

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Ursula Guttstadt McKinney. This is track number three. OK, so you were saying before that a few years ago, you wouldn't have been willing to be interviewed or talk about your experiences. What do you think has changed in these last few years?

Well, in the beginning, it was just too painful.

Yeah.

One time somebody asked me about things, and about what happened and so on. And afterwards when I went back to work, I had the telephone the wrong side around because I couldn't function anymore. And I would just break down and cry. And it was just too painful. And by now I think, number one, it is longer ago. And number two, it's I also think that if my generation dies off, there is nobody really anymore who can talk about it. And so we should just overcome that and just do talk about it.

Right. It's important that you tell us what it was like.

Yeah, yeah. And so on, but it's something that will haunt you for the rest of your life. And it's nothing which is easy to overcome anywhere. That's one reason is that I'm surprised that people could put children in the world. I couldn't. I thought I was too-- too damaging, was too bad.

And yeah, and you know when politi-- and people are not aware of it. That is the danger, is always that people say, oh, political, it isn't so bad yet. Maybe we still can take that and so on. And by the time they realize that I can't take it anymore, very often people are trapped, and then they really can't do anything anymore. Yeah.

But you know, with Germany, too, it's talking about Germany. When I worked-- when I was studying physical therapy in Frankfurt at University of Frankfurt am Main, we also had to go into different hospitals. And there was this psychiatric ward where they had locked us in, the therapists. And we played ball with these men and so on. And there was also a women's ward.

And one time I came there, and they were very excited. And I said, "what's the matter?" And I said, "oh, a Jew comes back from Germany, one from the United States." And I said, "so?" "We don't want a Jew." I said, "well, he might be very nice." "We don't want a Jew." I said, "well, how many Jews do you know?" "None." I said, "Oh, how can you say that you don't want him?"

And when he came, he was very nice. And you know, people came back. They were not-- not everybody made it. And the German government gave them money. So he came back, and he got insurance, and they paid for him. And he was a very quiet, calm man. You know, somewhere somebody who was not very assertive and so on. Because-- and he hadn't made it in the United States. So he was very depressed and had problems, and everybody loved him.

And I said, "oh." But then they didn't want to hear anymore that they once told me that they couldn't stand having one. But you know, then these people believed, you know, whatever the government fed them, because they really didn't know better. And then, sure, shortages didn't help either, in anything either. So it's always difficult, you know. I guess in the name of Jesus more people were killed than saved.

If someone asked you today are you German, what would you answer?

I said-- when people ask me, formerly. I was formerly German. I'm an American. Yeah. Oh, yeah. No, no. No, I don't-- I don't feel German. And I don't-- I don't want to be considered to be a German. And so it's not-- it's not good.

When you give those tours, you said the German speaking tours at the National Gallery, and the tourists ask you, do they ask you something about your knowledge of German or are you from Germany?

No, they usually--

They ask you or they don't ask you?

You know, they ask me where I'm from. I say from Berlin.

Oh, from Berlin.

And-- yeah, I know Frankfurt Oder, more or less Berlin. Frankfurt Oder they don't know in any case. But they-- they don't-- these are all younger people, really, then. No, they don't ask me anything.

Anymore than--

No, they don't. Right after the wall fell, I got lots-- there came people over from East Germany, formerly East Germany. And one of the women one time said to me, you know, when people realize that we are German, it's like a curtain goes down. There are a lot of Americans who are still very much anti-German. And you can see it on our collection. If you go to the German Collection, it's awful. We have some DÄ¼rers and so on. But don't tell me there are any good DÄ¼rers and so on! Yeah, so the people who collect it at this point, they also didn't want to collect German art.

Do you remember the Eichmann trial?

Sure.

What were some of your thoughts at that time?

Naja, one of the things is, I guess for many people that is a relief. For me, neither my mother nor my sister nor I ever have tried to find the Gestapo people who hunted us. My father was killed. They ruined my life to a certain extent. Chasing down these people wouldn't do anything for me.

I always thought, if I would have to have gotten these people on a trial-- maybe somebody else did, I don't know-- but it would be more horrifying for me to have sit through that trial than it would have done me any good. Because the damage was done. And so Eichmann, I mean, he was a horrible guy, and I guess justice was done. But it's the people. You can't undo anything with revenge.

When the people talk about 9/11, that was awful, but trying to-- now they say, oh, they should give us so much money for this and so on, that doesn't bring you the loved ones back. I mean, if you are left as a widow and have small children, for God's sake, sure, give them a pension and give the kids that they can go to school and so on. But revenge kills yourself.

And so I think--

[PHONE RINGING]

For many people, it's a relief. But for me, I don't know.

Are you more comfortable being with people who survived the war than those who didn't even live through it?

In the beginning, John and I, we saw every war movie. I saw every movie on the concentration camps. We felt people who didn't go through that lived in different worlds than we did. But by now, it's the whole generation, the younger ones, they never experienced anything like this. I mean, I think I personally would never serve in the armed services. I would never shoot against anybody.

But I would-- it's certainly in some ways easier to be with people who have similar experience than I do than with people who don't have any idea of what went on. But the majority of the people I meet, you know, they don't. They read it in books.

Yeah.

Would you-- do you think you would have been a different person today if you hadn't gone through?

I'm sure I would.

In what way?

Naja, one of the things is, you know, not so easy to immigrate, even if you are glad to leave your country. Somewhere I feel like I started off on the first floor and I don't have a basement. You know, I've never been to elementary school here. Things were very different when I lived here in Alexandria. It was so different to anything I had experienced or ever seen in my life.

It's not easy to live-- to leave your country. So in some ways, if I would have stayed in Germany, no war, no Nazis, no nothing, I would have had a very nice house, I would have gone to the university. I would have studied. In Germany at this point, I could have become an engineer, even as a woman.

I would have studied. I would have become a professional person. And then I would have traveled, and I would have a good life. We had enough money, too, so I could have had a good life. And it would have been much easier. So but-- I mean, to immigrate is hard. To move into a different country. And Americans are very nice, so long as you don't compete with them.

When I went to EU, one time I went to the English. You know, I had to take English 1. I was then-- I didn't have to take English 2, but I went and talked to the English professor. And she said, naja, people like you became-- she was not against me, but she told me, she said, people like you, we can't discriminate against. We can't discriminate against the Blacks. They're all up in arms. We can't discriminate. But people like you, you don't have anybody to fight for you. It's true. And Americans--

You mean immigrants. She's talking about immigrants.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And you know, and then in this case, the Jewish community would have helped the Jews, but I was separate, and so on. So Catholic University, I said OK. We had-- before the comprehensives, I said I'm doomed. And I went out and cried. And they said, why you? You can't flunk. You have so good grades. And I said, huh?

One semester, they flunked a nun, because they can't see the forest because of the individual trees. The next semester, they flunk an immigrant. In my class, there is no nun. So I'm the victim. That was in the '70s.

And what happened?

Well, I didn't flunk.

[LAUGHTER]

Naja, they couldn't flunk me. I had too good grades. You know, I was too good a student. But-- so it keeps on going. I applied for a job as a physical therapist, for the visiting nurses. And there was-- they had to interview me. It was a nurse who was a spinster, who was not married. And so on, and so on. So then, when I came home, I said, "John, that's a job I don't get." He said, "why not?" And I said, "well, one thing she told me. There you are, our American boys go overseas and marry all these foreigners. And then the American girls can't find husbands." So discrimination goes on and on and on.

Have you been to Israel?

Oh, yeah.

What is your-- what are your thoughts about Israel and how you feel when you're there?

Oh, naja, I mean, I love Israel. You know, I mean, for a while I really wanted to go there. In the meantime, it's another war, I don't want to go. Naja, no. But yeah, naja, like all, when Israel became independent, you know, I was so elated. Yeah, I was so elated that they finally made it, and they have a home country and so on.

Now, you know, things are unfortunately so bad, you know, with all the fighting and all that. But you know, that Israel, that the Jews had to go somewhere. And it was the most logical thing to go to Israel. And Israel was founded on idealism, and so on.

So you know, it was-- I mean, it was a wonderful, wonderful event when Israel became Israel, and so on. Oh, yeah, and I was there. And I was very, very happy there. And--

Do you know people who live there?

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Have friends?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, I know many people who live in Israel. Yeah, yeah. I also know people who lived-- emigrated to Israel and then came to the United States. Yeah, we have right now somebody here who was born in Hamburg, and then her parents, everybody went, immigrated to Israel. And she went. She got married. So her oldest daughter got born there, and then her husband, they're all Jews and now were Israelis. And then they went to Venezuela. He got a job offer there. And she came here now. She said Venezuela is awful, another dictatorship. You lost something. Yeah.

Before we finish, I just wanted to ask you, I know what the word "Mischling" means, but what does it mean to you viscerally? Do you know what I mean? Emotionally.

Naja, Mischling is really, in many ways, you know, you're a mixture between a Jew and a Christian. And it's mulattos. You know, Obama is a Mischling. Only he is between Black and White. But--

Do you consider it derogatory?

I don't feel it derogatorily, but it feels like you don't belong anywhere. The one camp says you're Jewish. The other camps says, no, you're a Christian. So you are in the middle. You don't belong anywhere. And so I-- you know, it's these days, you know, there's so many mixed marriages between Black and White and so on. And I always feel so sorry for the kids. I always think, I wonder how they feel, if they always feel, like I do, that you stand somewhere between them.

Yeah, and my grandmother, Mommy's mother, you know when she said-- one time she said to us, oh, you know, you always protect your father. What about your mother? And our answer was, but nobody attacks Mommy, but everybody attacks Vati.

Wasn't her life in danger, being married to a Jew?

No, I don't think so. They're tied to, as I said, many of them, they got divorced because it was-- I don't think they would have done anything to my mother. No. No.

Even though she'd been married?

Mm-hmm.

They told her her blood is--

Oh, her blood is OK.

No, her blood is-- how do you say that?

Pure?

No, it's not pure anymore.

It's impure.

Yeah.

Yeah.

You know, but I don't think that Mommy was really in danger. They would have taken my sister and me, but not my mother. But we were-- you see, Hitler in comparison to the Jewish law, you know, where your mother's religion is more important, under Hitler it was more important what your father is.

Oh.

It was-- so my sister had one classmate in her class, who was a Mischling. You know, half-Jewish, but her mother was Jewish. She was never taken. Her husband was the one. It was worse to have a Jewish father than to have a Jewish mother.

And you were what they called a Mischling of the first degree?

Yeah, yeah.

The first degree.

Yeah.

And did you ever have any papers that said that you were a Mischling? Was there nothing ever in writing?

Naja, they told me-- yeah, I have to look for it. They told me when they kicked me out of school that I couldn't--

Verbally?

No, no, no, no. I got it in paper.

You got it on a paper.

Oh, you got everything on paper from the Germans. They were very democr-- very bureaucratic. I mean, like we got a death certificate for my father.

Yeah, yeah.

You know, but the-- yeah, and you see, there was also-- it always depended, if you had four Jewish grandparents, you were Jewish.

Right.

If you had two, you were half-Jewish. But now, if I had two Jewish grandparents, if I marry another half-Jew, then my kids would have four Jewish grandparents. They would be Jewish again.

Right, right, right. So actually, though, from what I understand when you were growing up, you did not know other Mischlings.

Oh, yeah, for sure.

You did?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. There was another, one of my classmates who was her mother was Jewish, and she was of Jewish religion, but her father wasn't Jewish. And they-- but then she went to Berlin and so on. And then my cousins were like my sister and me. You know.

Oh, right.

[? Albert and Gerhard ?] And then my sister's friend, you know, she was a Mischling. And oh, yeah, there were lots of them around.

OK.

And we knew other people in Frankfurt Oder, where the mother finally broke down, the woman walked down and got divorced from her husband. Husband was deported the next day, and she was OK. But her daughter went with the children's transport to England. So she wasn't even in the country anymore.

No, I don't know how she would-- how she reacted towards that. And then we had-- you know, my father had other people-- I mean, I knew quite a lot of Mischlings. Yeah, quite a lot.

When you see that word written in 2010, do you have any kind of reaction to it?

Mischling?

Suppose you picked up something and it had that word on the page?

Huh? Then I would say that's me.

[LAUGHTER]

At this point, no. I think--

Has it lost its negative connotation?

To be a Mischling didn't really bother me so much. What bothered me most is the reaction of the two parties, that they always thought that I'm neither nor.

Yeah, yeah.

That I was otherwise. You know, that I was a Mischling, that didn't-- my father, I loved my father, loved my mother. That was all very nice, and it didn't bother me. But each camp really thought I don't belong there, you don't belong there, but there, you don't belong there either, You belong there. So we didn't belong anywhere.

Did your mother's family fully accept your father?

No.

Because of the religious--

Yeah. Yeah, my grandparents, my mommy's parents did.

Did accept.

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

But her relatives did not?

Not really, no. No.

Was that very upsetting to your mother?

Yeah. But it wasn't really that-- I mean, they didn't vocalize it, really, that much. We lived in Frankfurt. They lived in Erfurt. And I think if Mommy's parents would have been against Mommy, that would have been very hard. But Omi always was very supportive for us. And she helped us financially and everything. And so-- and my father, you see, went to my grandfather and asked, you know, for the hand of mommy. And said--

But they knew each other as children. There was a playground in Berlin. And my parents, both parents, were members of it. And the Guttstadts were on the board. And so my mother played with my father when they were kids and so on. And then they lost contact. And there was another family, the [? Karls, ?] who were also Jewish. And they kept in contact with both sides.

So they thought that my father and my mother should meet again. And so they invited them together. So they really got them together again. But they knew each other as kids. Yeah, they played on the same playground and so on. And then my mother was very good in tennis. And my father, I don't, think played tennis. But my father could run and do all these things.

And my mother tells us about it. When Uncle Fritz and Vati were brothers, took her in the middle and ran with her, and she never got two feet on the ground.

[LAUGHTER]

And so on. So they knew each other. So the family knew each other.

How do you feel about having the United States Holocaust Museum being built in the United States?

Naja, I'm a founding member.

[LAUGHTER]

I have very mixed feelings about the Holocaust Museum. Because you know, I can go there. I went there with my-- right after the opening-- naja, my sister and I went there when it opened. You know, we lit a candle for my father and so on. But then the second time around, we went with our two cousins. They're really once removed. They're from New York. And we all went. And then we saw all the pictures.

And that was funny, because then [? Loni ?] and her, they all were in Berlin, and said, "Oh, yeah, that's the synagogue I went to. That's the school."

Oh, my. Oh, my.

So it was, you know-- and then I wasn't upset at all. And one of my cousins was [INAUDIBLE]. So I pushed her in the wheelchair and so on. And then I went with John certainly, too. But one time I went. I had visitors. My classmate who finally came to us, her two daughters came over here. And I took them to the Holocaust Museum.

And then I spoke German. And then I couldn't. I said you go, and I sit down. And I cried.

Oh, you're speaking German to them.

Yeah, then I couldn't. I can go through with Americans. I go with John's family. Some of John's family came, and they said, can't you go with us? I said OK. I can do that. But when I get the Germans, then it's out. Then I can't. Germans, I can't go. Then I can't.

Well, it's OK. I think there are too many by now almost. You know, the trouble is, too, is whether you give anything to it, you know? My sister is a member of the Beck Institute. And you know, we looked up some of the-- where some of our relatives ended up, who went to Theresienstadt and out. Because Theresienstadt didn't have any gas chambers. So they all went to other places. The way how the people died in Mauthausen is awful.

Did you purposely want to learn that? Because your father was there?

I promised my mother never to go to Mauthausen. So I will never go there. But yeah. Yeah, I wanted-- you know, so it's-- yeah. And yeah, the SS-Staat-- this is in English. I mean, he wrote it in German, but he wrote about all the different ways they died in the camps, too. Not everybody died, you know, in the gas chambers. They had other ways to kill people, too, and so on. So I don't 100% know how my father died, but I have a pretty good idea. Yeah. But yeah, so it's--

But it's-- that people can-- and that people could-- many of these SS people who were in camps, they went home to their families. They were good family fathers. They had dogs and kids. And then they turned around and did that. I assume it's what some of our soldiers did in Iraq, right? And what did we do to some of the people? How to torture people. And then they go home and are good family people. It's hard to believe.

So as you said before, you still feel that the world has really not learned the lessons. Or has it?

Now, for most people by now, I'm afraid that the Holocaust is somewhere history. And for most people, probably. I mean, you can't-- I haven't tried it. But any time you would talk to any German about it, then they would immediately tell you how bad it was during the war with ration cards and bombs falling on your head, and all that. Immediately will tell you how bad it was to shut you up.

They also had taught in the '50s a joke, the Volkswagen. How many people go in a Volkswagen? Four Germans and one Jew. The Jew is in the ashtray. One of my classmates in physical therapy school told me that. But then we were, too, from East Germany, and they didn't trust us either. They thought that we were spies.

So depends to whom you speak. And if you don't say anything, OK. But-- and it was awful. You know, after the war the rats were that big. And the people were lying in the streets. They ate on them, you know? I mean, there was-- you walked along the streets and there was a pipe coming up, and people were living under earth because it was all destroyed. I mean, it was horrible.

Yeah, we went to-- you just stepped over dead bodies. Yeah. We went-- my mommy and my sister and I, that was before the war was over. You know, Potsdam was, like Dresden, declared an open city. But nevertheless, Americans bombed it. And so we went by train. We went in, and then we had-- at last we had to walk. And there were all these bodies lying there.

And I fainted. I'm not very good in seeing blood. But nevertheless, there was lying a hand, there was something there, and you just kept on going. I happened to go there, you know? You just went. And sure, it was awful. It had nothing to do with the Holocaust. It was the war. That was awful. And these are people, not soldiers. They were just civilians. You know, the train was hit. Which was one of the suburban trains.

Yeah. So that's awful, yeah. So war, yeah, I don't believe in war. I always tell people, it's sanctified murder. They don't like to hear that. And you know, I can unders-- I mean, these guys here, and they're all trigger happy, you know? I mean,



either you or me, it's better you and not me. Human beings want to survive. I mean, the people who survived in the concentration camps had a very strong will to survive.

Yeah. And so religious, the Orthodox Jews were the best. And the communists. The murderers were the best because they didn't care about heaven. You know, they helped. The ones who caved in were the elite, the university professors, the doctors and all these people. They couldn't cope with that. They were also the ones who informed. If they saw anybody, a Jew anywhere around there, they were informing. They were frightened to death of their own life.

You know, the laborers and the communists and so on, they were much more helpful. When I was very depressed there, I went to the northern part of Berlin, where all the laborers work and so on, and I felt much more secure there than when I was in the more fancy places in Berlin. But human nature is something, it's very strange. Very strange.

Do you and your sister talk about those years?

Sometimes yes. Sometimes.

Has she been willing to talk about it?

Yeah. Yeah, and our memories are somewhat different, you know? You know, we said something lately, and she said, Oh, I don't remember that at all. And sometimes she says something and I said, I don't remember that at all. And so on. You know, like I said, I can't remember when my elementary school teacher told us we have to say "Heil Hitler." I have no idea. It didn't make any impression on me. And so certain things. And two years difference, I guess, is a difference.

And one time Renata [? Chernov ?] and Frieda Blumenthal, who is dead by now, who was older than both of us, and I, we went to an exhibit together. And then Renata said to us-- said Amos wanted to go to, I think it was to Berlin, to a conference. And she was considering to go or not. And I said don't! And Frieda said, sure, why not? But then she could remember Germany before Hitler. I couldn't, really.

Right.

It was typical. Renata just looked at us both. Yeah, yeah. She could still remember when things were different. Yeah. So it's always-- it makes a big difference, yeah. Yeah.

But for you, it always meant you were eight years old when Hitler came into power, so--

No, I wasn't really eight yet.

Well, almost. Yeah, seven. Seven. So for you, it always meant-- Germany always meant tension and stress.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And we were surrounded. Our house was here. And there was another house here. And this was where the SS was.

Oh.

So they could always watch us. And then right over there was a house, and there was a Lutheran pastor living. But you know, there were two branches. One was the Deutsche Christen, the German Christians who were Nazis. And the other one was the Confessing Church, which we are not. Niemoller [INAUDIBLE] in Confessing. But this guy was a Deutscher Christ. So there he was, and there was the SS. And they were so good together. Yeah, yeah.

But when I was-- and my teacher was very nice. I wrote to my teacher. The last thing I sent was my wedding announcement, which came because that she had died. But she was very nice, and she was very good to me. But-- and in the beginning, I really acted-- I had somebody across from us, was somebody living who was very poor. It was a very old house, and it was a poor house. And she is a-- we had to pay to go to Gymnasium. Not very much, but we had to pay. And also to the middle school.

So she was a good student, and she had to keep on going to elementary school because her parents couldn't afford it. So I went to the teacher, and I said you have to see that she get a fellowship. And she did get one. But this was '36. By then, you know, things were already difficult and so on. But I didn't hesitate then to do that. I didn't feel like I couldn't do that. And she did get her fellowship. I was very happy about that.

[LAUGHTER]

What-- when you would see the flag with the swastika or the men in their boots and their uniforms as a child, is that frightening also?

Naja, we really, in many ways, we didn't-- naja, the swastika you saw. You saw that my mother was always upset, because Hitler's birthday on the 20th of April and she on the 21st. And on the 21st, they hadn't taken down these flags.

Oh!

Which was awful. Naja, so I mean, but the SS and marching and boots and so on, we didn't really see this so much. I saw military people. But in many ways, I saw-- under Hitler in many ways, and this is under a dictatorship, I mean, there was a curfew. You weren't supposed to be out after 11:00. But in many ways, it was much safer than under other conditions. Less murder and any of those things of between the general public. And you saw less police than you see when you go downtown to Washington. And so on.

So you know, and I heard Hitler talk.

When you would hear him talk on the radio?

Oh, sure. Or on television.

On television?

Mm-hmm. Yeah, we heard him. I mean, we had to listen to him. We had to know what's going on.

Who had an early television?

Where did we see the television? Maybe I didn't see that. No, I think I only heard him on the radio. And television, I saw the stuff after the war. And there on it.

Or maybe in a news reel in the movie theater?

Yeah, the news reel. Yeah. We had always the news reels.

Yeah.

We had the news reels.

Now, when you would hear him?

I thought he was an idiot.

You did?

[CHUCKLING]

I thought he was an idiot. And then they had a power struggle one time. When was that? Pretty much to the end of the

war, too. They had a power struggle. He wanted to kill Goebbels. And Goebbels said, OK, if you kill me, I will talk. So three days later, Goebbels was in power again. But it's--

But he was-- people were-- it was like to see-- like when Beck talked. People were hysterical when they saw him. And then they had this idiotic thing. "If the Fuhrer would know, that wouldn't happen." Come on.

Oh, if the Fuhrer would know all the terrible things that happened, he wouldn't have--

Yeah. Yeah. But the people were hysterical when they saw him. You know? So it was-- and the young people, you know in Berlin we had the werewolf in Berlin. You don't know the werewolf? We had to the end of-- you see, the five story apartment houses and the whole block, because of the bombs all the attics were connected. So the wall was broken down. In the basement, also they had only one wall which you could really hit and connect, so you could get out if your house was hit and so on.

So the young guys, the 16-year-old ones and so on, were fanatic Nazis. And they were running around in these attics and shooting. And then the Russians went in and said, if you don't get them down, then you all have to go out. And one time they did. They had their tanks set up in Pankow. And then they went down in the basement and put the women in the front. And then they told the werewolf, OK, now this is your mothers. Stop shooting. But they didn't. So they sent the women down again.

Some of the German young people were very fanatic. And the Germans had these flame throwers. So they throw-- so they shot into the first floor. And then the houses started to burn from the lower part up. And then the Russians went down and said, your house is burning. You better come up.

And so I mean, we had the Red Armies, which were supposed to be better than the others. They did lots of bad things. But nevertheless-- nevertheless, I know only one girl who was raped. I only know one girl who was raped. But in the country was a different matter. But we were on the border. So where we lived in, behind us was what we called the ["Stalinorgel," ?] which is automatic cannons. Woo, woo! And so on.

They were right behind us. And then before us, they never got further there. The next part they never got until Berlin capitulated on the 2nd of April. So we were under fire every day. And the Russians came with their little panzer wagons. You know, the ones they had from Siberia and so on? That's all they had. Otherwise, everything was made in USA. The uniforms and everything was made in USA when they marched into Berlin.

And we were frightened to death of them. Yeah, I think. it was the Gestapo and all this, and then you had the Russians you were afraid of.

And the American army?

Well, they never came where I was.

Yeah, yeah.

They came afterwards. You see, they stopped at the Elbe.

Right, right.

By the time they came, the war was over.

The war was over.

Yeah. The Russians conquered Berlin.

Right.

Yeah. That was the capital.

What did America mean to you at that point?

Well, at this point, I mean, I was glad when the Americans came. I was more-- would have been more glad if I would have been in the American zone and not in the Russian zone in Berlin. But you know, we--

I meant the country itself. What did--

Oh, I loved America. My father was here with the Schinkelpreis. You know, the architectural prize he won. He came to the United States and studied the railroads here. And he came back, and we had a suitcase in the attic full of stuff from America. So my father always said, when you grow older, you know, we are going to America. Not to emigrate, but to visit so on. So my sister and I grew up with a love to America. But we always thought that is a wonderful dream. We will never make it.

So when the Americans actually came, you know, yeah. But on the other hand, before I went to physical therapy school, I had to make a Praktikum in a hospital. So I was in-- I thought I go to children's hospital. It's better to take a visit from the children and not from the adults.

So I went to a children's hospital. And that was bombed out. So we were in the country. And then this was in American zone. And then they had maneuvers. And the Americans had these huge tanks. And the houses, the tanks were as big as the houses were high. And then on top there were these Black soldiers.

Oh.

And I remember I had to cross the street. I had night shift, and I had to go across the street to where I was staying, you know? And I was afraid of them. I was frightened to death of them. They looked awful frightening. I know they would not-- I didn't know. They were soldiers, and so all soldiers are bad. An occupation army is no good for civilians.

And the Americans had a plus. You know, the Russians had no choice. They had to rape women. The Americans said, "hi, baby. I have chocolate" and found enough girls to go with them. The British and the French were different. But the Americans, you know? But then in Frankfurt Main in the main streets, you know, the Americans, the young soldiers, they flew out of the bars drunk.

I mean, an occupation army is no good. And you try not to get involved with occupation army. Even if I didn't try to get involved with them.

When you came to the United States, how did you get here?

By boat.

By boat. Which boat?

United States. It was called United States.

Oh, it was called "The United States"?

Yeah. They were two-- America and The United States. It was was American boats, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Well, is there anything else you wanted to-- you would like to say or would like to add?

Anything you can think of?

[CHUCKLING]

No.

It's wonderful that you did this interview. As you said, you couldn't always have done it.

No, no. It's-- Yeah. But you know, it's-- it's a long time to go, but you will-- at least I will never really get attached to anything. And when my husband-- I miss my husband very much. But when he died and they all said, don't do anything the first year. And I emptied the house, and I sold it.

And I told John before. I said, I liked that house, but I can walk out. It doesn't mean anything to me. When my sister and I, for a long, long time, when we talk about our house-- and my sister has a townhouse-- but when we talk about our houses, our house in Frankfurt Oder, even now, I will never talk about our house here or anything. Our house is a house in Frankfurt Oder, and we are still attached to that.

And to have to leave that, that was very traumatic. You know, accordingly is anything else, you know, and if people say you can't afford that, you have to move in a one-room apartment, OK, I'll get rid of all that. And so, you know, people-- some people were-- they say, "oh, you know we admire you." They don't realize that this-- isn't nothing to be admired. It's just-- it doesn't mean--

And also, it's people heavily complain here about the food, including me. I hate it. But on the other hand, it's not-- so if I don't go down, I don't eat, it's not that important to me. No.

Yeah, but then I was a good student and a straight A student and all that. That was important, because I had to show myself that I can do it, too. Because Hitler always told us, you know, no, you are no good. You can't do anything. No.

So in the beginning is with the-- when I became a docent in the first-- in the beginning when I had to give tours, you know, I was standing there at the rotunda, I always said, "Oh please, Lord, let nobody come."

[CHUCKLING]

Yeah, because basically I was frightened to death.

Yeah.

When I went for an interview, I usually was there a half an hour too early and walked the street to get my courage up to go in for an interview. And this stays with you. So there are lots of things. And as I said after the war, nobody ever thought about that we were in shock, that we need some help or anything. It's just, OK, it's over. Now start again.

Did you ever turn to professional help, or are you just--

No.

No, you didn't. You just coped on your own.

No. But then, you know, I thought, how can I talk to any American psychiatrist? They haven't experienced that. I don't have anything in common with them. You know, or even a Jewish psychiatrist. I would only have-- can talk to somebody who went through the same. And then this person might not want to talk to me. Because I would be too difficult.

Yeah. Uh-huh. So it's, no I never did. And I think, considering all, I think I did I quite well.

[LAUGHTER]

Absolutely. Do you and your sisters still get reparations? Or did you get reparations? You said your mother did.

Naja, we got--

But do you and your sister currently?

No.

No.

No, no, no. We don't. We got money. Yeah, my mother established that. She got the pension back from my father. And then we got the house back.

Right.

And you know, we divided the money for us. And in the beginning, yes, on this one you'll see that's one reason over there I stayed that long, because I took the money to go to the university in Germany and so on. And paid my trip over here.

Right, right.

To come over here and everything and so on. But no, we don't get anything from the-- we both get something similar to the Social Security for Germany, but this is because I worked there. And they recognize our education. So they recognize my sister's university time and that. And the time she worked during the Nazi time for this lawyer.

And the daughter of this lawyer, she went to a lawyer in Germany, and gave the-- said that, yes, my sister worked there and all that. So she established that. And I went, and I get-- so we both get it. But it's very small, and with the exchange rate it doesn't amount to much.

Right, right.

But we both get a small amount from the Social Security in Germany. At least that, I'm pretty sure. But just so you all know, we don't get reparation from the government. No, no. And I can't-- but I know some people who have applied for German citizenship, Jewish people.

Really? Because?

I think they're old. Because they never officially wanted to give it up. But one is a daughter of two immigrants, so I don't know how she feels about it. I would never do that. I would never try to get German citizenship.

Why not?

I don't want to have any German passport. No! No. And as I said, it's still somewhat difficult for me to go to Germany. It's-- I mean, I'm OK when I'm with people I know and so on. But when I'm in the train, I sit there, and I can't even-- I can't say a word in German and so on. And I definitely don't want my German citizenship back. No.

I mean, if I would consider to go back to Germany, I would get better health insurance. But I don't think I want to do that. No.

You are truly an American.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I can criticize the Americans when I'm here. But when I'm in Germany, I can't criticize them.

[LAUGHTER]

No, I don't. I don't. And so-- but it's remarkable, you know, when you think what the Germans did after the war, and they are hardworking. But then I think, half of the American population is German. Lots of them. For a while there was the question, which language they would take, English or German. New Amsterdam and all this, you know? God, no.

And my husband was very American. He was very much. I remember when we went over to England, and we passed the Statue of Liberty, he had to get up. He had to see that. Meant a lot to him. And so on. No, he-- and you know, he went to the World War II Memorial opening and everything. Yeah.

Well.

OK.

Well, that's a good note to end on, the Statue of Liberty. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Ursula Guttstadt McKinney.