the gas chambers. One time my sister gave a party, and one of the people asked us. This was-- I was already married then for [? one year. ?] And he said, how do you feel? And I said, "naja, sometimes I feel like this is a really beautiful dream, and one day I will wake up, and then it's all again like it was."

And then I asked my sister, and she said, just [? the words, ?] "that was a bad dream, and this is a reality." But yes, I think it can happen again. And when East Germany-- when the wall fell, I had a terrible dream. I was standing on a mountain, and there was a railway station. And I was in-- obviously in West Germany. And the wall fell. And I went down to the railroad station and entered the train. And then the train went East, and all the people in there were dead. So it still haunts me.

So there are certain things, when they happen, it just haunts me. Yeah. Yeah. I never will get over it. I never will get really over it. And even people say I do so much. Yes, and I do supposedly a very good job in giving tours and so on. But I feel very much different than the other docents. I feel different.

And one of the things is, I feel different is they also-- one of our docents, there is a Jewish group. And they immediately took her in. But they didn't take me in. I'm not really Jewish. And I'm not really there either. So all my life I have been struggling somewhere between.

I feel closer to the Jews, but I'm not really-- I don't know. So John and I got married in the Unitarian Church.

How did you meet him?

Oh, I met him in a camp. At Prince William Forest.

Oh. My sister had a friend and colleague who was a member of the 2030 Club of the Unitarian Church, 16th Street. And they had-- Memorial Day, they went to a camp in Prince William County Forest. And they had three camps-- for men, for women, and for families.

So Laura said to my sister, don't you and Ursula want to come? We said, oh, sure. Why not? So we did. And then we get in-- I rowed-- was rowing a boat. And there came a thunder show, and it poured. And the lake in the middle had an island, and everybody tried to get there.

And there was a gentleman who was John.

[LAUGHTER]

Who also went there. He also had friends who, roommates, who were members of the 2030 Club. And so he was in the men's camp. And then he asked me about cars, about Porsche and all these. At this point, he had an MG. And I didn't know. It was all much-- I couldn't afford any of those things.

So I said, fine. So then he asked me for a date, which I didn't take. And then John had hay fever very badly. So he came to GW for shots. And I was outside of the physical therapy department, because we had inpatient and outpatient. And I waited for a patient, and there came a gentleman and he said, "oh, you probably don't remember me."

"No." And then he said, "I now have a Porsche." Oh. That's this guy. "And so you want to see it?" "Sure." Then I came home, and I said to my sister and her roommate-- and our roommate, if he asks me for a date again, I do it. I want to be in this Porsche.

That's how it started.

Oh, that's wonderful.

Yeah.

That's wonderful.

So I still had the Porsche when John died. I always said, if the Porsche go, I go.

How long ago did he die?

Only on the 15th of January 2009.

Oh.

He had heart attacks before. And he collapsed on the platform of DuPont Circle.

Oh, my.

We went-- we went to GW for tests, and everybody thought he was sailing along. He had a kind of a leukemia, and he had this heart condition, and his kidneys didn't function that well anymore. But everybody thought he was a [INAUDIBLE]. And we went to Kramer's. And we had lunch. And he really made plans. We made plans. He thought, oh, maybe we go back. We liked to go to Virginia, to the state parks.

And then he went back to the railroad station and collapsed. And they took him to GW, but he was braindead already. And they asked me then if we really vigorous wanted to revive him. And I said, if he has no brain function, no. And then he died in the night. And he was gone.

And he was buried-- you said, buried in Arlington.

Yeah. So we were married for 50 years and five months.

Oh, yeah.

Yeah. That was a shock. Yeah, yeah. It was very strange.