

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Ruth Rappaport, conducted by Gail Schwartz on October 14th, 2010, in Washington, D.C. What is your full name?

Ruth Rappaport.

And is that the name you were born with?

Yes.

Yes. And where were you born?

In Leipzig, Germany.

And when were you born?

May 27th, 1923.

Let's talk a little bit about your family. Your father's name was--

Mendel Rappaport. And he was a Romanian subject living in Leipzig.

Was he born in Romania?

Yes. And he could pass for Ukraine.

And do you know what town he was born in.

Yes, Wistocki.

And do you know when he was born? It's OK if you don't.

Not really. Except that he got married in 1910.

Uh-huh, OK.

If that's kind of an earmark date.

OK, in Romania?

Yeah.

Yeah. And your mother's name?

Helene Rubinstein. And she was a first cousin to Helena Rubinstein.

Oh, my.

So that's the family background.

I see. And was your mother also born in the same town your father was?

No, no, no, no. My mother was-- well, these Jewish birth places, they kind of change.

Right.

Because the Rubinsteins were all born in a little, itty-bitty village called Mielec, which nobody acknowledges, which is a suburb of Tarn³w, which nobody acknowledges, which is a suburb of Krakow, which everybody acknowledges.

Do you know when she was born or not?

Not.

OK. OK, did you have--

Well, wait a minute.

Yeah.

Her older brother was 40-- her older brother died in 1947 and was 65, and she was maybe three years older.

OK, OK. And so did your parents meet in Romania or meet-- where did they meet?

Well--

They got married there?

Well, see it wasn't Romania then. It was the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. They were both living under Kaiser Franz Joseph.

OK. And remember, the historical connections--

Yeah, yeah.

--is what-- whatever you call the certification.

So do you have or did you have any brothers or sisters?

I had two half sisters.

Two half sisters.

Yes.

Because one of your parents had been married before?

My father's first wife died in childbirth.

Oh.

You know, back in the olden days, when-- and so I had that half sister.

Yeah.

And then my mother-- well, anyway, then there was another one and then there came me.

Yeah, OK.

So there were three half sisters.

And what kind of work did your father do?

He was a furrier.

Uh-huh.

In Leipzig, Germany everybody was a furrier.

What brought them to Leipzig?

Actually, it was interesting. My father initially was sent to Leipzig from Romania, a city called Wistocki, where the family owned wooded-- many forests and a sawmill. And he was sent to Germany to sell the lumber and stayed.

Ah, OK.

And then because everybody in Leipzig had something to do with fur, he'd lifted into the fur business.

And was he successful?

Fair.

Fair, yeah.

I mean, considering that most of this was the Depression.

Right, that's true.

Nobody was that-- but OK.

Yeah. Were your parents very religious?

Modern Orthodox. In fact, you might have even-- you might even have heard of this. Leipzig had a really famous rabbinical family, the Carlebachs.

Yes, of course.

You've probably heard a Shlomo.

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, right.

Well, Carlebach was my school principal. I went to Carlebach's private school. And he was my school principal.

Really.

And one of my classmates was Shlomo's cousin.

Uh-huh.

And I was very close to the Carlebach children.

What was the first name of the principal? Do you know? Mr.-- that's OK.

It's been a long time.

Just a few years. So you said your parents were Modern Orthodox.

Yes.

You went to this Jewish school, the Carlebach school.

Yes, and Carlebach was our family rabbi.

Uh-huh.

He had the Modern Orthodox synagogue in Leipzig, the big--

It was a big one?

Oh, yes.

Do you remember the name of it.

I think we just referred to it as the Carlebach shul.

OK, that's good. Were your parents Zionists at the time?

My father was. My mother was not. Figure that one out.

OK. So how did it manifest with him? Did he just speak about Zionism.

Well, I guess he always wanted to go to Israel and never did, or Palestine.

Palestine.

And my mother always had her eyes set on the United States. She never made it. But she had three brothers in Seattle, Washington.

Oh.

And if it hadn't been-- December 7th killed it all.

Yeah.

You know, they--

Once we went to war, you mean, yeah.

They had papers to go to Cuba, legal-- I mean, valid papers. They were purchased, but they were for real.

Mm-hmm.

And if December 7th hadn't happened-- OK, because of the American immigration quota system, my father was number 34 on the list to come to the States. There's only one thing nobody told you. The Romanian-- Romania only got two visas a year. So being number 34 meant a 17 year wait.

So he was still considered Romanian even though he lived in Leipzig.

That's right.

OK. And your mother also was considered Romanian?

Yeah, because she--

Even though she--

Well, the family passport was a Romanian passport.

OK, even though you were living in Germany, OK. Let's talk about as a young child now.

Yeah.

Now that we've talked about your family.

OK. I was very precocious.

Of course.

I was a snot-nosed kid, but I was bright. In fact, it's kind of interesting, because when I was six years old, somebody took me to some Zionist meeting. There was sort of a commemoration of somebody who was a hero-- Joseph Trumpeldor, who died, and da, da, da, da.

And here's this little six-year-old, and he says, well, what's so great about dying for your country? Isn't it more important to live for it? And I thought that was a pretty astute comment from a six-year-old.

You.

Me.

Yes. And how did the teacher answer that?

There wasn't a teacher. It was a youth group.

Oh.

Very-- they were quite impressed.

I would say.

As I say, I was kind of a bright, snot-nosed kid. I don't think I was quite as smart as I thought I was, but I was fairly bright, which has stood me in good stead over the years. In fact, I guess growing up when I did, I grew up sort of confrontational.

And I think it stood me well in my life. I like to say, I've never been aggressive, but I've always been assertive. Fine distinction, but a good one.

What's the distinction?

That when you're aggressive, you hold things-- you have boundaries. It's not all free floating, whereas aggression can fly in every direction. It sort of missed this focused. At least, to me, that was a distinction.

Mm-hmm. So you went to school. Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood? Was your house in a Jewish neighborhood in Leipzig?

No, it was a mixed neighborhood.

So did you have friends who were not Jewish?

Yes.

You did?

Yes, we did. Actually, you probably wouldn't know about this, but there used to be a very famous German encyclopedia called Brockhaus. Well, you know, it's-- take my word for it.

Yes. Oh, I'm sure.

It was [BOTH TALKING] standard. And the Brockhaus family lived across the street from us. And Leipzig, of course, was a publishing city. And very few people know that. But not pocket books, but paperbacks, quality paperbacks, were published in Leipzig long before the names were coined. Because we had these publishing houses in Leipzig. And boy, I had a whole collection of English novels by the time I was 10 years old.

So you were-- you were able to speak-- were able to speak English?

Yeah.

How did you learn that? In school?

No, Leipzig, being a city that had fairs, also had language institutes, where they trained translators and interpreters. And it was a three-month course. And you can live-- I didn't have to live at the school because I was from Leipzig, but most students lived there. And it was immersion study.

You had breakfast with your teachers. You went for a walk. You couldn't-- you couldn't use anything but English. If you couldn't say it in English, you couldn't say it. It was agony while it lasted. However, when I came to the States as an immigrant,

I didn't have to take a single required English college course. I passed every single college course, high school and college entrance, by exam. The only thing I couldn't pass was Shakespeare.

So what other languages did you speak? Did you know, besides German and English?

Well, I spoke a little Hebrew.

You spoke a little Hebrew.

And English and French--

Oh, OK.

--from school.

From school, right.

Still speak a little French.

What were your other interests as a child?

Mostly reading.

Sports? Oh, mostly reading.

Mostly. No, I wasn't too much into sports because I was very nearsighted as a kid. And in those days, we didn't have plastic glasses. So I couldn't go in for sports.

Because they would break.

Because my glasses would-- yeah, a tennis ball and pair of eyeglasses can be fatal.

Right.

So I kind of was a little bit removed from sports and tended towards books.

Mm-hmm. Were you very close to your parents? What kind of relationship did you have with--

I was much closer to my mother. Yeah, I had-- we had a good relationship. I think my dad was a little bit of a control freak. But then I guess most parents were in those days.

Uh-huh. And your two sisters, what were their names?

One was Clara.

Clara.

And one was Miriam.

Yeah, were you close to them?

Well, no, because they were much older-- they were close to each other.

Yeah.

Well, one of them I was fairly close to. And in fact, the one that ended her life in Israel, I actually went and spent six months with her in Beersheba before she died. She was quite-- well, she-- she ended up with Alzheimer's.

But that's all right. I mean, she was a nice person. And she had-- she had good-- she had a good husband-- had had a good husband and family. So she was well taken care of. And I spent six months helping her. And things worked out OK.

Good. So to get back to your childhood, you said you were very independent. It sounds like you were very independent.

Yes.

And doing what you thought you should be doing.

Well, yeah, because one of-- part of the independent bit was, as kids we belonged to the Jewish youth groups. And parents were not really that much-- you know, it was a double-edged sword for the parents.

Do you remember the names of the groups?

The Habonim.

The Habonim.

Oh, yes, I was a very upright Habonim member. And then when I went to Switzerland, they didn't have a Habonim. It suddenly became Hashomer Hatzair as the next substitute.

Right, right. And so you had non-- but you also had non-Jewish friends that you--

Yes.

--played with when you were a youngster.

Mm-hmm.

Yeah. And then, when did you know that conditions were starting to change? You were born in 1923. Did you-- when did you ever hear of a man named Hitler? Do you remember the first--

1933.

You heard, OK, you were 10 years--

I think I heard about him the day I was 10 years old.

The day you were 10-- OK, what did you hear about him? Do you remember what your impressions were?

Terrible things were going to happen.

Who told you? Your parents?

The neighbors, the parents. It was in the air.

OK.

There was unrest. There was really turmoil in the air.

And a 10-year-old child sense it.

You picked-- you picked that up, yes.

Mm-hmm.

It was-- you could kind of cut it.

Were there any outward manifestations right then on the street, or signs, or banners?

Well, my strongest recollection is the week of Kristallnacht.

Yeah, that's later. We'll get to that. We'll get to that. I'm talking about--

Yeah.

--a little earlier. You're talking about '33. And you heard that a man named Hitler--

Yeah.

--is now in control. Did you talk--

Well, we heard news about Hitler and Hindenburg together.

Yes, yeah. Right, at that time.

You know, as a 10-year-old, you didn't separate that much.

Did you-- is it something you talked over with your family?

Mostly in the Habonim group.

Mostly with your-- OK.

Mostly with your contemporaries.

Yeah. Did you hear any speeches over the radio by Hitler?

Yes.

You did. And again--

And not only that, but not wanting to, but without being able to help it, I actually saw him. I was-- I was crossing a major street in Leipzig when his car-- you know, he was heil-ing-- sieg heil-ing in his open vehicle, driving along--

The motorcade, you mean.

The motorcade. And I was at the curb. And I couldn't help it, I had a look at him.

And you knew exactly who he was.

Of course, I mean, sieg heil.

Yeah.

I mean, everybody knew who he was.

Uh-huh. Were you-- I assume you did not do the salute.

Of course not.

And did people give you a hard-- did other people on the street--

I don't think people noticed me.

OK.

Everybody was focused on him.

OK, so they did not notice that you-- yeah.

I mean, I was a little-- I was-- I was small.

Oh, OK.

I wasn't that visible.

Really?

I'm still only five feet.

Oh, I didn't-- OK. OK. OK, yeah. And then, again, when did conditions start to change? It was '33, '34-- do you remember any progression, any signs, or treatment by neighbors? Non-Jewish neighbors, did they ever say anything negative or positive to you?

Oddly enough, believe it or not, we had very good non-Jewish neighbors, who were very friendly. And like the night-- just before Kristallnacht, they came and warned us and told us not to go out the next morning, that the party had sent out word that all members had to show up, and Mufti, and start shooting and looting.

And it was-- Kristallnacht was planned down to the last detail. And I knew all about it before it happened. I was told the night before to stay home and be careful by non-Jewish neighbors.

What were their names, do you remember?

No.

You don't.

But I guess, Leipzig was a stronghold for communism. And I think our neighbors might have been communists. And that might have been the warning connection. I didn't think of it at the time, but in retrospect it would make sense.

Yeah. So up till Kristallnacht, did life go on for you as a child, as a 10, 11, 12, 13-year-old, normally--

Yeah.

--did it go on? You don't remember any restrictions?

No, I went to my private Jewish school.

OK, and that was still functioning all the way till Kristallnacht.

Yeah.

It was not closed or anything like that?

No.

And any restrictions on your father's business that you know of?

Well, I think between the economic situation and being Jewish, it wasn't going too well.

Isn't wasn't going well, but it wasn't taken over or closed down?

I don't think he was closed-- he wasn't shut down or anything.

Anything like that, right.

It was just Depression and--

Right. And your non-Jewish--

Actually, I think it's kind of funny, looking back. I don't know if there was a middle class Jewish trait or not, but Jews were never poor, they just had cash flow problems.

That's wonderful. That's wonderful, yeah.

And I don't think my parents would have ever admitted to not being well off.

Did you have household help?

Yeah.

Oh, you did.

Did you have a car?

No. My uncle had a Rolls Royce and we used it.

Very impressive.

Yep.

Speaking about your uncle, so you had an extended family that you were--

Yeah, my mother had two--

That you were close to?

She had a younger brother in Leipzig. And we were all very close.

Uh-huh. And did you get together on holidays?

Yes.

Yeah. Do you have any certain memories of any of the holidays? Anything special?

Actually, this is kind of weird. My first memory of Passover is we were always invited to the same family for Passover seder. And I couldn't stand their silverware.

That's important.

No, it was cheap metal. And it had a taste.

Oh, I see.

And my parents had a real problem understanding why I would go visit to seder and not eat.

Oh, OK.

That was one of the--

Did you celebrate the Sabbath in your own home, Shabbat? Did you light candles?

Yes.

Or your father make a blessing?

No, my mother lit the candles. And we always had challah and gefilte fish, or regular fish, or matzo ball soup or noodle soup. No, we had the traditional--

Traditional home. Did you keep kosher?

Yes and no.

OK.

My mother kept kosher for my father.

Yeah.

So we had a kosher kitchen. But when we traveled, she and I ate trayf.

Right.

And actually, with my father's blessing. He just said he was raised Orthodox.

Yeah.

He couldn't get himself to change. But he was very-- he was sort of a accepting liberal kind of guy. And like if I was sick in bed and needed a treat, he'd come home and bring me a package of ham for sandwiches. So, you know, it was a tradition, not religion.

Yeah. You said you were a big reader, what were some-- who were your favorite authors?

All the forbidden-- everybody who was forbidden. Leon Feuchtwanger, and Max Brod, Leon Trotsky.

This is while you were growing up and it was forbidden for people to read those.

And actually, what we did was, we passed around the paperbacks. We read them and as we finished reading, we tore up the pages and destroyed them so we wouldn't get caught.

Oh, my. This is through your youth groups.

Mm-hmm.

Now were you aware of--

And I-- the other thing is, because in '33 all the German professors were fired--

Right.

--from the German universities.

The Jewish professors.

Yeah. Since I went to the Carlebach private high school, every one of my high school teachers was a--

University professor.

Was from whatchamacallit.

Yeah, university.

You know, the one outstanding-- the one well known--

In Leipzig?

No, in Germany.

Oh.

What was the big university? Heidelberg.

Heidelberg, yeah, right.

Practically every one of my teachers was from--

From Heidelberg.

--was a Heidelberg professor.

Really? Yeah.

My physics teacher, my chemistry teacher.

Did you know about the book burnings?

Yeah.

And again, here, you loved books, what-- do you remember as a young person what your thoughts were?

Actually, I remember-- I watched them.

In Leipzig?

Yeah, I saw them-- I saw the piles of books on the streets, in the middle of the road, being burned.

And?

And you passed by. You walked.

And, you, who loved books, what--

What? You know, you kept from crying.

Were you frightened by that point, seeing what was starting to happen in the country?

I'm not sure that-- I'm not sure that that's-- I don't know. I don't think I was frightened. I think I was unnerved. No, I

don't think I-- I don't think fear was the word.

In fact, one of the peculiar things about the fact that I was a Romanian citizen and my passport did not say that I was Jewish--

Oh.

--I could go out when nobody else-- when all Jews were restricted, I could still walk the streets because my passport didn't say I was Jewish. I mean, obviously, policemen are-- on the street, people suspected, but they couldn't prove it.

And since nobody could prove that I was Jewish, they couldn't keep me inside. So when all the curfews and everything was going, I was-- I was walking around freely.

I was going ask you about that, the curfews and the limitations.

No, I moved.

And what did you do? Did you do anything special because you were able to--

Well, that's how I-- that's how all my volunteering started. We had this big-- OK, the German-- no, the Polish government, after they-- I forgot his name. There was a 17-year-old Polish kid--

Right.

--who Killed the attache in Paris.

Yes, right.

And the follow up to that was the German government expelling all Polish Jews in Germany back into Poland.

Right.

And they would all board to the Leipzig railroad station.

Mm-hmm.

Because that was the biggest railroad in Europe and it had all these sidings. And that's where I started volunteering. I decided these people-- all these people showed up in nightgowns.

Mm-hmm.

And I decided they needed toothbrushes. And so I looked up a man who had a sundry shop. And I knocked on his window at his house. I knocked on his door. And I told him about all these Polish Jews sitting in the railroad siding in their nightgowns and that they needed toothbrushes.

And I made a toothbrush distribution. Of all the crazy-- well, I guess it was as appropriate as anything else, wasn't it? Kind of weird in retrospect.

Did you do this-- did you do this by yourself?

Yeah.

It was your idea.

Yeah.

It wasn't a group of friends?

No, no, no, no.

And you were just a young--

It was just me.

Yeah. You were about 13 years old.

No, 15.

Oh, 15, right, 15, right.

Yeah, I just-- I knocked on the guy's door. And I said, you have all these sundry items. And we have all these people that are dislocated that are waiting for transportation. And they need some--

Did you tell your parents you were going to do it?

Yeah.

And they said OK?

Yeah.

They said go ahead.

Well, they knew I was safe with my passport.

Did you always carry your passport with you?

Yeah.

OK. Now, the other Jews in Leipzig at the time had restrictions.

I guess so.

Curfew and so forth. Did they have restrictions about where they could go by that time? Or were they-- or did they have freedom to go around the city?

It seems to me-- it seems to me they were pretty damn restricted.

Uh-huh.

But one of the things I sort of clearly remember, and that was kind of a horrible, horrible-- I've just never forgotten it. Leipzig had some small rivers. And they assembled the elderly bearded Jews on the river's edge.

Now, there was the river. And, you know, there was paved-- I mean, there was a little riverlet.

Right.

And then there was like pavement. And then there were the walls.

Right.

And what they had done was they rounded up all the Orthodox Jews and made them face the wall and shot into the air. They didn't kill them. They just pretended to kill them all. And in some ways, that was worse.

Because you heard the shots, you opened your eyes. You looked and they were still standing. But the fear, being lined up against a river bed wall and hearing all these shotguns-- I don't know if they were guns or-- I don't remember what ammo they used. But it was pretty--

And you actually saw this?

Oh, yeah. I stood--

By chance? Or did they force you all to come out and look?

No, I made a point of going out.

How did you know it was going to happen?

I heard the neighbors talk.

The same neighbors that--

The communist neighbors.

--that warned you about Kristallnacht.

I was in a feisty--

Sounds like it. A very unusual young girl, yeah.

No, in a peculiar way-- I can't-- I'm not sure I can explain it, but I guess I always kind of went along feeling it's better to see than not to. I felt more in control being able to watch. I wasn't so puzzled. I could see what was going on. But I just sort of hoofed it around.

And then you came home and told your folks what you saw?

Mm-hmm.

And what were their reactions to all this and what was happening?

Horrified, scared, upset, you know, what you expect.

Yeah.

And again, you have to realize, at the time I wasn't quite as analytical. It's easier to analyze--

Yeah.

--looking back then--

Uh-huh. Did the other Jews in Leipzig have to wear a star? A yellow star?

That came later on later.

That came later, OK. So life went on, except for these terrible, terrible happenings, for you. You went to school. You did a lot of reading.

Well, particularly I went to this English translator school.

And then you learned English.

Where I had all kinds of good friends.

Yeah. Now these were non-Jews?

These were non-Jews.

Non-Jews, OK.

Well, these were immersion classes.

Yeah, right. And they treated you well? Did you ever experience any anti-Semitism on the street or at that English class?

I'm sure I did, but I don't think it registered. Or if it registered, it didn't stick. I mean, I'm sure I was called names by other kids. I just can't remember the specifics.

Yeah. Do you ever remember being frightened at any time?

Not really.

Did you know what was happening in the rest of the world? Did you know about the Anschluss, when that happened, and Hitler went into Czechoslovakia? You did.

Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I was politically very astute because of my membership in the youth group.

Yeah.

No, I mean, I think all of us were way ahead in political understanding from the rest of the population.

And in your youth group, were they urging you to eventually go to Israel, to Palestine?

Not eventually, as soon as possible.

Uh-huh. And how did they prepare you for that? Did you do anything special?

Well, looking back, it's all kind of weird. Because at the time, they told did you go up and go on some farm and learn agriculture to get [HEBREW].

Right.

And looking back, good lord, I mean who came up with this? You know what I'm saying? But at the time, it was a solution to a problem.

That you learn how to be a good farmer.

Yep.

What did you do? Did you milk cows?

No, I dug potatoes.

Oh, OK.

I harvested potatoes.

OK.

And one of the other strange things in all this mish-mash, there were some very large Swiss corporations. And they owned acreage on which they grew stuff. And when I went to Switzerland, we volunteered to dig up potatoes for the Swiss chemical companies.

These chemical companies owned farmlands. And they actually cultivated them. And so we volunteered and we dug up their potatoes for them, in exchange for which we got to live in a Swiss castle.

Now this was like a summer project or something, when you went to Switzerland?

I guess so.

Yeah. This is while you're still living in Leipzig that you went to Switzerland?

No. I'd just left-- I'd left Leipzig for good.

Oh, you had already left. OK, we'll get to that.

And I was in Switzerland.

Yeah, no, no, no, we'll get to that. We'll get to that. OK, so let's get up to Kristallnacht. You said that you went to school. You're a member of the youth group. And then one night in November, there's a knock at the door by your neighbors saying, don't go outside tomorrow.

Right.

OK, and then tell me what happened. So what happened the next day.

Well, the next day, as I said, I took a walk through town.

Your parents knew that--

Yeah.

--that you were leaving by yourself?

Yeah. I stuck my passport in my handbag and I walked. Well--

What did you see?

I told you, I saw old men with a-- turned against the wall.

Oh, that was that day?

Yeah.

Oh, I didn't that was the--

That was the connection.

--that particular day, yeah. Anything else? Did you see any burning?

Well, I saw book burning. Heaps of books in the middle of the road being--

Did you see any synagogues being burned?

Yeah.

What?

The Carlebach synagogue got set on fire.

And you actually saw that?

Oh, yeah.

And what were the firemen doing? Anything?

No. But the other interesting thing-- and oddly enough, this sort of years later had a follow up right here in Washington, D.C. The librarian from the Folger Theater--

Yes.

--his aunt and uncle owned one of the biggest haberdasher firms in Leipzig. And they-- they were foreign subjects. And so when they set things on fire in Leipzig in the Jewish stores, when they looted and had everything on fire, they protected the foreign owned-- they actually had the fire department with their hoses sprinkle down and save the foreign Jewish businesses.

Oh, OK.

And Leipzig had one, what they call a high rise, I mean a whole house, with 10 stories. And it was English owned. The fire department protected that. It could not be touched because it was foreign property.

A British Jewish property?

Mm-hmm.

But see, it became British rather than Jewish.

Yeah. Now, I know you were strong. I know you were independent. But what were your reactions seeing your synagogue being burned?

Shock, disillusion, sad.

Any fear?

I don't think I was afraid. I think what saved me was not being afraid. I think that's what helped me get through it.

Mm-hmm.

I was just sort of leading with my chin up front. Maybe I was too stupid to be afraid.

That I don't think. Did you see any other synagogues being burned or just the Carlebach?

No. I saw them-- they set fire to the reform temple, which was only about two blocks.

And were there crowds on the street watching?

I assume-- I mean, yes, there were people. Just how closely they watched, or whether they were delighted, or whether they were appalled, it's been too-- some of these details, you don't--

No, I know.

So you come home to your parents and you tell them what was happening.

Mm-hmm. I was the reporter.

You were a reporter. And their response? Do you remember what they said? OK. And meanwhile, they're trying to get frantically out of Germany. Yeah.

Right.

So this is November '38, did you go back to school the next day, the next?

School was closed.

School was then closed permanently? So what was your life like at that point? You still met-- were you still able to meet with your youth group?

Yeah.

They permitted that.

Yeah.

That was permitted.

In fact, anything that helped get Jews out of Germany was initially permitted.

Uh-huh.

Because initially, Hitler wasn't going to kill all the Jews. He was just going to get rid of them.

He just wanted to get rid of them, right. So what did you spend your time doing now that you couldn't go to school?

Reading.

Reading.

I did a ferocious amount of reading.

Yeah. And then--

Oh, and visiting with friends, including non-Jewish friends from the language school.

Who were still good to you and positive?

Yeah, but the people that went to these immersion--

Were open minded, you mean?

Most of them were foreigners.

Oh, I see.

So we were all buddy-buddies.

Yeah. And then the next big step was? Leaving? How did you-- how long did you stay in Leipzig?

Well, I came to the States in December of '39.

OK, tell me about how you left Germany, and how you got out, and how the arrangements were made.

OK. I started out by being in Switzerland.

OK, first you're in Leipzig.

Yeah.

And then you tell your parents you want to leave? Or did the whole family go to Switzerland.

Well, we all went to Switzerland.

The whole family went to Switzerland.

Except my parents went back and I stayed.

Oh, OK, but initially--

Initially, the whole family was in Switzerland.

OK.

Which was a real freak accident, because normally one person in the family always had to stay home--

To keep an eye.

No, to make sure--

The family didn't leave.

Didn't leave.

I see, I see, yeah.

And so all of a sudden, all three of us were in Switzerland.

Uh-huh.

And I hooked up-- well, we had some relatives in Switzerland.

OK.

Who were for the birds.

You're now 16.

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Anyway, to make a long story short--

No, let's make a long story long.

I kind of got to be an au pair.

OK.

And I took care-- I lived with this young couple in Switzerland.

A Jewish couple?

Yeah. In fact, I'll never forget them. Their name was Herzog. And they were very nice. And I guess I was their au pair. And I took care of their two-- helped with the two kids.

Mm-hmm.

And I went to English class every day.

Mm-hmm.

Now this-- this is-- when was this? When did you leave?

'39.

What part of '39? Early in--

The week before Kristallnacht.

No, Kristallnacht was--

'38. I'm sorry, '38.

It was Kristallnacht and then you left soon after?

No, I left the day before-- I don't know, I left a week of Kristallnacht.

Oh, so you all left very quickly after Kristallnacht. OK. Got to Switzerland. How did your parents decide to go to

Switzerland? Because it was neutral?

Yeah.

Yeah. OK.

Except-- I mean, my father was totally unrealistic. Hitler's going to last six months and the Germans will know where to bargain-- God, all mighty-- I mean-- never mind. I mean, when I remember, I still get angry. Because there was no excuse for being that much of an ostrich.

But anyway, I was in Switzerland. And I sort of worked as an au pair and studied English, and made the best of things. And, oh, there were funny little things. I mean, it was such a peculiar time. Like my parents couldn't send me money.

You didn't get permission to send money out of Germany anymore. So they would send me pounds and pounds of nail polish, which I could sell. And that gave me spending money. But you know, I was kind of a 16-year-old hustler, putting it in modern lingo.

Right.

But it gave me money. It gave me spending money.

Was it hard for you to say goodbye to your parents?

Well, I was a runaway.

They wanted you to go back to Germany with them.

Yeah.

Oh.

I was on a train with my mother going back to Germany. And when the conductor said, all aboard, I jumped off. And the train didn't stop until after it crossed the border. And there was nothing she could do.

Why did you want to do that?

I wasn't about to go back to Germany.

You didn't want to go back to Germany.

No, ten horses could get me back there.

So you-- so this was a surprise to her too?

Of course.

Yeah.

Well, yes and no, because when we packed for the trip, she went through my luggage and she said, you don't need-- in a summer-- whatever seasonal clothes I packed was the wrong season. So she knew what I was planning. But there wasn't much she could do.

And when I-- when I jumped off the train and the train moved on, that was it. She--

Where were your two sisters when you went to Switzerland? They didn't come with you?

Well, one was in Israel and one was in France.

By that time?

Oh, yeah.

Oh, I see.

Well, they were both older-- one was 12 years older.

Yeah, so they were not with you.

I got a pain.

Oh, well, let's take a--

Let me take a little break.

Absolutely.