This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Barbara Goldberg, conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 22nd, 2012 in Chevy Chase, Maryland. This is track number one.

What is your full name?

My full name is Barbara June Goldberg. And Heymann was my maiden name.

Now, since you're going to be telling the story of your parents' journey, let's talk about your parents. Their names?

Erich-- "Er-isch"-- Heymann-- H-E-Y-M-A-N-N. And my mother, Emma, which changed to Emily when she got here.

Where were they born and when were they born?

My mother was born in Olomouc, in what was then Czechoslovakia in 1912 or '13. And my father was born in the early 1900s in Thorn-- T-H-O-R-N. That was the part that kept going back and forth between Poland and Germany, the corridor up there. But he lived in Berlin. And my mother in Prague-- Teplice, a kind of suburb of Prague.

Did they come-- well, let's take them one at a time. Did your father come from a religious background?

He was totally secular. He was German. However, his mother was quite religious. And his father, I remember him saying, or at least my grandmother, who lived with us, that he studied Torah in the back room. And I guess they had some kind of store.

And my mother's family was also secular. It was the Sudetenland where she grew up, and her father was, as she said, a Notar, which was a notary, which is very unusual for a Jewish man. And they were secular too.

And what kind of education did they have, your parents?

Well, gymnasium for my mother. I'm not quite sure if there was something after. She probably went to some school in Switzerland after. And my father probably went-- I'm saying probably-- university in London, because he was in London for some time. I think he wanted to be a lawyer, but that all changed when his father died of the Swine Flu. I think it was 1918, is that when-- yeah, so.

Yes, that was the flu epidemic.

Yeah, and he had to come back to Berlin and support his mother and himself.

Yeah.

So how did your parents meet?

I think they met at Karlovy Vary, Karlsbad, in German. And it was a place where people went to summer. And as a matter of fact, I found the actual ballroom where they met and first danced with each other. And as my mother said-- I mean, he was quite short and quite fat, but my mother said he could dance a mean tango.

And he was very kind of Prussian. He was not known for his charm, although he could be very funny. And my mother was very beautiful and very charming. And after they met, they were both invited to a dinner party, where the subject of Hitler came up.

And the Czechs in the Sudetenland we're saying, oh, it's nothing, don't worry. And my father got-- he had a big, bad temper, and he got outraged, and called them all chicken-headed. But no one believed him. And so he stormed out.

But the next day, he was at my mother's apartment. At that time, she was probably working in some kind of dress shop,

boutique, in Prague, with a dozen long-stemmed roses. And I think-- she later said that why she married him-- she had many suitors-- was because she felt like he was rock solid, that she could rely on him.

And indeed, his paranoia saved her. And her own parents wouldn't leave. Her father said, since he didn't speak English, "What would I do, sell sausages in a foreign land?" And her brother, my uncle Paul Brennan-- that's a story-- stayed behind to take care of them. And that's how they met.

When did they get married? Do you know what year?

No, I don't. Because I know that-- when was Kristallnacht?

November.

Of what year?

In November '38.

I know that they-- he was in Czechoslovakia in the first place because he had developed a reputation for taking failing companies and making them profitable again.

This is your father?

My father. And pretty soon after they met, I think he took my mother and his mother to Paris to live. And they made their getaway the minute the Germans crossed over into France, maybe a little before that.

But they were married by then?

They were married by then.

Oh, OK, so--

Yeah, sure.

--they were married before--

They were married in Czechoslovakia, and then pretty soon after went to Paris.

I see. OK, so now they're in Paris.

Now they're in Paris. And my father, when he got paid, had asked to be paid in Swiss francs. He didn't want Czech money or German money. So he had resources. And when they came to Paris, well, I'm sure he didn't work, or maybe-- I don't know if he worked or not.

But anyway, they lived there a couple of years. And my sister was born, I think, in 1940, or '41, near Aix-les-Bains, which was kind of a resort town. And then they came back to Paris. And then when they left Paris, along with all the others, you had to wait in line for a visa and everything like that.

So that took a while, even to get out of Paris. But then, I think I wrote you that-- so I think is that they followed a lot of people who were there, who were driving south and trying to get to Spain and then Portugal. And in, I believe, it was Bordeaux, there was Aristides de Sousa--

Mendes.

--Mendes, who arranged for them, I think along with something like 30-33,000 other people to get--

Possibly 10,000.

Oh, really? Because I heard from them and that's what they said.

Well, you may be right.

Anyway, so they got an exit visa from him.

Did they meet him directly?

Well, I don't know, but the manifest exists. Their names exist on a-- I don't know. Because I never heard his name until very recently.

I just didn't know whether they had direct contact with him.

I don't know. But the people who he gave visas to, they were like on the first three lines of God knows how many pages, was my grandmother, Gusha Agusta, and Erich, and Emma, and then my sister. Monique Marguerite was her name before it was changed to--

How old was she at that point?

I think this was '40-'41. So she was-- I remember that she was very young.

Yeah.

I mean, a baby.

She was an infant.

She was an infant. And my grandmother in the backseat of the car was feeding and feeding her to keep her quiet.

So they get the papers from Aristides de Sousa Mendes.

Yes. And I remember them saying that it was this long, long ride over the Pyrenees or something to get to Spain. I don't know how long they spent in Spain. Eventually, they got to Portugal.

And then, where was their visa from? Because--

Did they talk about any of the other people who were during the same thing? Did they tell you about that? The other refugees who were leaving--

Yeah, I know.

--with them?

I'm not really sure. I have this one photograph, which seems to me so strange, which was on this obviously cross-Atlantic trip. And they were partying. They were dressed up in party clothes.

OK, so they get to Portugal, you said.

They get to Portugal.

And they get on a boat.

They have a three-day visa--

Oh.

--for the States. When they get to the States, Ellis Island, the customs person looks at my mother--

Oh, they went directly to the United States.

From Portugal.

From Portugal. Do you know what boat they were on?

My son, my younger son, has a suitcase, which has Rio de Janeiro on it. And I'll tell you how that happened. So they have a three-day visa and the customs person-- this is how the story went-- looked at my mother, and the baby, and the older grandmother, and all that, and he extended it to three months. And in that time, they got a visa to Brazil.

They had been considering Argentina, but his mother had high blood pressure and I think Brazil was better for that. They spent a year in Brazil. My sister was in a crib. And my mother said the cockroaches were like nothing you could imagine.

And then I think-- I don't know whether they came in on a Brazilian visa or whether that visa finally-- I'm very--

Where did they stay in the United States for that month or that three months?

I think they were in Delaware, Wilmington.

Because?

Because the next job for my father was going to be in a brewery to make it profitable. And so the first year of my life-- I was born in '43-- was spent in Wilmington. I was born there.

I'm a little-- let's clarify this. They came to the United States. They stayed for how long?

Three months.

Three months. And then went to Brazil.

Went to Brazil for about a year.

OK, what did they say about their life in Brazil, besides the cockroaches?

Not much.

Yeah.

I don't think they were alone there. There were many--

Many other refugees.

Yes. But I don't know much about that at all. And maybe the party dresses could have been on the boat from Rio to the States. That, I don't know either.

So then after Brazil they came back to the United States.

And went to Wilmington for about a year-- a year or two.

But my question before, when they were first in the United States--

I'm not really sure, I assumed--

--where were they--

--it was--

Where were they staying then, their first trip?

I don't know.

You don't know, OK. So now they're back again.

They're in Wilmington. He's making this brewery. If only I could remember the name of the beer. Because Pabst, of course, is-- I'll remember the name of the beer. But long story short, he somehow became a financial advisor to people. And one of them was Lehman, of the famous Lehman that went broke.

But anyway, so he was doing quite well. And then they moved-- and then they moved to Forest Hills, New York, where there were many, many, many refugees. And I believe they may even have known a number of them beforehand.

In Europe.

In Europe, yeah.

And how was their English? Did they know English before they came?

My father spoke English well, with a trace of a British accent. And my mother, I'm not sure how well she spoke it, but all her-- she spoke it fluently, but all her life she still said welcome with the V.

But they kind of-- by the time that they had lived in America for a while, spoke this-- I guess it's called Spanglish, if it's Spanish and English. They kept throwing in English words and stuff. But I do remember-- and I spoke German with my grandmother.

And when I was in high school and I had taken a practice boards, they said that I should study English vocabulary because it wasn't as good as it should have been and all that.

So let's go back. You were born in '43 you said.

'43 in Wilmington.

In Wilmington, OK. And Then you moved to New York.

Right.

And stayed in--

In Forest Hills.

In Forest Hills.

Right.

And while you were growing up, did your parents tell you or talk about their previous experiences?

I knew very little. The only thing I got about the camps is when I was eavesdropping. And the people they had over in their social circle for bridge, or canasta, or whatever-- I wrote an article about this once. I don't know how I knew, but I knew pretty much everything. They never talked about it.

Directly to you?

Never. And I knew that Mr. Nash had lost his wife and children in camp. And he came here. And he was starting over again, had married someone else. And I know this person had relatives that-- I somehow knew their stories. And I don't know how it-- how I knew it.

And the only thing that I really knew about them, I knew her parents had died. I don't know when I knew that exactly. But I know when I was born they named me Barbara.

After?

So I said, how come you named me Barbara? And by that time, my sister's name had changed to Monica. And my mother said, well, you know, Santa Barbara, Santa Monica. And it really wasn't until I was 20 that I knew her mother's first name, which was Blanca.

So they didn't talk about it. And I also found out that there was a letter written to my father's uncle in Australia, that I saw a copy of years later through my Australian cousins. And it went, "Sorry to hear of Max's death. Agusta--" who was-- they were brother and sister-- "is grieving." I thought, I didn't know she was grieving about it.

So it turns out there were seven brothers and sisters on my-- of my grandmother. And there was a short period of time where you could buy people out of Germany. And so he and a cousin in London raised some money and got a lot of them out. So I know-- to South Africa, and Israel-- Palestine then-- and Australia. But I didn't know about that until so much later.

And I remember the text of the letter because it said, "Monica is so smart, et cetera, et cetera." There was hardly a word about me. I remember feeling, well, why not? Of course, I was younger.

So your folks did not talk, as you say--

No.

--about their experience. Or about Aristides de Sousa Mendes.

Not at all.

So do you know-- so what you know about him is what you read later.

Is what I heard within the last couple of months.

Oh, OK. Not from anything that--

We were contacted. Nothing from what they said.

Who contacted you?

There was a woman who, I guess, is with the foundation, or beginning the foundation. It's very bizarre.

What foundation?

The Sousa Mendes Foundation. They want to start a museum.

Oh. Where?

I'm not sure whether it--

In Portugal?

--would be-- or Brazil, I don't know.

He was a Portuguese diplomat.

So where did Brazil come in?

Well, it was Portuguese. Brazil was Portuguese.

Oh, so it was-- OK, so maybe he came from Brazil or whatever. But anyway, actually got in touch with her through my sister's daughter, whose name is nothing related to our names at all, but who's an extremely active presence on the web and has her own company.

Contacted her. She referred it to my sister, who really hasn't followed the history of my family the way I have. There's always one. There's always one, thank God. And so she forwarded it to me. And so that's how I found it. It's startling to see.

Oh, I see. So this is all very recent.

This is all recent.

Yeah.

So I forward it to my kids. And my younger one, Jesse, who's the historian in the family, sent along images of this suitcase to the foundation. He still has it. He said, when my mother died, he saw this suitcase. So I must have said something to him. And he took it. And no one else was interested. It was an old bunged-up suitcase. But interestingly enough, she kept it. Yeah.

Now, my uncle, who was a survivor, came to this country, America, when I was four.

It was 1947?

Right. And he was very handsome. My father had sent him and a cousin, [?Gertie?] Fleischman, to a sanatorium in Switzerland for a year to recover because he was severely underweight. And apparently-- now, again, I don't know how I knew this, but he sat my mother down, probably my father too, and said, I'm going to tell you this story once. I'm going to tell you what happened once and then I never want to speak of it again.

So my parents weren't exactly communicative, but I think I knew the story before he actually did start talking about it, which was when he was older and my younger son was getting bar mitzvahed. So he was starting to talk.

And I remember my uncle as being a great ping-pong player. And young, and kind of dashing, and very funny. He told jokes all the time.

His name, again, is--

Well, his real name was Pavel Briess, B-R-I-E-S-S. And when he came to this country, the customs person said, well, you can't go with Pavel Briess, no one will know what to do with that name. So I now call you Paul Brennan, the Irishman from Prague.

And many years later, I got contacted by someone, who by chance had been searching for my uncle for many years. Unfortunately, he had just died. And he was in the bunk bed above him at this camp. I want to call it Friedenwald. I don't know what it would be in another language. I don't think it was in Germany. But it's where they made rocket parts.

But he was in Auschwitz and the whole--

That was his story. I was going to ask you what his story was.

Well, his story is that he was in Theresienstadt. And then when he was sent to Auschwitz along with his mother-- his father had already died in the boxcar from Prague to Theresienstadt. And I think he saw his mother die.

But long story short, he was greeted at the train by Mengele in his white uniform, just the way they say. This is what he told me. And he was going to the right, to the left, to the right, to the left. And the man ahead of him said, you know, I'm a good worker, my back hurts me a little bit, but I can certainly-- to the left, or however it was-- to the left.

And my uncle got off, and he said, I'm young, I'm strong, and I know how to weld. To the right. How he learned how to weld is another story. But another cousin of ours, also a survivor who recently died, was a violinist. And his father, I don't know, had taught them both to weld.

So anyway, he survived. And then was sent to-- I don't know if he was sent to another camp, like Dachau, before Friedlander. My cousin, other one, was in every camp you can imagine.

So then he-- that's the story he told your parents when he came.

Yeah, he told it. And then I remember after the war, he had saved someone's life in the camps by getting him extra food, or doing what I don't know, or by getting him a pair of shoes. And then after the war, they were marching out, or getting out, and this same man said, "Look what these shoes have done to my feet. You like them so much, you wear them." And he took them off and he threw me at my uncle, because I guess the shoes didn't exactly fit.

So I remember that story. And it must have been horrible for him to know about his mother. So I don't know how they actually-- my uncle got in touch with, or my father, actually, got in touch with him.

I remember in my early days, there were all these phone calls, all these phone calls going on all the time, trying to locate people. And then there was always wiedergutmachung. So there was a lawyer, accountant, or whatever in Forest Hills, [Personal NAME], and I think he dealt with all the people who were putting in claims, legal claims.

And I don't think my parents or my grandmother ever got any wiedergutmachung. But from what I understand, it's property, not people-- if you lost a paint factory.

So you don't think they got any--

I don't think so.

--reparations.

I'm not even sure, the reparation, yeah.

And so then your parents stayed in New York.

In Forest Hills, yes.

The rest of their lives?

Yes.

And your father worked?

He became a stockbroker. And I remember, he was one of the first hundred, or whatever, to be admitted into the New York Stock Exchange. This had to be back in the '50s. And he did very well. He researched companies, and invested for himself and for other people.

And he invested in this little company that had something to do with technology and computers, which was IBM. So IBM, as a matter of fact, traveled through my father, through my mother, and came to me. They weren't worth all that much by the time they came to me. So he did quite well.

And I also remember, we had a little candy store at the corner, walking there every night to get the evening paper so he could see. Eventually, we had a ticker tape in our basement. Yeah.

Any other stories about them or your--

I know my mother took sleeping pills. She couldn't sleep. She was having trouble sleeping. Because for many years, when I was first born she didn't know whether her own parents were alive or dead. And she had her own fears, which I think were exaggerated because of this situation.

And my father's paranoia was certainly exaggerated-- maybe not. Maybe he would have been like that anyway. So he said-- I've written a lot about this. I've written a lot of this material in two books of poetry, that talk about this, exactly how he kept saying, never invest in real estate. It's not liquid.

And the one illegal thing he did was keeping a bar of gold under his pillow. It's not allowed, at least at that time, to keep gold. Because you couldn't-- it wasn't liquid. You couldn't make a getaway. And that mentality of making a getaway is something that I grew up with.

Also-- these are just little things that are sort of interesting. He never believed in showing exactly what you have. So our house in Forest Hills, it was outside the gardens, which were the Forest Hills Garden, which were segregated-- no Jews, no Blacks, no anything.

It looked like a decent house, but you would never know what it looked like inside. And there was this snobbery. But I imagine that pre-existed the war, with the Eastern European Jews. And the two communities, Forest Hills and Kew Gardens, were in their own way segregated. With the-- as I said, the Hungarians, and the Czechs, and the Germans, and the Austrians, and all that in Forest Hills, and the Poles, and the Russians, and the rest over there in Kew Gardens.

So there was only German spoken in my house. I don't think we had an American-- I don't know if it was on purpose, but they didn't have any-- they had American acquaintances, but they never came to the house. Or I don't know if they went there or not.

So it was a fairly closed society, which they called [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] which is the whole circus, because it was so-- the morality, and the ethics, and all that was so different from 1950s America and Ozzie and Harriet. There were love affairs, and divorces, and parties, and lots of-- a big social life, even during the week, as I call it, a school night. But that was the life there.

I know that my father loaned money to a lot of people and helped a lot of people out, which you would think would not quite be like his character, but he did. And he always said, this country's been very good to us. You have to pay all your taxes. And you have to this-- you know. He was very black and white.

How do you think their experience affected the way they raised you and your sister.

Hey, listen, I was raised in 19th century Vienna. The discipline was such, children are to be seen when they're clean, et cetera. And my father was-- well, let's just call him Prussian military, although he never was in the military-- very, very strict, at least my father was. And my mother was less so.

Do you think-- I was asking in the sense that they had to escape to leave, did that affect how they raised you. Do you think that influenced?

You mean were they overly cautious for us--

Protective.

--and protective?

Yeah. Or did they encourage you to be independent and your sister?

Well, the assumption at that time was you're a Heymann girl, you're supposed to behave a certain way. And you have to have the best education. And you have to go to the best colleges, et cetera, et cetera. And you're going to marry someone who's rich, who will take care of you, and you'll be the perfect wife. There were two girls. So that was how we were raised.

But you don't think that was influenced by the fact they had to escape.

It's hard to say, isn't it? I don't know. There were little things, like in terms of movies, my mother didn't want to see sad movies. She always said life is sad enough. Of course, I love sad movies. I had to grow up opposite.

My father died when I was 14. And he left an extremely complicated will. You had to admire the way he was thinking it through. Like, OK, at 21-- and we were 14-- up until the age of 21, whatever my mother-- you know. But when we were 21, we came into money. Then when we were 28.

So 21, we might be married. 28 we might be divorced. And 35 we might be buying a house with second husband. I don't know, but I'm sure this was the way he was thinking. So very-- that we would be taken care of.

And in terms of being taken care of, that was how he showed his love. I don't remember one hug. And my sister, I think he felt closer to her for many reasons. I'm not saying-- I don't know if he hugged her either. But she was more, apparently, or supposedly more mathematically minded. And her personality was totally different.

I was a live-- I mean, I just was like mercury. I was all over the place. And I kind of always had the feeling he could deal with her easier. I was like my mother, more exaggerated. But he did hit us, me in particular. Because I was fresh.

The reason I was fresh is because I was proud. And I didn't even know I was fresh when I was being fresh. But again, it's hard to say whether that would have been the case anyhow.

Did you did you tell your friends about your parents history when you were young?

I don't think so. But I know that a lot of immigrant families, the children are kind of ashamed of them, or ashamed of their parents, or ashamed of the house. I never felt that. I always thought it made me exotic. But no-- no, I don't think I talked about it with them.

When did your mother pass away?

Quite recently, February 2011. I was just so glad-- not 2011-- 2001. So I was glad that she didn't live for that.

Yeah.

That would have-- the thing about my mother is that she-- as she said, she was a worrier. But she never worried about the big, important stuff. She worried about the little stuff that didn't really make a difference. And I think that was intensified.

Like there was just a reluctance-- I can't blame her really-- to go in certain directions in conversation or even thought. Because I think it was just too vivid for her.

You're relating this to her experiences in Europe--

Yeah, I--

--and having to escape.

Yes. And because of her parents, and her family, and the whole thing, that it just really intensified what may have been a quality anyway, which was a kind of anxiety, but it became quite pronounced.

When the Eichmann trial took place, did your mother say anything?

No.

She didn't talk about that?

Uh-uh.

Did you feel any connection when the Eichmann trial?

What year was that?

When was that? In the '60s-'70s.

No. But I tell you what I did-- because I think I was older. Who's that guy who came to the States. His name was Dem something or other--

Demjanjuk.

Yes. And how he had kind of passed. I did kind of follow that. Also, my stepfather, who was also a member of [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], his brother went to South America and Argentina. And I know there was a big community of Jews there. And I had a cousin, who they made their lives in Mexico. So we met them maybe once or twice.

I just remember I was the one person who I knew growing up who had hardly any family. I had a grandmother and I had an uncle. And somehow distant were Ilse and Hans Boss. She had been experimented on. They never had children. They met in the camps. Really, very nice people. And they-- I think my father helped them out a lot.

And he helped my uncle out when he came to this country. But Ilse and Hans were about-- that was about it, and my uncle, and my grandmother. And she lived with us till I was about 11. And then at that time, what they had were people who took in older boarders. So she lived a bus ride away with this-- these people who took in other older people.

You mentioned stepfather, so your mother remarried.

My mother remarried.

When was that?

Let's see, '59, I graduated. Like '58, '57. No that's, not right. I remember, she married before the year was out. Big scandal.

So my father, I think, died in '53, yes. And in August-- and they wanted to make a trip back to Czechoslovakia, as a matter of fact. And she said she wasn't going to travel with him unless they were married. And so they got married in May or June to make the trip. I went with them to--

This is your--

I went to Europe.

So you're 10 years old?

That sounds-- or 11. No, I had to be older. Maybe my father died in '53-- at age 53 in 1957, sounds more like it, because I was 14 Yeah, sorry. So in 1957. And in 1958, they got married. And in terms of their lives, they went to Europe every year, Switzerland, et cetera, and stayed about six weeks, a month, six weeks.

And then at 11 was my sister-- well, I was 11, our first trip to Europe. They put us in a Swiss boarding school for a month. And then-- to learn French, supposedly. And then we met up with them. I can't believe they sent us alone by train from Switzerland to Austria, but we did.

And I think they always-- no matter, they always felt Europe was their home. Even though he was extremely patriotic.

Your stepfather's name?

No, this was my father.

Oh, your Father, sorry.

Yeah. My stepfather's name was Richard Glauber. And he had two daughters with his first wife. And he had tried to-- he had made an expedition to Palestine-- he was a pediatrician-- to see if he could live there. And he just found the language so impossibly hard that when he came back, he came to the States.

I remember him saying that he was in a rented apartment with I don't know what. It was a sweltering hot summer. He was in his undershirt, his underwear, listening to TV all day, trying to learn English.

So how do you think your parents' experience affected you? Would you be a different person today?

Absolutely, there's no question about it.

If they--

No, no, no, no, there's no question about it. Because there were a couple of little things, like I couldn't stand Hansel and Gretel, because of the oven. And because I was so curious, I was really curious to know all the unspoken stuff.

And I say there's always one in one family, I really felt like, in a way, I was holding the history because no one else was. It certainly had to do with the subject matter of my poetry, which is very much affected by that. And also, because it's astonishing to me-- I think I can be funny too-- but how, in a way, obsessed I am with apocalypse-- I mean, with terrible things happening.

Like, I never imagine things are going to turn out for the better. Of course, my father said, always imagine the worst, that way you won't be disappointed. I think that was a huge mistake. Because it made me always imagine the worst.

And like right now, OK, so I worked my whole life. And for the last 10 years, before I retired, I was a speech writer at AARP, many issues. So after I retired, I thought, OK, I don't want to teach. I've taught enough. I've taught all the way through, even when I was working.

And I've written, and this and that. So I became, and am to this day, which has only been two years, like obsessed with Iraq, and Pakistan, and the terrorists. And I go to everything having to do with that subject. There are many stuff downtown, think tanks, that are talking about it. I'm there.

So, I mean, it's-- I don't know if it's linked or not. But for some reason, going there and finding out these horrible things makes me-- it objectifies it in such a way that I can kind of live with it, sort of.

And you think this is a result of your family history?

I do. I think I may also have been anxious or whatever, but I don't think I'd be thinking about those things. I do.

Do you discuss that with your sister?

My sister has a kind of amnesia about our childhood. So I say, do you remember when-- I don't remember that. I said, you know, I used to think such and such about Uncle Paul. She says, what are you talking about? So it's like-- but she became interested for five minutes when the foundation people were contacting her. But it doesn't-- she doesn't live it. I think it's always there for me at some level.

So she doesn't talk about the fact that she was--

No, and she knows so little. Although, I might be surprised-- we're going to spend a week together shortly, and I might be surprised by the things she does remember, which have nothing to do with what I remember. So we'll see.

Because she was older.

She was older.

And she was closer to the European experience than you were. Obviously, she was born there.

Yeah, but she was like a year--

She was an infant.

An infant.

Yeah.

And the other thing is, through my life I've always lived in two worlds. It's like never putting all your eggs in one basket. Like, I had-- and it was really like a kind of split life. Even when I was working, I had my poetry life, my poetry career. When I was having my poetry career, I was teaching. And so it was always like I wanted always to have an escape hatch. So that if something went wrong here, I could move there.

And the other thing is that whatever sustenance, or support, or-- I didn't get it at home. I just-- I got it from school. I got it from-- through education or whatever. And so it made me very-- also, you can't tell here, but I think I survived my family because I was very funny. And whenever I felt fires starting, as it were, I would just start being very funny.

Yeah, to protect yourself, you mean.

To protect them too.

Oh, protect them.

Yeah.

Tell me about your education.

Well, I went to PS 101. And after high-- I went to Forest Hills High, home of Simon and Garfunkel. They graduated a couple of years ahead of me, and some other famous people. And from there I went to Mount Holyoke.

It was a given that I would go to a girls school, because-- and my father was dead then, but it was the Ivy-- it was the Ivy League. Majored in philosophy, minored in art history, and was writing all along, but didn't claim it.

I knew I wanted to be a writer, but I never-- it sounded too kind of arrogant. So even in my college-- my high school yearbook, I said journalist. I didn't want to be a journalist.

So after Mount Holyoke-- let's see, where do I start? I went to my first graduate school, which was Yeshiva University in New York. Because I wanted-- they had a special program for teaching people who wanted to teach in disadvantaged schools, education for the disadvantaged. So I taught in Spanish Harlem.

And then after that I got another degree to become-- in psychology of school learning. That was to be a reading specialist because people were tracked-- kids were tracked according to reading and there were smart kids who couldn't read. So I did that.

And then I got my MFA here. And I say I have recidivism. I always keep going back there. But I wrote a--

Here, being where?

School.

No, no-- where'd you get your MFA?

My MFA was Myra, American University.

American University.

Right.

And so currently, I'm visiting writer at American University. And I taught there for a while, just as an adjunct. But at the DC JCC and the Rockville JCC I taught. And also, I did some private work when my kids were young as a reading specialist.

Do you tell people about your-- when you're teaching in a professional situation, do you ever talk about your parents' background or anything? Do you bring it in?

Sometimes I do, depending on the books we were reading. Do you know Tova Penny? Well, she's fascinated-- that's all she reads. I mean, she reads everything there is to read about it. And I'm not like that. I'm sort of like that, but in that sense, I'm my mother. I haven't read all the literature.

And it's like, I'm there. I remember when I wanted to change jobs and I interviewed at the Holocaust Museum. And I thought, I just don't think I could come here every day. I couldn't. And so, it's like I'm very aware of it. Like, I'm very aware that I'm Jewish, but I've never been observant.

And I'm very-- I'm trying to think of the books I've chosen. Well, when I was in the Rockville JCC, I may have chosen

some books. It was supposed to be by women authors, where this was the subject. And, of course, I see the films.

When your parents were still alive and came to this country, did they have any kind of religious observance? Or they were still very--

No, my father only said if you want to not go to school for Yom Kippur, you kippur, Yom Kippur, you better go to temple. You can't stay home just to stay home.

But there were no holidays observed in the home, Passover?

Well, oh, yeah, we did Passover.

Oh, you did.

My grandmother, as I say, she was kosher, although we didn't keep kosher, except for bacon. She loved bacon. But no.

What are your feelings about Israel?

Well, I very powerful feelings about Israel, very complicated feelings about Israel. But I'm not sure I would have those feelings were I not-- did I not get involved with an Israeli poet. And get involved in the translation. And I go there, at this point I go there a lot. I'm trying desperately to learn Hebrew.

I have very complicated feelings about Israel, like I think the basic question is, does it have a right to exist? And once you say yes, then that comes along with so many other issues. I'm very bothered by people who have very strong opinions about it without having seen it, or been there, or seen how small it is, and how close everything is, and to know what they live with every day.

And I'm very sorry for the generation that's aging that knew about the ideals that Israel had, and are now very materialistic, and Americanized, and the hatred. Because like, when the-- Moshe Dor, who I--

He's the poet that you've been translating.

Yes. I mean, he learned Arabic in high school, or to a certain extent. So it was a whole different world. And it's sad to see it go. And it's sad to see it-- the people of his generation are very--

Again, do you feel that your connection to Israel--

Is stronger?

No, is influenced by your parents' history?

I know my father bought bonds and all that stuff and supported Israel. But I don't know. I never went with them. We always went to Europe. But I think-- what's the word-- philosophically speaking, he was certainly in favor.

But both my sister and I married-- our first marriage was to non-Jews. And the rabbi-- we did belong to a reform-- well, I went to Sunday school. So I know my Bible stories, which is more than I can say for most of the people today. And I knew that-- he said he wouldn't marry my sister because her husband to be was not Jewish.

And for me, the more important thing was that he not be American. So my first marriage was to someone Dutch, who came to this country when he was 11. And he had blond hair, and blue eyes, and my mother thought-- first thought was, he's a Nazi.

Why was it important to you that he not be an American?

I didn't think anyone American could understand my terrain. I often said that-- an American poet asked me, well, is your poetry American? Is it Jewish? And I said, no, I don't think I hide that I'm Jewish. You'll be able to know. But it's not American.

He says, what, you don't feel connected to Walt Whitman and Emily-- I said not at all. My landscape is the Brothers Grimm, those woods. That's my inner landscape. And I don't think that-- or under certain circles, I mean, Moshe has a foreign accent.

So like, it just feels like it's a bigger world. I feel I need to live in a bigger world. Not that people who aren't American live in a bigger world, but just something that's broader, more international.

How did you raise your children, as Jews?

Well, now, my older son is observant. And he married someone Jewish. And she was bar mitzvahed when she was in her 20s. So you get that story. And the husband who's the father of-- was the father of my kids-- that's number two, a psychiatrist, but we're divorced. And he--

Was he Jewish?

Yes.

I thought, well, OK, now I'll do the right thing. But that didn't work out either, for 18 years. But anyway-- Jewish doctor. But he was observant. And he would go to Kol Nidrei, et cetera. And I guess I'd have to come along.

And I just did it. But it didn't really mean anything to me. But it did seem to mean something to my older son. My younger son married someone non-Jewish. But they're everything. If you ask him, do you believe in God? He'll say-- and now I'm going to start saying this because I like it so much-- yes, but my God is the God of infinite complexity. I said, boy, that sounds good. I like that a lot. So I can acknowledge that God.

How do you feel about the Holocaust Museum being in Washington, DC?

I like it. We knew-- God, what was his name? His last name?

Weinberg.

Weinberg, yeah we used to go out to-- Moshe knew him from Israel. I think it's fantastic.

Even though the war took place in Europe?

Well, you know--

You feel it's appropriate that it be here in Washington, a museum be here?

Was it the first? Because I know they have one-- all over the world--

Right.

--they have Holocaust museums.

Right, they do.

Yeah. No, I have no-- the more, the better, especially now, with the people dying off. The one thing that made me feel uncomfortable is-- and that's only as I've gotten older-- is there's so many Holocausts, so many other slaughters. I don't know if they've ever been six million. I don't know how many Armenians died, or Rwandans, or any of the others.

So the word Holocaust, to have it, it's like appropriated for the genocide. But as I recall, there are parts of the museum which--

Yes, they have a Committee on Conscience that deals--

Yes.

--with the--

Right.

Yeah.

I was in Paris not so long ago. And I was wandering around. And before I knew it, I was-- I didn't plan on it, I was in front of the Holocaust Museum that's in Paris. Never knew there was one. And I thought, look, I have a day or two in Paris, do I want to do this? And then I say, God put me here, the God of infinite-- he had me standing here. I think I have to go. So I spent the day.

What was your reaction?

Very interesting. You know, the French, they were not so great. They had concentration camps of their own and very antisemitic and all of that. It seems to me that the Holocaust Museum there concentrated on the French people who saved people's lives.

There was a map, but the general impression, the most space were these very moving videos. And by the way, that to me is the most moving part of the Holocaust Museum. Like, I went through that museum and didn't cry. But when I came to those--

Testimonies.

--testimonies, I found them so unbelievably moving. So they had some people who went back to the French farmers or whoever who saved them. And the building itself was very impressive. They were taking schoolkids around.

Do your grandchildren-- well, how old are they? They're still too young.

Five and two and a half. Yeah.

Yeah.

So no, but they go to synagogue already. They belong to a congregation, my older, the first born. And to me, the most important holiday is Passover. I really-- I don't go to services, although I used to like to hear the shofar.

I'm trying to think of the principle-- the principle. I remember when I was going to-- when I was younger, I did go-- I did go to services, because I stayed home from school. I was Jewish. I think it was the Abraham-Isaac story that turned me off. I still don't know how to cope with that.

And I was about-- I'd say I was about 11 or 12 when I thought, no. I mean, and even n metaphor I don't quite understand, obviously. But the principle behind atonement for sins, I remember thinking, well, I haven't sinned, I haven't sinned, what have I done?

But then that one line, for being stiff necked, I thought, OK, maybe I've been stiff necked. But I think the principle of it is it's very important.

I think you've answered the question I was going to ask, which is has the world learned any lessons from the Holocaust, but you obviously answered in the negative to that, there still is so much genocide.

Still. It's just-- it's, I think as you get older, and you see right, wrong, gray, white, black, white, everything is so complicated, becomes so complicated, that it almost becomes impossible to make a moral judgment. Because everyone has something.

I do think-- I do think that Israel still, despite everything, stands on more of a morally high ground than the Palestinians. I do. Even though, by no means, are they perfect. They have terrible PR. And people are so uninformed.

But the recent incident of beating up Arab youth, it's hard to-- it's hard to say.

Are you-- if you meet someone who is a child of a refugee, do you feel a connection to that person?

Absolutely. As a matter of fact, one of the causes that I used to give to, not just Jewish, it was Refugees International. Because I see those people leaving their countries with what? So I do feel that they have experiences that are quite unique.

And you, yourself, personally feel a connection?

I feel like, as I said, I have one foot in this country and one foot over there. I really would doubt that my sister feels that way. She's in California. They have no history. I'm exaggerating. But yeah.

Now, I think that my parents adjusted with minimum discomfort compared to many other stories. But my mother always said anytime she did see someone selling sausages in New York City, she would think of her father. So-- you know, they say, remember, remember, remember. I mean, even that doesn't prevent, sad to say.

Yeah. Do you have any future messages for your grandchildren? They are young now, but when they listen to this in the years ahead, is there any message you'd like to leave them?

Well, I will say one thing. When I was growing up and I felt this burden-- I felt a terrific burden, even though I always felt really strongly that I didn't want to burden my children. And so I talked very little about it myself, about the Holocaust and all the experiences.

I think when they got older, I started to a little more. Because I feel probably how my parents felt, very protective. I mean, how do you grow up with this? I don't know what young children do with this kind of information. I mean, they should know about it, but when?

That's one of my main concerns. So in terms of my grandchildren-- in terms of my grandchildren, I want them to know that it happened and there's a written record of it happening. And I just can't expect them to feel as connected to it as I do.

But on the other hand, if they're connected to me, they will be connected to it. It's a big world out there. I think that they should know what they want to know about it and kind of stretch a little.

My oldest granddaughter is starting kindergarten in a few days. Do I want her to know that there are people out there who do these kinds of things?

I remember, in terms of when I found out about my cousin who had these medical experiments, I didn't want-- I mean, I guess, I didn't want a picture it all, but somehow-- so that a lot of my-- like, my mother, maybe it's just been pushing the imagery away. Because the imagery is so disturbing.

Well, is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't covered? Anything else you wanted to talk about?

Well, interestingly enough, I'm not-- I haven't gone back and traced my roots or done genealogies. I know that when I was in Israel I was very upset there was no trace. But of course, you have to fill out all the papers and do all that. And same here, same in the Holocaust Museum here.

And so while I do want it, I somehow am not doing the work for it. I was going to say something. Now, there was a relative in my family who did do all of that. And that was the husband of this [?Gertie?] Fleischman, who was a survivor. She survived with my uncle.

And her brother became one of the Czech pilots. Remember, at the beginning of the war, there was a Czech Air Force? They were very good.

Yes.

Anyway, they somehow made it out to England and became part of the London, but they didn't let them fly. So then he went to Israel and started up the Maccabiah, the athletic games.

Maccabiah games.

Yeah, Maccabiah games. And he did do some kind of family tree on my mother's side. So I have that somewhere. And then, as I said, this man who contacted me some years ago, who was the bunk mate of my uncle-- he must be dead by now-- I sent all the stuff to my uncle's kids, to my sister, because this had to do with my uncle. And no one followed up on it.

So we were in correspondence a while. And he sent me tons of papers on the laws in Germany. And how they-- like, when they first began, like a veterinarian couldn't treat a Jewish dog. What they saved, it's all with that-- the record keeping stuff. So there's some people who make it their lives. And I guess I haven't, but it's definitely there.

Do you have any desire to find out any more about Aristides de Sousa Mendes or not?

Yes, I'm curious about him. Because he really-- he got punished after the war.

Yes, he did. He did.

I don't remember in what way.

Well, his government, yeah-- he was in poverty when he died.

Yeah. I think I remember--

He lost his job for doing that. Because he issued all these visas.

Quite extraordinary. Against the orders.

Against the orders.

OK, so this was Portugal. But there was someone else from Portugal, in another part of-- in another country who did the same-- who did the same thing.

Have you been to Portugal?

Just once.

But at that time, you didn't know.

No, I didn't know this.

Do you have any desire to go to Portugal--

And to find all this?

--and find out?

Not really. Listen, it was hard enough to get me to Theresienstadt. I was in Prague, limited period of time. And I kept saying, should I go? Should I not go? Should I go? Should I not go? And I mean, really, it was fighting an enormous thing to go.

I felt I should have gone to Teplice and seen the streets where my mother grew up and all of that, although I'm sure it's changed. But still, I didn't go to Teplice. It's 10 minutes from Prague. So I did go there. I had no desire to see Auschwitz or any of the sites and make the pilgrimage. Why? Why?

Is this something you live with every day?

Yes. I mean, it's hard for me to live in the moment, which is I know the best way to live. And the feeling of menace, even when there isn't any. In my general surroundings, I feel safe. But I-- and just I don't know if this is the Holocaust, maybe I'd be there anyway, but I really feel this Earth has come-- is very close to the end of its life span. It's not funny.

And I worry for my grandkids in that way. Because human nature is human nature. I remember once I was being interviewed. And my interviewer, who was Black, said do you feel like the Jews were especially--

Singled out.

--singled out or whatever. And I said look, it's an accident of fate. It could have been anything. It's an action of faith that I'm born Jewish. It's an accident of fate that Hitler went after the Jews. It could have been this. It could have been that. There's no limit in terms of what could have happened, what did or didn't happen. I don't know if I put it quite like that.

I don't feel especially-- what's the word-- righteous For. My people having gone through this and survived. I mean, look, I don't feel that way. But I just feel that life is-- life is-- you're vulnerable. And the best thing to do sometimes is to deny, although I would have been scandalized by my saying that in my flagrant youth. Yeah, because otherwise, how could you live? But I try.

And to be remotely cheerful and good natured, which was my livelihood when I was younger. I mean, that's how I made it through all this.

I do remember when I went to my stepfather, who was a doctor. I was around 18 or 19. I said, I'm very depressed. And he went, you, depressed? And he laughed. And I mean, I think a lot of people would say that-- you, depressed?

So your poetry is your way of expressing--

The depression.

No, no, no.

There's so much work about it. Even in disguise there's a lot of work. But I write about it in terms of my-- it's always in terms of my mother's experience. I have a lot in there-- now that I think of it, you'd know more if you read just five poems about how the war affected my father and how he-- well, I don't want to paraphrase the poem, but how we always heard boots coming.

And my mother, and how that affected how they parented me. It's in the poetry. And how I understood it. And how I've

had to come to terms with it.

Mm-hmm.