

OK. And then I'll start asking you some questions, OK?

Fine.

OK, OK. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection Interview with Vera Levine in New Jersey, conducted by Gail Schwartz in Washington D.C. On February 7th, 2013. This interview is being conducted over the phone. What is your full name?

Vera F. Levine.

And what does that middle initial stand for?

My maiden name--

Which is--

Friedlander.

Friedlander is--

Yes.

--your maiden name. All right, let's talk a little bit about your family. Your parents, what were your parents' names?

My father was Ernst. And my mother was Ellie.

Mm-hmm. Where were you born? And when were you born?

I was born in Berlin, Germany September, 26.

September 19, 26.

Yes.

What day? What day in September were you born?

The 23rd.

September 23rd, 1926. All right, how long had your family been in Berlin? Your parents or even--

Well my father--

Even farther back.

[LAUGHTER]

My father's family came from an old Jewish family. My mother was non-Jewish. My mother converted prior to marriage.

Mm-hmm.

My--

What was her maiden name? What was her name?

Seifert, S-E-I-F-E-R-T.

Mm-hmm.

Her parents were working people.

Mm-hmm.

My grandmother came to Berlin as a cook. My grandfather worked in a company that made bronze items.

Mm-hmm.

He died very young. He died at 55. I adored him.

Hmm. Mm-hmm.

My, [CLEARS THROAT] excuse me, my father's family, as I said, was an old German family, totally assimilated, sort of very comfortably off, very cultural. My father's uncle was at the Berlin Stock Exchange and was--

Hmm.

--ousted from there in the very beginning of 1933.

Right, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

I was the only child.

OK.

Overprotected.

[LAUGHS]

First grandchild.

What kind of work did-- your father worked on the Stock Exchange, or what did your father actually do?

No, my father was not-- my father was in the family business. They had a-- what do you call it? A fabric store in those days.

Mm-hmm.

This was for men only.

OK.

In those days customers bought their fabric and then took it to--

To a dressmaker--

--a tailor.

--yeah, tailor, yeah.

But that was before the ready-mades--

Mm-hmm.

--became popular.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

My father was the youngest son--

Mm-hmm.

--of two. My uncle was as a physician. And my father worked in the family business.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Did you have a large, extended family on both sides, on your mother and your--

Not really. My mother had one sister--

Mm-hmm.

--who drowned as a child.

Oh, oh my.

Yes, she was evacuated--

Hmm.

--during the First World War.

Hmm.

Into a very nice estate. And the children's companion or nurse was ill. So anyway, four, four girls. They were on their own, and they were told not to go near the lake.

Oh.

And of course they did.

Oh, God.

They took a boat, and it capsized. And two of the girls drowned.

Mm. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

So, there was little family on that side. My--

Mm-hmm.

My father had just the one brother. My paternal grandfather came from a larger family.

Mm-hmm.

And he came to Berlin as a young man. He was much more educated in religion than the other side of the family, as I say. The other side was very, very assimilated.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

What religion was your mother's family?

Lutheran I believe.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, so what part of Berlin did you live in when--

In the suburb Pankow. That's P-A-N-K-O-W.

OK, OK. And tell me a little bit about your childhood. You said you were an only child. And your mother had converted. So, were you raised Jewishly in any way?

Marginally. I always thought of Hitler as having made Jews more Jewish, I guess.

[LAUGHTER]

But, I mean, I do remember the Seders at my grandfather's house.

Uh-huh.

And my mother always lit Friday night candles.

Really, uh-huh.

As a matter of fact, an old, family friend would always say my mother was more Jewish-- [LAUGHS]

--than most of her Jewish relatives.

[LAUGHTER]

My father always made Kiddush. And I wish I had had the sense to record it. Because it's a beautiful voice.

Hmm.

And it's a wonderful, wonderful job.

Oh, yeah.

So this was a routine Friday night affair.

Uh-huh, uh-huh. Did your family belong to a synagogue?

Oh, yes.

Uh-huh.

As a matter of fact, my grandfather was very active in his synagogue. He was responsible for initiating a youth service.

Hmm.

I remember Simchas Torah.

Mm-hmm.

--him packaging up little bags of candy and that's--

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

--for the children.

Mm-hmm.

He really, quite active. However, in those days they still had a maid. The maid would be sent to the butcher to by the ham so nobody else would know.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah, and tell me about your neighborhood. Was it a Jewish neighborhood that you lived in?

As a matter of fact, Pankow really was. But we moved away from there when I was about seven. However, later I found out that there was a Jewish orphanage and apparently, quite a number of Jews living in Pankow.

Mm-hmm.

But at the time I wasn't aware of it.

Of course, of course.

I was one of two Jewish children in the elementary school.

Oh, mm-hmm.

And that brought up kind of interesting things.

Such as?

Well, we had to bring a coin to school to go and see a movie. And my parents kind of thought it would be one of the Grimm's Fairy Tales.

Right. It was the story of-- was it Horst Wessel? The--

Oh, oh.

--and the conflict between the Nazis and communists.

Oh, uh-huh, uh-huh.

And my parents were kind of horrified afterwards. But--

Mm-hmm.

--I told them about it.

How old were you then?

Probably seven.

Oh my, oh my. So you were still living in Pankow then?

Oh, yes, yes.

And why did your parents move when you were seven?

Ah, I guess I must have been eight or nine. Oh, for one thing, it was an economic move. Because, you know that was that time of we had the depression here.

Mm-hmm, right.

And my mother, as a matter of fact, took work, she worked at home. She was a fabulous dressmaker's. In those days, you know, you had to go as-- what do they they call them? You know, to learn the trade.

Mm-hmm.

And she worked for--

An apprentice? You mean she was an apprentice?

No, well, when we lived-- after we moved from Pankow, when things got tough--

Mm-hmm.

She brought work home. I remember her--

Mm-hmm.

--doing hand beading on gowns.

Hmm, hmm.

Always a white napkin on her lap to--

Oh, my.

--make it easier, you know to see-- [CHUCKLES]

Oh.

And always just before sunset there would be an hour for her to play with me. That was our hour.

Oh, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And so I think that was the primary reason why we moved.

Was for--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah, yeah.

As a matter of fact, my last few months in elementary school I travel by subway like maybe three or four steps so I wouldn't have to change schools. It wasn't worthwhile.

Oh, when you--

It was the last year of elementary school.

I see. You mean when you moved-- and where-- tell me again where you moved to from Pankow?

It was Berlin proper.

Oh, Berlin proper, OK.

Yes.

Uh-huh. But you continued to go back to your old school--

Yes.

--is what you're saying?

And in retrospect, I realize my parents-- I mean, I was relatively safe there. And I guess they didn't want to move me for a few months into a different school, not knowing what this would bring.

Yeah, cause Hitler--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--was in power already.

Oh, yes--

Yeah.

--yes, yes.

Were you aware when he-- I mean, I know you were quite young, of course. Were you aware when he came into power in 33?

Oh, yes, yes. I guess it was my seventh birthday when we were waiting for--

Hmm.

--my closest friend to come. In those days the mothers came also--

Mm-hmm.

--to the birthday party's.

Mm-hmm.

And one mother took my mother aside and said, Mrs. Friedlander, I don't think Mrs. Meyer will come--

Oh.

--because you're Jewish. And that was my first--

Experience.

--awareness, yes.

Yes. What did it mean to a young child to hear that? Do you have any memory of your feelings then?

I think just shock that my closest friend wouldn't come to my birthday party.

Yeah, yeah. Mm-hmm.

You know from that time on I grew up quite quickly.

Yeah, yeah.

We all did.

In just in those beginning years, in 33, 34, did you have any other incidences like that, any other experiences?

No.

No, yeah. What about at school? Was there any antisemitic--

No.

--experiences there?

No, that's exactly why my parents chose to have me go by subway for the last few months, you know, to--

Uh-huh.

--keep me at that school. Because there was no overt antisemitism.

Was it was a coed school or just girls?

Oh, no, no, [LAUGHS] not in those days.

It was just girls?

Just girls. Just girls.

Just girls, uh-huh. And was there religious training at all? Did you have to stop during the day for religious training?

No.

No, OK.

I do remember though, in the morning when teacher came in, you greeted her--

Mm-hmm.



--with "Heil Hitler".

Oh. And did you do that?

But of course.

Oh, OK, uh-huh. And your parents d--

In the beginning I didn't even know what it was all about.

Right, right. So your parents didn't say anything about that to you?

No.

Yeah, yeah. Well, how would you describe yourself as a child? Were you independent? Or you w--

Uh.

I know you are quite young, obviously.

Overprotected.

Uh-huh.

Quiet. Sort of easily scared.

Uh-huh, yeah.

But otherwise, quite normal, I think.

[LAUGHS] Did you like sports? Did you do any kind of sports?

Very reluctantly as a matter of fact. My father enrolled me in a Jewish sport race, Bar Kochba. But this was quite a bit later. I was not great on sports.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. OK. But obviously, you said you had-- you were one of two Jewish children in the school. So--

Yes.

--your friends were not Jewish. Most of your friends were not Jewish, right?

No, no.

Uh-huh. And you would go to their house?

Oh, yes.

And play, and there was no problem with their parents except for that other, the birthday party incident, yeah.

And that--

Yeah.

--that was the only, only incident.

Yeah, yeah.

And I assume you spoke German at home?

Yes, of course.

OK.

[LAUGHTER]

All right, so now, Hitler comes into power in 33. And you said things started to change. And then you moved into Berlin itself.

Yes.

And, but you went to the same school. And then--

Yes.

--did you notice anything in the city, any changes in the city once you moved there and Hitler was getting stronger and stronger?

No.

Any restrictions?

Well, well wait a minute. I have to change that a little bit.

OK.

I do remember actually, repetitive dreams about the Hitler parades at night. I in my dream, as I was going home, in the street parallel to where I was, there was the parade with singing and torch lights. And that dream occurred a number of times.

Mm-hmm.

So that I'm still very, very much aware of it. I remember--

Mm-hmm.

--it as though it was yesterday. Oh my, yeah.

So, and the discomfort until I got into the house--

Mm-hmm.

--the apartment houses used to be locked at 8 o'clock.

Mm-hmm.

So I always had to be sure that made it before 8:00 because I didn't have a key for the apartment house.

Uh-huh, mm-hmm.

So there was, I guess, there was fear in me.

Yeah.

And the other thing I do remember-- and that was really when we moved into the center of Berlin was the large swastika flags out of the windows everywhere. And to this day, I have a dislike for putting flags out.

Hmm, mm-hmm.

It must stem from that--

Yeah.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah.

--the only reason why I should feel that way.

What did the symbol of the swastika mean to you? Did it have any special meaning?

Oh, hate and fear.

Yeah.

The interesting thing was that in Germany, people who looked slightly Jewish or were dark complexion--

Mm-hmm.

--would generally wear a swastika button in their suits. That's to make sure that nobody--

Oh, would misunder-- [LAUGHS] misconstrue that they were Jewish.

Yep.

Oh my, yeah, yeah.

Did you ever see Hitler?

No.

OK, mm-hmm. But you saw, as you say, the parades you saw.

Yes, the parades, the constant parades.

Yeah, yeah.

And always at night and always with their torches lit.

Yeah, yeah. So, then you're traveling by yourself to school. And then the next change was what?

The next change was my grandfather dying.

Yeah.

He had been in the hospital and was supposed to come home the following day, and died. Now, what I remember was, it's supposedly was some bladder problem. I assume it was prostate cancer.

Oh, my. Mm-hmm.

But in those days, I didn't even know they existed, a prostate, [LAUGHS]

Yeah, right, of course, mm-hmm.

And, as I say, I was always shielded. And I was not at home. My father belonged to a rowing club.

Mm-hmm.

And I was spending the summer there, I suppose, because we had one room there. And I never was brought back to the city for the funeral. Again, you know, they shielded children from such things.

Right, right. What was your grandfather's name?

Julius.

Julius Friedlander, right?

Yes.

Mm-hmm.

Do you know I don't-- come to think of it, I don't even remember my maternal grandfather's name.

Uh-huh. [CHUCKLES]

Isn't that strange?

Yeah, it'll come to you. It'll come to you.

Probably not because he was just Opi, you know? [LAUGHS]

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So now when you were in Berlin itself, besides the parades, did you experience any anti-Semitic incidents?

You know--

And seeing the flags, you know, and.

You know, Berlin was the capital. And it had definite advantages for us Jews. In smaller towns everybody knew exactly who the Jew was.

Mm-hmm.

There was-- well, until Kristallnacht.

Yeah, yeah.

There wasn't that much overt--

Mm-hmm.

--stuff going on.

Mm-hmm.

Don't forget we had the-- Berlin had the Olympic games too.

Right, do you remember--

I can remember wat--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Do you remember that, those?

Yes, I do you remember it because I know one evening my mother and father took me there. This was before the games started to at it.

Mm-hmm.

To look at the,the--

The stadium?

The stadium.

Mm-hmm.

But actually, that's all I remember. I mean I've read a lot about it since. [LAUGHS]

Well, yeah, yeah, mm-hmm.

At the time I didn't remember it.

Mm-hmm.

But as I said, there was quite a bit of anonymity living in Berlin compared to living in a smaller town.

Mm-hmm.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

What about the book burning? Were you aware of that?

No.

No, what about restrictions, sitting on benches and parks, and things like that?

No.

OK. So you went-- you just continued your childhood, in a sense, commuting to school. And then you'd come home and what play with non-Jewish children? Or was that a new neighborhood a Jewish neighborhood? You knew--

No, it wasn't. And, oh, I didn't really finish what I was saying about my grandfather. When my grandfather died--

Mm-hmm.

--my grandmother [CLEARS THROAT] had been in this apartment--

Mm-hmm.

--from the day she was married.

Mm-hmm.

And it was considered that poor old me couldn't be expected to move. So we moved in--

Ah.

--to her place. And that was in central Berlin.

I see.

And after I was through with the elementary school, I went to Jewish secondary school.

Oh, you went to a Jewish school you said?

Yeah.

And how old were you then?

Must have been 10.

OK.

Because we didn't start a school until the age of six.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Four years there it must have been--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Right, right. And so, that continued on. And you, would you say your childhood was kind of a contented one up to that point? Or-- [LAUGHS]

Well, we were very, very aware of what was going on.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

My uncle was arrested twice.

Oh, oh. Your father's brother you mean?

My father's brother, the doctor--

The doctor--

--who helped us, too.

Yeah, mm-hmm.

Yeah, he was accused of, I know the German word for it, which I think meant that he had relations with gentile patients.

Yeah, yeah. What was his first name? Your uncle's first name?

Rudolph, Rudy.

Rudy, OK, mm-hmm. So now you're in the Jewish school. Do you remember what name it had?

Yeah, it was a Hamburger Strasse.

Mm-hmm.

Grosse Hamburger Strasse.

Hmm.

That's where one of the beautiful temples were.

Hmm, hmm, mm-hmm. And what street did you live on in Berlin?

Dirksen Strasse. That's D-I-R-C-K-S-E-N.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Big old apartment house.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Back entrance for trades people.

Mm-hmm. The number? Do you remember the number?

Yes, hold on a minute.

That's OK. [LAUGHS]

Oh, number five.

Number five, OK. So, you are now in the Jewish school. And were your parents the type to talk things over with you about what was happening in Germany to the Jews and--

No.

--Hitler? So, did you talk about it with your friends in the Jewish school?

Yes, and this was the beginning of the Great Exodus too, people leaving, or Jews leaving Germany in droves.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

I do remember, I guess I must been 11. I and three of my friends went to the Jewish board of education because [CHUCKLES] we objected to so many young teachers being dismissed.

Oh.

The young ones were the favorite ones. And we were told, and it made absolute sense to us. We were told that the younger teachers would have a better chance to emigrate--

Oh--

--than the older ones.

Yeah, yeah.

And we accepted it.

Mm-hmm.

And that was it.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And first of all, the nerve to go [LAUGHS] to the board of education. [LAUGHS]

Right, right, right. Do you remember being fearful? Or were you relaxed on the street when you were outside?

More relaxed than fearful, fearful when there were demonstrations--

Mm-hmm.

--that I happened to be close to. But, now I know, for instance, I had a friend, my very closest friend, who lived a distance away. And I had to go by subway. And I was very much aware of the fact that I had to be home at a certain time because my parents would be worried that something had happened to me.

Sure, yeah, yeah.

I remember being in the subway and almost wanting to push it, you know? [LAUGHS]

Mm-hmm.

If I was on the late side.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. But you went to school, and you played with friends? And sports?

Well, then, of course, it was all my Jewish friends from school.

Right, right.

And one lived very close to me.

Uh-huh, uh-huh.



And we would go back and forth to school together.

Yeah, so that continued what, till Kristallnacht? Or anything else between then and Kristallnacht that you can remember?

Well, it really continued until until I left.

No, I know. But I was going to then talk about Kristallnacht with you and--

Kristallnacht.

Yeah. [CLEARS THROAT]

I knew my mother was on the telephone to this girlfriend's mother in the morning. And it was decided that I was going to go to school. And I really didn't immediately realize what was happening. But I must have during the course of the day because my cousin, actually was my father's cousin. But she was closer to my age, and I loved her. She worked in the Office of a department store, which was actually just across the street from our business. And we heard stories about what they did they're, throwing. She was in the office on the top floor's throwing, throwing typewriters--

Mmm.

--and whatnot out of the window. And it so happened that the store was owned by a British Jew. And they had to pay reparations. I remember that as-- [CHUCKLES] You know, we were kind of thrilled with that.

Mm-hmm.

But, and I also know that the streetcar going along the streets where our business was and this department store, the streetcars could not go because of the shattered glass--

Mmm, mm-hmm.

--and the rails. It was-- oh, and my girlfriend's father, they were Polish originally. My girlfriend's father was picked up.

Oh, yeah.

And that's when they picked up all--

Yeah.

--men and boys, I think over 16 or 18. Yes, I mean that was a time when I became very, very, very aware of--

Yeah.

--what was going on--

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

--and fearful.

Yes. Now, what about your father, was he picked up at all?

No, he wasn't.

Uh-huh..

Now, my father, of course, was German born. And they picked up the--

The Polish?

--Polis.

Polish born, yeah, yeah, yeah. So you were n-- so you in a sense slept through Kristallnacht? Did you-- [CHUCKLES]

Oh, yes, absolutely.

[LAUGHTER]

OK, yeah, so, yeah, OK. And what did you, again, what do parents say to a young child, a 12-year-old when that happened? What did they say to you?

You know--

How did they explain it?

--I don't even recall actual conversations with them other than hearing what was said. As I said, we lived with my grandmother.

Mm-hmm.

We had moved into her apartment.

Right.

And, [CLEARS THROAT] we later had an old--

[CLEARS THROAT]

--aunt of my father's move in, whose two sons had emigrated to what was then Palestien. She was over 80. And all I remember was she would sit and crochet continuously. She covered all our hangers.

[LAUGHTER]

Very sweet, very unassuming, very quiet.

Mm-hmm.

Although, I do remember visiting her as a younger child when she had a parrot. And I was fascinated with a parrot because the parrot would be talking.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. [CHUCKLES] Did your parents ever talk about trying to emigrate?

Oh, yes, of course. Oh, of course. I was very, very much aware that. [CLEARS THROAT] My father was very much as a law abiding, straight, honorable-- and look where it got him. [CHUCKLES] But there were all sorts of things tried at various consulates.

And I do remember finally, at the 11th hour practically, him joining a few families. I guess, it was bribing some consulat to get a visa. And it fell through. But aside from anything else, my mother had kidney disease very early.

Oh.

And, [COUGHS] excuse me. And because of that, very, high-blood pressure.

Mm-hmm.

And those days they couldn't control it sufficiently. So any of the tropical countries wouldn't give a visa--

Mm-hmm.

--of it.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

So, that fell through too. But I was-- I mean everybody was aware of people haunting the consulate.

Was your father a Zionist? Did he want to go to Palestine?

Who, my f--

Your father, did he suggest trying to go to Palestine?

No, but I was. I was brought up in that atmosphere.

Mm-hmm.

I guess my friends also, we all-- all we could think of was getting to Palestine.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

These were your friends at the Jewish school that you went to?

Yes, yes.

Yeah. And what did your father say about that, or your parents say? What were their thoughts about that?

I have no idea.

Yeah, OK.

[LAUGHTER]

OK. [LAUGHS] So, Kristallnacht is over, and then what happens? What other changes can you remember from that?

Well, then of course, we heard about the Kindertransport.

Yes, mm-hmm.

Because the British government did this within days after Kristallnacht.

Mm-hmm.

And my grandmother had wrote to a cousin of hers, a second cousin of hers in London. Now the story is, that he was in

love with my grandmother. And she wouldn't marry him. And he went to England.

Mm-hmm.

With a broken heart, ha, ha. And she contacted him. And he had one daughter, who was very active in trying to find families in England to sponsor German children--

Mm-hmm.

--Jewish children.

Right.

And she actually made contact with a woman, who eventually offered to sponsor me. And what was the woman's name? Mrs. Kingham, K-I-N-G-H-A-M, Mrs. Kingham.

Mm-hmm.

Alice Kingham.

I'm sorry what was her first name?

Alice.

How do you spell that?

Alice, like Alice in Wonderland.

Oh, Alice, I'm sorry. I didn't that.

Oh, my accent probably--

No, that's fine, [LAUGHS] yeah. So, so your father got in touch with her.

My grandmother.

I'm sorry, your grandmother.

Yes.

And she offered to sponsor you?

No, she, [CLEARS THROAT] excuse me. She found somebody who would sponsor me.

Oh, I see, I see.

Mrs. Kingham.

Mm-hm, mm-hmm.

And we got that news the last day of 1938.

Oh my, mm-hmm.

And the Kindertransport, mine, left on June 5th.

Right.

It took that long.

OK, now let's talk a little bit about before you got on the transport. What were your thoughts about doing this, your 12--  
Excitement.

Oh, but they were positive?

Like a big adventure.

Really?

Nobody would tell me when I had to--

But you were leaving your parents.

I know. But that didn't-- that wasn't the ultimate thought in my mind.

[CHUCKLES] OK.

The idea being really, that my parents would be able to get a domestic grievance somewhere and get out.

I see.

I never occurred to me that they would not be able to get out of Germany.

I see, OK, mm-hmm.

So it really was [CLEARS THROAT] like a big adventure for me.

OK.

I could wear socks as long as I wanted.

[LAUGHS]

I didn't have to wear woolen stockings--

[CHUCKLES]

--during the winter. With all the so-called sophistication, I was still a kid.

Yeah, well, you were only 12 years old.

Yeah.

You were just 12. So you hear about this, and you have several months between the time that you hear about--

Yes.

--leaving and the time you actually left. So how did you--

Private English lessons.

I was going to say how did you prepare yourself for this new adventure? You took English lessons, mm-hmm?

Yes, I didn't have to practice the piano anymore.

OK. [CHUCKLES]

I [CLEARS THROAT] had private English lessons.

Mm-hmm. Anything else that you did to prepare for the trip?

I'm thinking. A lot of talk, of course, to my friends about it.

Mm-hmm.

Jenny, this close friend of mine, whose father had been deported back to Poland--

Mm-hmm.

--managed to get to London. And she thought correctly that her mother and sister would be able to follow--

Mm-hmm.

--which they did.

Good, mm-hmm.

It never occurred to me that my parents would not get out of Germany.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Now, how many of your friends were able to get on the Kindertransport?

I don't even know. I know one girl and tried to trace her here, but unsuccessfully. One girl came to one of the few transports to this country.

Mmm.

I don't know. Are you aware of it that there were efforts made to get kids out?

Yeah, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Only that it was kept--

Yeah, right, there were a few, yeah, yeah.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--because of the antisemitism. He had, as a safe deposit.

There was some there were a few, yeah. And people are now looking into that, yeah.

Oh they are? Good.

Yeah. So now, you're getting ready to leave. So let's talk about the actual leaving, and saying goodbye to your parents, and so forth.

All right, the actual leaving, the worst part is leaving my maternal grandmother. [CLEARS THROAT] Excuse me. Because I felt that I would never see her again.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And I was very, very close to her.

Mm-hmm.

Thinking that my paternal grandmother would probably be able to get out.

Mm-hmm.

I don't know why I thought that.

Mm-hmm.

But I did.

Mm-hmm.

But saying goodbye to my paternal grandmother was the worst thing of all.

Maternal, you mean maternal.

My maternal--

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, yeah, that's mother.

And what was her name, your maternal grandmother?

Martha, Martha Hilse, H-I-L-S-E because she had remarried.

Mm-hmm. So, you said, do you remember what you said to her or what she said to you?

No.

OK.

No, not at all.

Tell me what--

Maybe I just blanked it out because--

Yeah, sure, it was so painful.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah. Tell me what you took with you. What did you take with you when you left?

Oh, well, we were limited on what we could take with us.

Uh-huh.

I know I took a s-- I wonder where, what happened to it. I took a silver egg cup with me.

[CHUCKLES]

That was, that's the light weight that they permitted, I guess.

Mm-hmm.

And I had one suitcase with everything listed on it. As a matter of fact, I think I still have the list. And my mother outfitted me with clothes, taking into consideration that I would still be growing.

Mm-hmm.

Although, I was very tall for my age at that point.

Oh, mm-hmm.

I don't remember taking anything. I had a large collection of books.

Mm-hmm.

I don't recall taking anything--

Mm-hmm.

--with me at all.

Mm-hmm.

That kind of thing.

You had said about how this woman found someone to sponsor you. But how did your parents get you on the train itself, make arrangements and get the tickets? Do you know? Did they ever tell you, or?

Well, as the m--

The mechanics, mechanics of it in other words is what I want to know.

Yes, as a matter of fact, they had corresponded with the woman in England, Mrs. Kingham.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And-- [DRINKING SOUND]

In a sense how did your parents get you a ticket on the train? [CHUCKLES]

Oh, I don't-- I have no idea.



You don't, OK, OK.

I know I got a beautiful, leather, large suitcase.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And I don't even know how that suitcase got to England.

Hmm, mm-hmm.

But it did, obviously.

Mm-hmm.

And as far as tickets goes, my parents took me to the train.

Yeah.

And then rushed home because from the balcony of my grandmother's apartment we could see the train.

Oh.

So they were going to wave to me as well.

Oh, yeah.

Um, I do--

What did you parents--

--remember a cab taking me to the station--

Mm-hmm.

--and having to turn back halfway there because, [CHUCKLES] believe it or not, I had forgotten to take my umbrella.

Oh, ah.

Mm-hm. [LAUGHS]

Ah, OK.

[LAUGHTER]

You know--

[LAUGHTER]

--when you think about it. It's laughable. But, uh--

Uh, yeah, yeah. What did your parents say to you when they put you on the train?

I also don't know.

OK, mm-hmm.

Complete blank.

OK. And did you know--

And it was again, it was like a temporary thing.

Right, right.

As a matter of fact, my mother told me after the war that if she'd realized that the separation would have been that long, she would never have let me go.

Aw, yeah.

And I remember saying to her, "How could you say that?"

Mm-hmm.

It was the most unselfish thing--

Mmm.

--for you to do to let me go.

Yeah, right, right, right.

But my mother suffered terribly from that separation.

Oh, yeah, yeah. Did you know anybody else--

She never got her little girl back.

I know, right, right. Did you know anybody else on the train?

No.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

I do remember a couple of nuns bringing infants--

Mmm.

--onto the train.

Mmm, mm-hmm. And staying with them you mean? Taking them on to--

No, no, they didn't stay with them.

Yeah.

They handed them to somebody on the train.

Mm-hmm.

It wasn't, you know it was further down to where my compartment was.

Yeah, yeah. So tell me about the journey to England, the actual journey, what you remember of it.

Well, the big thing was we knew that before we crossed the border into Holland, the Germans would come and inspect our baggage.

Mm-hmm.

And we were very worried about that.

Mmm.

They did come, and they did open my small suitcase. But nothing--

Mm-hmm.

--nothing further happened.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And it's tremendous relief when we realized we had crossed the border.

Ah.

And when we stopped in Holland--

Mm-hmm.

--there were people on the platform giving us apples--

Mmm.

--candy, snf it was very-- it was very heartwarming.

Mm-hmm.

We felt wonderful.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Did you wear a number around your neck, you know a pr--

I must have.

A string, you know, with a card, with a number?

I'm sure I did. I don't recall.

OK.

But I've seen pictures. [LAUGHS]

Right.

Everybody had them.

Right. And then, OK, so how long did you stay in Holland?

Oh, we went directly to the boat.

Uh, oh, OK, OK.

And we crossed at night.

You did? huh, uh-huh.

And we arrived in Harwich.

Mm-hmm.

And I know we were taken, it must have been a playing field of a school.

Mm-hmm.

And we each got a bar of Cadbury's chocolate.

[CHUCKLES]

And then we went to London. And we're waiting to be picked up by our sponsors.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And I remember a boy next to me asking me why I was crying. I said I'm not crying. But apparently I must have been, very, very, very tense.

Aww, mm-hmm.

At that point.

Yeah, yeah, mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And so, then how long did it take for your sponsor to come?

Oh, I'm sure it wasn't long. But it seemed like ages.

Yeah.

I would imagine probably half way of everybody being picked up.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And she took me to her home in St. Albans, which was sort upscale suburb of London.

Mm-hmm, and her name?

Very, very nice.

Your sponsor's name was?

Kingham.

Oh, oh, I thought she was the one who offered to find someone.

No, that was my grandmother's, cousin's, daughter.

Oh, but Alice Kingham was your actual sponsor?

That's right.

I see. I see, mm-hmm, OK. And tell me a little bit about her. How old a woman was she?

She was in her 50s--

Mm-hmm.

--never married.

Mm-hmm.

She inherited from her father two tobacconist's shops in St. Albans.

Mmm.

She had a very nice house with a housekeeper--

Hmm.

--named Helen. I remember getting there and having tea.

Mm-hmm.

And I was not a tea drinker. Tea to me was something you had when you were sick.

[LAUGHS]

So being a kid, I finished it to quickly get it out of the way.

Mm-hmm.

And I was asked do I want another cup of tea? And I said, thank you, think-- meaning no, thank you.

No, thank you.

And to my horror--

[LAUGHTER]

--they brought another cup of tea.

Right.

And then with the third cup I realized, I said, no, thank you.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And I remember being out in that very pretty garden of theirs, sitting on one of those slide things.

Mm-hmm.

I'm not even sure whether I laid down and slept for a while. But then a neighbor came over, and she had two girls, I believe. And she was asking me whether I could ride a bike.

Mm-hmm.

And I didn't understand her. So she motioned with her hands, and I thought she was talking about somebody boxing.

Oh, oh, oh, mm-hmm.

Funny how certain things--

Mm-hmm.

--stick in your mind.

Mm-hmm.

And then, going to bed and seeing-- you know, I was used to feather beds. And seeing this flat thing and not knowing what to do with it.

Oh.

[LAUGHTER] Yeah. Were you able to contact your parents?

I must have, by mail.

OK, yeah, mm-hmm.

I received mail from them and packages every day.

Mm-hmm.

And when war broke out, I thought the world had come to an end for me.

Yeah. You're talking about now, September '39, right?

Yes.

Yeah, yeah, and so you had been there two, three months.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

June 6th, through September 3rd.

September 3rd, yeah, yeah.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

What did-- just to back up a little bit, what did you do over that summer before war broke out?

OK, let's backtrack a little bit. Mrs. Kingham was about to get married.

Oh.

To a friend, a widower, who had a 20-year-old daughter, who had been expelled from college and did not talk to the father. Or the father wouldn't talk to her.

[CHUCKLES]

He had no idea that I was on the horizon. So when he came for the weekend, he was confronted with me.

Mm-hmm.

Not a very happy situation.

Hmm, mm-hmm.

And his daughter Susan then stayed in St. Albans with me. The marriage took place, I think, 10 days after I got there.

Oh, oh, mm-hmm.

And he was, what I consider, a typical Englishman, polite. I called her aunt--

Mmm.

--and him uncle.

Mm-hmm.

And when war broke out, he asked me-- it was a Sunday. He asked me, who did I want to win the war.

Mmm.

And his wife said, you know, that's a ridiculous question to ask. And I said, yes, it is.

Mmm.

And then, he said, well after all she is German.

[LIP SMAKING SOUND] Oh.

So, you get an idea of what--

Mm-hmm.

--the climate was then.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And then shortly after that we moved to Ipswich on the East Coast.

Mmm.

He was head postmaster of there and about six or seven smaller--

Mm-hmm.

--towns around there.

Mm-hmm.

In a new, modern home, very nice.

Mm-hmm. How was your English then?

Well, it was getting better. But I do remember waking up at night searching for a word in English.

Oh, yeah.

And, you know, the brain was so--

Yeah.

I guess, overworked. [LAUGHS]

I know, yeah, yeah.

The school was about a mile away. And I had to walk it, of course. They had a maid named, Joan, who finally taught me how to ride a bike.

Mm-hmm.

And, but for a good couple of months I walked back and forth to school.

Mm-hmm.

And one or the other teachers would pick me up when they saw me.

Mm-hmm.

And later on, I found out that they were so impressed about me being able to converse about the weather--

[CHUCKLES]

--you know, that small talk.

Mm-hmm.

So mind was obviously, had improved.

Mm-hmm.

It had to.

Mm-hmm.



The thing of my experience with a new language is that the ear actually has to accustom itself--

Mm-hmm.

--to the sound.

Mm-hmm.

And once that happens, you are on your way. But, the school was a lifesaver for me.

Now, you're in Ipswich, right?

In Ipswich, yes.

Yeah, mm-hmm.

It was an all skirts, school for girls.

Mm-hmm.

It was fantastic for me. Incidentally, I stayed with that first family just a year. Because during the war, being head postmaster, he would receive advance notices of air raids.

Oh, mm-hmm.

And he made that-- or they made that as the reason that they could not have me stay there.

Mm-hmm.

I was an enemy alien.

Oh, oh, mm-hmm.

Which was the term used.

Yes, yes.

So, there was one other Jewish family in Ipswich. And they invited me to tea. They had an eight-year-old boy. And I realized immediately, they were afterwards a mother's helper.

Mm-hmm. mm-hmm.

I wasn't thrilled about it.

Mm-hmm.

And then, lo and behold, Ipswich had its first air raid sirens.

Mm-hmm.

That's the siren, no, no--

Mm-hmm.

--no raid. And the family packed up one, two, three, and moved to the midlands to a sister. And I was off the hook.  
[CHUCKLES]

Oh, OK.

So the school was very instrumental to find a place for me.

Mm-hmm.

And it was one of the teachers--

Oh.

--who said she would take me.

Mm-hmm.

And she lived with another woman, who had a girl--

Mm-hmm.

--two years younger than I--

Mm-hmm..

--also the Jewish refugee, Doris. And, I moved to them--

Mm-hmm.

--very happily.

Mm-hmm.

And then the two women headed out.

Oh.

Well, actually, Joan Bailey invited an Air Force man, I guess m-- he must have been British, into the house, you know special occasions--

Mm-hmm.

--or what have you? And the teacher, Miss Mobey, felt this was, this was not appropriate.

Mm-hmm.

So she moved out. And I had the choice to go with her--

Mm-hmm.

--or to stay with Miss Bailey. And I opted to stay with Miss Bailey.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

First of all, there was Doris.

Mm-hmm.

Another girl. And it was a nice--

Mm-hmm.

--house and so on and so forth.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

But I stayed on very good terms with the other teacher.

Mm-hmm.

Like I went with her to her folks. Her father was a minister.

Mm-hmm.

Who absolutely adored me.

Mm-hmm.

They lived in a very, old house in Shropshire.

Mm-hmm.

I can't even remember the name of the town right now, right in right in the center of the town. The house was in all the guidebooks.

Mm-hmm.

It was fascinating. And I remember sitting at the desk writing letters when somebody waved to me from outside the window. It was an American tourist--

Oh.

--who asked if they could come and see the house. [LAUGHS]

Uh-huh, uh-huh.

It's that man, that minister told me that he was going to pray for the safety of my parents--

Oh.

--every day.

Mm-hmm.

And I would have sworn my life on the fact that he did.

Oh, oh.

He had a-- in those days, he had to learn Hebrew.

Oh.

And he had great respect, almost a little bit of env great respect for Jews.

Mm-hmm.

And I am sure he did exactly what he promised, he would pray for my--

[CHUCKLES]

--parents.

Now you were hearing from your parents by mail you said?

By that time, it was 25 word, Red Cross messages.

Oh, mm-hmm.

They cost me \$1.

Mm-hmm.

My French teacher paid for that.

Mm-hmm.

You would write your text on one side--

Mm-hmm.

--and mail it. And then my parents would answer on the other side.

Oh.

Which, the round trip would take a couple of months or so.

Oh my, oh my.

Maybe six weeks. But at least we knew that-- we knew that we were both well.

Yeah, yeah, mm-hmm. And did you know what was happening on the continent? Did you--

Of course not. We didn't know the extent of--

Yeah, yeah.

At that early time, nobody did.

Nobody, yeah.

They didn't and discuss it. [LAUGHS]

Yeah, yeah. So you're going to school, you're living, and anything else? And, as you said communicating with your parents.

Yes.

Yeah, and what about the other students in the classes and everything? Were people very accepting of you?

And how. I started there in September--

Mm-hmm.

--and came Christmas.

Mm-hmm.

Somebody from my class came with a big package of gifts--

Mm-hmm.

--including a jigsaw puzzle, my first one. [LAUGHS]

Mm-hmm.

And school girls stories, and you name it.

Mm-hmm.

And I had invitations for every day.

Mm-hmm.

And at that time I was staying with the original family--

Mm-hmm.

--who knew about all the invitations and just asked me, or told me, not to go on Christmas Day--

Mm-hmm.

--to with them, which I did.

Yeah.

But by that time I was completely ensconced in school activities--

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

--with loads of friends. I couldn't-- the school for me was a safe haven.

Mm-hmm.

Years later--

Hmm.

I was listening to you, and all of a sudden it stopped.

Yes.

Yeah.

Me too. [LAUGHS]

Oh, OK. You were talking about how the school was wonderful for you, yeah.

Oh, yes, I know exactly what I was going to say.

Yeah.

At crisis times, for many years, I would dream about the school.

You're talking about afterwards, after the war, you mean?

Yeah, oh, yes, I mean after being married.

Oh, oh, uh-huh.

And the school was just let's say, a--

Mm-hmm.

--safe haven for me.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

I had a ball. I got away with murder.

Mm-hmm. Was it a coed school or all girls?

Oh no, no girls school.

All girls, mm-hmm.

Nice school.

Mm-hmm.

Built around two quadrangles.

Mm-hmm.

Open school, the doors would open directly outdoors.

Mm-hmm.

Cold in the winter.

Mm-hmm.

But we had a-- we had a swimming pool, outdoor swimming pool.

Mmm, mmm, mm-hmm.

It was a very nice school.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And as I say, I had a ball there.

[CHUCKLES]

And now Doris, the other girl that lived with, Joan Bailey, came to that school afterwards. But she was two years younger. She had no trace of accent. And she had been in a private preschool, private school, I guess before. And she didn't-- she was just accepted like everybody else--

Mm-hmm.

--where for me, they treated me differently. I remember--

How so did they treat you differently?

Oh, this kindness, I guess.

Oh.

I remember having to write an essay on my-- ah, the word fails me. My pet, something that you really hate.

My pet peeve? My pet peeve?

Pet peeves. it wasn't that, but it could be pet peeve.

Mm-hmm.

Let's say it was a pet peeve.

Mm-hmm.

And I wrote about Nazism, and my English teacher asked permission--

Mmm.

--for her to read the essay in the staff room to the rest of the staff.

Oh, oh my, mm-hmm.

Oh yeah.

Do you remember what it said? Some of the things you said?

Oh, yes, I do.

What, tell me some of the things you said.

Well, I think I talked about at the beginning being a result of the First World War and the economic conditions and in Germany afterwards.

Mm-hmm.

Hitler's appearance and building up the ego of the German again.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And the rise of the Nazi party without the people necessarily quite realizing what was happening until it was too late, the idea of children betraying parents, and things like that. Let's see, that was about the gist of it.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Was it very personal for you? Did you talk about your personal feelings?

No, not really.

Yeah.

I treated it very much like a subject to discuss.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

You know, rather than--

Objective, an objective.

Objective, yeah.

Yeah, yeah. So now you're there. And you said you're at the school. Any other experiences there that you would like to talk about while you were at school in England?

Well, it so happens that after school exam, which was after the 10th grade or 12th grade. I don't even remember. Because the grade system there was different. Almost everybody graduated and left school, except those who were slated to go to university. Now that wasn't anything like it is here. Out of three classes, six students went on to what they called the sixth grade.

Mm-hmm.

And I don't know. I must have been because of Joan Bailey to give me a little breathing space. She had me stay on for another term there.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

To give me an opportunity to figure out what to do with my life after that.

Mm-hmm.

And-- [CLEARS THROAT]

Can I just ask you, but that part of England, where you af-- was your life in d-- were people's life danger there? Was there any bombings? Or was it a very safe location?

Oh, no, no, it was definitely not safe. We had the planes come and go across us--



Uh-huh.

--and dogfights.

Oh, OK.

We--

Were there bomb shelters and things like that?

Yes, we had a bomb shelter in the back of the yard--

Oh, OK.

--in our garden. And the beginning we would go into the cupboard under the stairs, which was considered the-- which was the safest place in the house.

Mm-hmm.

But after that, we put a mattress into the shelter.

Mm-hmm.

And we would go to the shelters.

Mm-hmm.

And being kids, we wanted the right to last until after-- I think it was 2:30 because then school would start an hour later.

Mm-hmm.

When we had raids we, first of all, had lots of practice at school to--

Mm-hmm.

--get into the shelters.

Mm-hmm.

In the shortest time possible. We had to go across two hockey fields.

Mm-hmm.

And when we did have raids, we would sit in those horrible, damp, cold shelters watching the time. Hopefully, we would miss mass.

[LAUGHS]

You know, things like that, typically kids stuff.

Right.

The only one time that stands out in my mind was when the gasworks in Ipswich were bombed.

Mmm.

And kids from the other side of town--

Mm-hmm.

--everybody, commuted on bikes, on their way to school would see human remains in the street.

Oh.

And came for class and talked about it.

Yeah.

That was the only time that I remember as kids really being badly affected.

Yeah.

Because it was so close to home. It was one of our own kids that saw it.

Yes, yes, mm-hmm.

On the whole, of course, children are much more resilient than we give them credit to.

Yeah, yeah. Were there other Jewish Kindertransport children in the area?

No, no.

No, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Except Doris. Doris--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--in the transport.

Yeah.

And as I say, she was two years younger than I.

Two years, yes, yeah.

She was. But in Manchester, the Jewish family was very unhappy there.

Mm-hmm.

And her father, who was non-Jewish got out, and was in London, and saw to it that she was moved from there.

Yeah, mm-hmm, mm-hmm. So you're-- anything else that you can talk about, about knowing, again, what was happening in the other countries? [CLEARS THROAT] Did you read the newspapers, or listen to the radio, or?

Oh, I read the papers and listened to the radio.

Yeah.

And we followed the war--

Yeah.

--very closely.

Yeah. Now what about your parents experience?

That's very interesting. My parents survived in Berlin. And what happened was my father was used-- no, my mother originally had to work in the factory making uniforms. And my mother-- I think I told you. My mother was not well, and got sick, and that was that. My father was used to clear the railroad tracks after air raids.

Mmm, mmm.

So that the trains could continue.

Mm-hmm.

My mother told me that there were times when he would be gone for two or three consecutive days.

Mmm.

And she never knew whether he was put on one--

Right.

--of the transports--

Right.

--or not.

Did they wear the yellow stars?

You know, I'm not sure whatever my mother did or not. My father of course did.

Mm-hmm.

I don't think my mother did because I remember her telling me that she went to a birthday party of this one uncle. And so, she could travel on the subways.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And my father couldn't.

Yeah, yeah.

And I remember she was so upset that they didn't send any food home for my father.

Oh, mm-hmm. So they stayed in Berlin during the whole war?

Yes, and what happened was my father came down with double pneumonia--

Oh.

--and went to the Jewish hospital, which was bombed out. But they were in the basement, in the cellar. No electricity, no running water, no doctors, no medication.

Mm-hmm.

And my mother was there day and night nursing him.

Mm-hmm.

Now, very interestingly, maybe-- was it you Gail, who told--

Yes.

--my daughter about the b--

Yes, yes.

Yes. That was so interesting, and I'm dying to see that book. So that confirms at least that part of what I had heard from my parents.

Yeah.

But what had happened--

Just to clarify, we're talking about the book about the Jewish hospital in Berlin by Daniel Silver? Is what we're talking about.

Oh, that was by Daniel Silver?

Yeah, mm-hmm.

Oh.

That's the book.

Was that a part of the bookshelves here? Because I just read his latest book.

Oh. Silver, Daniel Silver.

Yeah, S-I-L-V-A.

No, S-I-L-V-E-R.

Oh, it's Silver. I was say-- no, that's a different--

Yeah.

--different author.

Mm-hmm. Yeah, he wrote about the Jewish hospital in Berlin that you're talking about.

That is so interesting.

Mm-hmm.

And I had no idea that there were that many patients in there.

Mm-hmm.

And I guess it was one of the places that was just overlooked at the--

Mm-hmm.

--you know, last hour. Because I understand when the Russians were shelling Berlin, that the Germans made every effort to round up the rest of the Jews they could find.

Right. So your father was in the hospital, and your mother nursed him?

Yeah.

And for how long was that?

I don't know.

Uh-huh.

I have no idea. Obviously, until at the end of the war.

Until now to the war, oh, OK.

Now my, a distant cousin of mine was in the British army, one of the first to head to Berlin, and found my mother standing in line at a fire hydrant for water--

Mm-hmm.

--and recognized her, and talked to Eddy, and that's how I found out that my parents had survived.

Oh. Well when did you have your last contact with your parents?

Oh, you know, that was a long time--

Mm-hmm.

I mean, I would have to guess really. It probably was a good nine months without any sign of--

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. You're talking about the end of 44 beginning of 45?

45, yes.

Yeah, mm-hmm. So, let's talk about the end of the war. And you're in Ipswich, and what was that like?

Oh, no, I work by that time in the North of England. I had found out that the Ministry of Supply in England was testing 50% of all materials used in the war. And they had a crash course in Cambridge, a training course, and I applied for that.

In other words, you finished school.

Yes.

Yeah, OK, and you're what, 18 years old or something? How old are you?

I was--

Was this 44?

45.

So this is 1945, OK, mm-hmm. But the war is still going on?

Oh, yes, yes.

OK Yes OK so it's early 45, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Yes, so in other words, when I that three months course in Cambridge--

Mm-hmm.

--because I was an enemy alien--

Mm-hmm.

--I was lucky. Because most of the people there would be sent to places that manufactured gunpowder. And because I was an enemy alien, I went to a place that for ferrous and non-ferrous metals.

Mm-hmm.

Which was great, first of all, much more variety, and more interesting. And I worked there. As a matter of fact, I was working there when I got the news that my parents had survived.

Oh, mm-hmm.

And then my friend in London, who was part of the refugee committee, community, found an article in the paper that the American government was looking for bilinguals for employment. And she told me about it, and I applied. Now, I was two years below their minimum age.

Mm-hmm.

After I found out that my parents had survived, I moved heaven and earth to get over to Germany to help them after the war.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And I was too young everywhere. I even wrote to the Russian commissar something in Berlin.

[CHUCKLES] Mm-hmm.

I never heard from him though. [LAUGHS]

Mmm, mmm.

And I applied to the American government. And what happened was that they had, had 200 bilinguals from France, the Alsace area where they have bilingual. And at the last minute, the French government nixed it. They said they couldn't spare the manpower. So, the America War Department was kind of desperate. So they took me.

Mm-hmm.

Me and-- I and one other girl. We were the same age. We were two years below the minimum age. And, I was accepted by them and went to Germany, to Munich, for censorship. We censored mail, telephone, and telegraph.

And it was-- by the way it was very traumatic for me that train trip because I saw children begging--

Mmm.

--along the way.

Mm-hmm.

And we would throw out whatever K-rations we had.

Yeah, yeah.

And all of a sudden I realized these we're not friends anymore. These were German children. And it had a terrible effect on me. And an older man-- older, he probably was in his 20s, late 20s, saw my distress, and we talked about it. It was a terrible thing for me to realize that the kids look just as bad in France as they did in Germany.

Yeah.

But hey, these were Germans after all.

Mmm.

Anyway, we got to Munich, and I started working. We actually posted in a camp that was owned by Martin Berman, Martin Berman, yes, who was never found.

Mmm.

It was a great camp, very nice housing. And we live there but worked in Munich.

Mm-hmm.

We had the daily train back and forth to take us--

Mm-hmm.

--to work, and what was deadly boring. First of all, the letters were written poorly, on poor paper. That was heart of the eyes and terribly boring. And then I found out that they had the research lab on base. And I checked into that and met the guy who was in charge of one section of it, Robert. I talked to him. And he arranged for a transfer so I didn't have that train trip every day.

Mm-hmm.

I could go to the PX in peace when most of the them were still in Munich. And I ended up marrying him.

[LAUGHTER]

That was my husband.

Uh-huh.

And we worked in secret ink and code.

Oh, mm-hmm. And his name?

Robert.

Mm-hmm.

He took his discharge overseas.

Mm-hmm.

And we were married overseas by that time. The States in Puloff, in Munich was dissolved. And we went to Esslingen, which was near Stuttgart. And we were married there, fabulous reception.

Is that 1945 you're talking about?

46.

Oh, 46, you got married, OK.

Yeah, December 46. It so happened the day with the longest night of the year.

Oh.

We hadn't planned that.

Mm-hmm.

But It was the first-- you know, it takes a while. It took a while--

Mm-hmm.

--for paperwork to be OK'd.

Right.

And so on and so forth.

Mm-hmm.

I mean they wanted to be sure the poor ex-GI didn't make a mistake.

Right, right. Now had you seen your parents by then?

Yes, yes, I had. There was a story too.

What was that reunion like?



I hitched a ride to Munich with somebody from the motor pool. And I was set-- I was sitting in the Jeep waiting for him, whatever he was doing. But I decided I'd go in and ask for a chaplain. There was no Jewish chaplain, so I got a Protestant chaplain and told him my sad story that I hadn't been able to see my parents.

Mm-hmm.

And within three days, I had orders to go to Berlin.

Mmm.

And see my parents.

Mmm, what was that reunion like?

[LAUGHS] Well, first of all, I got there sick. And Robert had made me promise that if I didn't feel better I would get off the train in the British sector and go to the hospital.

Mm-hmm.

But of course I didn't listen to him.

Mm-hmm.

So when I got to my parents, I went to bed.

[CHUCKLES]

My father at that time was employed by the Russians. And they heard that I was coming home to them. And they celebrated with vodka. My father was, who was not a big drinker, was imbibed by the time he got home.

Mm-hmm. [CHUCKLES]

But it was-- and my grandmother was alive.

Mmm.

That's the big thing.

Mmm.

My mother's mother was alive. It was wonderful.

Mmm.

It was so unbelievably wonderful.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

I carried a big bag of provisions with me.

Mm-hmm.

That was a story in itself.

Mmm.

I could barely lift it. And when I got off the train--

Mm-hmm.

--I had to make arrangements for transportation to get into this subdivision in Berlin itself.

Mm-hmm.

And, I finally managed that they gave me a young kid with a Jeep. And from there I got another kid with a Jeep to take me to Pankow.

Mm-hmm.

And he was scared silly because it was wasn't the Russian sector--

Yeah, mm-hmm.

--which in those days the city was still divided.

Right.

And I had to guide him, which was very difficult, because landmarks and streets that I recalled were no longer there. Everything was in ruins.

Right, right.

But I managed to find my way home.

Mmm.

My mother was hanging out of the window waiting for me.

Ah, ah, ah.

It was-- I was there for seven days.

Mm-hmm.

I got back once--

Mm-hmm.

--into the American zone--

Mm-hmm.

--to get my PX rations--

Mmm, mmm.

--to take back to them.

Mmm.

Because cigarettes were the main means of--

Paying for things. [BACKGROUND VOICE]

--paying for things.

Mm-hmm.

Money wasn't worth anything. That was before they had the currency reform in Germany.

Mm-hmm.

So, I had lost quite a bit of weight because I could barely eat anything in my parents' house. Because, you know, it was so short of food.

Right.

But it was a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful time.

Right, yeah, yeah.

My poor mother never got her little girl back.

Right, right. Did she recognize you?

Oh, yes, of course.

She did, mm-hmm. I mean you were gone for almost six years.

Yes.

Yeah. Mmm, yeah.

From 39 to 46, seven years.

Yeah, yeah.

Figured it out, I think, it was two weeks sort of seven years. [CHUCKLES]

Two weeks sort of seven year, yeah.

A long, long time.

Yeah, so now you're married.

Yes.

And then what happened? You stayed in Germany?

Well, Robert stayed for one more year.

Mm-hmm.

Under contract.

Mmm.

And because he took his discharge overseas, he was entitled to two months of leave to go home.

Mm-hmm.

And the only problem was taking me with him--

Mm-hmm.

--he finally managed it-- well, actually, a young, First Sergeant in Frankfurt cut the orders for us. Cause Robert went up, down the scale from Lieutenant Generals, down. Nobody would sanction the order. Because I was entitled, or he was entitled, to one trip for me, but not three trips, not going to New York, and then coming back, and going back the third time.

Mm-hmm.

And anyway, we managed it. And the reception was very, very awkward because my mother-in-law was terribly upset that he married overseas.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And we had no idea of what kind of reception we would get.

Mm-hmm.

But it was all right.

Mm-hm, mm-hmm.

But my mother-in-law was a very, very difficult person. And, of course, that's a lot of grief. But we never had in-- it was never a question of in-law problems. It was mother problems. She was that kind of--

Yeah.

--possessive--

Yeah, yeah.

--person.

So you came to United States in?

Came to the United States.

When was that?

Oh, for the furlough, came to the United States for the furlough. Saw almost, probably saw six Broadway shows--

[LAUGHTER]

--while we were here as a gift from one of his uncles. And both Robert and his younger brother, George, had a ball showing me New York.

Mm-hmm.

And it was an exciting time.

Mm-hmm.

And then we went back for another year--

Mm-hmm.

--to fulfill the contract and then came home for good. And--

When was that you came to the United States for good? In 48?

I'm sorry.

When did you come to the United States for good, in 48?

48, yes.

Yeah, OK. And where did you settle?

Well, we stayed with my in-laws for by the year because it was very, very hard to find housing at that time.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Everybody had--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

And where was that? Where was th--

In Brooklyn.

In Brooklyn, OK. And then where did you move to? Where did you go?

We found an apartment in Brooklyn, too. We stayed there for, I think, eight years.

Mm-hmm. And what kind of work did he do, Robert do?

Robert, Robert went back to school.

Mm-hmm.

Got very sick with whatever flu-type-- I think was the Asian flu at that time. And then was a detail man for one of the pharmaceutical houses.

Mm-hmm.

And I worked at Maimonides Hospital--

Mm-hmm.

--in the chemistry lab.

Mmm mm-hmm.

Again, because of my background, although, it had nothing to do with blood chemistry. But it worked out fine for us.

Mm-hmm.

And then-- oh, what happened? Robert-- I can't even remember why at this moment. Anyway, Robert switched to a pharmaceutical house in Dover, Delaware.

Mm-hmm.

And I was there also.

Mm-hmm.

We always say we-- to Delaware with nothing and left three years later with one dog and two children.

Oh, wonderful. [LAUGHS]

We adopted my son. And it was just great, too. At that time Delaware was considered one of the three top states for adoption.

Mm-hmm.

You know, it went very smoothly and very pleasantly.

Mm-hmm.

And then after that I had my daughter. There was 21 months difference in age between the two.

You adopted your daughter also?

No.

Oh, oh.

Daughter came naturally.

Oh, OK.

[LAUGHTER]

It was wonderful because Dover celebrated with us.

Oh.

They were thrilled about the adoption. And then when Gail came along--

Uh-huh.

--it was the same thing over again.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

I had baby gifts left on stoop when I--

[LAUGHS]

--went home and like that. It seemed like the whole town was celebrating with us.

Wonderful, mm-hmm. And then you left Del-- when did you leave Delaware?

Three years later.

Mm-hmm.

To get my-- Ira was-- Gail was born in 59.

Mm-hmm.

In 60 or 61.

Mm-hmm.

In 60 we went up to North Jersey--

Mm-hmm.

--for a horrible, six months and the worst snow they had there in 50 years.

[CHUCKLES]

And then came--

Yeah.

--to East Brunswick.

Yeah. Can we now talk a little bit about your thoughts and your feelings about what you went through? What are your thoughts about Germany today?

Well, I went back as a guest of Berlin--

Mm-hmm.

--and I was 70. That would be six years ago. And, I had never expected to accept that invitation. But through a co-worker I got in touch with a woman who'd felt the same way I did, and did go, and thought it was worthwhile. And at age 60 I was-- Berlin paid everything for me, and my husband, and one other person. I guess they figured at that age we needed--

Yeah.

--some help. So my daughter--

Mm-hmm.

--went with us--

And it was worthwhile. There was no question about it. I found the same apartment house where I was living as a child in Pankow. I found the rowing club where I had so many happy hours.

Mm-hmm.

I think that was one of the most emotional things. I found and went to the synagogue where we had gone a couple of years for the high holidays. It was closure. And it was worth going.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Why did I bring this up? Oh, you--

Well I asked you what your thought--

--wanted to know how I felt about Germany.

--what your thoughts about Germans in general.

Listen, I can't begin to tell you-- Berlin wallowed in an apology.

Mm-hmm.

Wherever you went you had memorials for what happened.

Mm-hmm.

There was one very art board. It was like black but stenciled out with dates, and numbers of people, and destinations that were sent to the concentration camps.

Mm-hmm.

And one of the mo-- almost like a Times Square--

Mm-hmm.

--kind of area. I couldn't, I couldn't believe it. By that time, I realized there was a difference between the young people I saw--

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

--and people of my own age.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

If it was somebody from my own age--

Right.

--I've always wanted to ask them how many did you shove into the oven?



Yeah.

My whole attitude about Germany had been terrible--

Mm-hmm.

--before I knew that my parents had survived when at the first atom bomb--

Mm-hmm.

--go off, my reaction was whether my parents are alive or not. They should have used the atom bomb in Germany.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

If I met anybody German, it was difficult for me to disassociate--

Mm-hmm.

--them from my feeling about the Germans.

Mm-hmm.

I had utter disdain for the people as a whole. When I went back to work for the American government in Munich, I saw daily this business about, well, I didn't know what was going--

Yes.

I went to Dachau.

Mm-hmm.

And people told me they didn't know what was--

Mm-hmm.

--going on when the railroad tracks led right into the--

Yeah.

--the concentration camp.

Yeah.

If somebody would have said to me, yes, I knew and too bad Hitler didn't manage to get the last Jew, I might have had some respect for him.

Uh-huh.

But this-- I'm a little person. What could I have done, kind of baloney.

Yeah, yeah.

It didn't sit well.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

However, when I did go to Berlin later on, I realized that-- I mean, I was surprised at all the signs of--

Regret. [PERSON IN BACKGROUND]

Regret.

Mm-hmm.

And that's putting it mildly, about what happened to the Jews.

Mm-hmm.

Now I realize that Berlin, that Northern Germany [CLEARS THROAT] was very different from Southern Germany, the Munich area.

Mm-hmm.

And probably still is. But it took me a long time to get over this neurotic feeling about Germany and the Germans.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And I also felt that my hate was like a comfort blanket for my own--

Preservation. [PERSON IN BACKGROUND]

Preservation.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

But, you know, times have changed.

Yeah. When your children were the age that you were when you had to leave your parents--

[LAUGHTER]

--did that bring up memories of your wartime experience?

Not so much memories as, [CLEARS THROAT] as, well, I did realize hey, they're at this age when I left home.

Mm-hmm.

It was hard to reconcile.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

I consider myself on the whole as having been very fortunate. Except for the first year in England--

Mm-hmm.

--the rest was a very positive.

Mm-hmm.

--experience.

Mm-hmm.

I think I gained from it a much broader outlook on things than--

Mm-hmm.

--I would have had if things had been normal.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Yes, I was once called, oh, here's the happy one. We went to see one of the Kindertransport movies--

Mm-hmm.

--in a theater. I think it was in Philadelphia. I'm not sure. And afterwards they asked if any of the Kindertransport people were there. And there were about half a dozen. And I stood up too. And behind me, somebody said, oh, here is the happy one.

[LAUGHTER]

However, it was much, much later that I realized there are some deep scars left from the experience.

Yeah.

Because as much as I enjoyed my stay in England, I was always an outsider. And being here is the first time that I didn't have that feeling. I'm home now.

You mean w--

Can you understand that?

You mean w-- you mean when you came to the United States? Is that what you meant by being here?

Yes.

Yeah.

Not necessarily when I came. But now, you know, after I've been here for a while.

Oh, I see, yeah. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, yeah.

This is your true home in other words.

Yes.

Yeah.

I belong.

Yeah, yeah.

I'm putting this--

Mm-hmm.

--concisely as I can.

Mm-hmm.

It's a feeling of belonging.

Yeah.

Being home. This is where I belong.

Yeah, mm-hmm. Because of your childhood experiences in Germany and in England, yeah, mm-hmm. Are there any sights today, or sounds, or smells that bring back the war years for you? In today's world anything that reminds you, or?

I don't believe so.

Mm-hmm.

I did have strange experiences when I went back to Berlin. The sound of the wheels of the train.

Mmm, mm-hmm.

The smell of the river when I found the rowing club. It's amazing. It is like no other smell.

Mm-hmm. Hmm, mm-hmm.

But now, here that could remind me of the war years, I don't think so. I sometimes marvel at how we have and we keep our young.

[CHUCKLES] Mm-hmm.

And we do.

Mm-hmm.

Including I as a parent. [CHUCKLES]

Right, right, mm-hmm, yeah.

But all in all, I can describe my state of mind at this point as content.

Mm-hmm.

I'm content. I never expected to be this old.

[CHUCKLES]

I have-- I am basically healthy.

Mm-hmm.

Which is a blessing.

Mm-hmm.

I have terrible arthritis. That started when I was in high school.

Mmm.

But I could live my life.

Mm-hmm. Do you, when you think back sometimes about what you had to go through as a young child do you have moments of terrible anger or rage about that you had to go through that?

Not anger. No, there was no room for anger.

I mean in today's world, when you think back of what you were forced to go through, leaving your parents, and so forth, and living in a different country, and, you know.

Well, if there was anger, it was it's the political--

Yeah, yes,

--situation. It wasn't until a few years ago that it dawned on me that all this horror took only 12 years.

Mm-hmm.

12 years of nothing.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And look what horror it created.

Yes, yes, yes. Did you lose any extended members of your family, your father's family?

You know we had such a small family.

Mm-hmm.

I was fortunate that my grandmother died--

Yeah.

--a natural--

Uh-huh.

--death.

Right.

My uncle incidentally, did manage to get to England. And his wife and daughter followed.

Mm-hmm.

So there wasn't anybody in the immediate family.

Family, yeah, mm-hmm.

I did see a book but I was in Berlin. [COUGHS] And we found the same at the Holocaust Center, a book of Berlin Jews that lost their lives.

Mm-hmm.

And I only had time to glance at it for a very, short time.

Uh-huh.

And I looked up the name of one school friend of mine.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And sure enough there it was.

Oh my, oh my, yeah, mm-hmm. Do you think what you went through affects your political views today?

Yes, probably. But also, what I experienced in England and political-- from the political view, I mean, I was first really introduced to the liberals in England. And although it's a dirty word, I'm still liberal.

[CHUCKLES] I don'-- I'm not sufficiently active, or knowledgeable, I should say, in politics--

Mm-hmm.

--as I should be.

Mm-hmm. Were you active in the civil rights movement at all in the 60s and 70s? Or you were busy raising children?

I was physically active. I had two young children.

Right, right, right.

But absolute-- I absolutely followed it.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. I mean here you lived in a country that deprived people of their civil rights, of course you were a young child at the time. But still, you know--

Yeah.

--I bet it gave you a greater sensitivity to that issue.

You know when we think along those lines it makes everybody think.

Mm-hmm.

I mean, we treat civil rights throughout the world and expect them to honor it.

Mm-hmm.

And look what we had here.

Yeah, right.

To this day.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

I mean look at the justice systems. But I'm a great one for spouting forth and not doing anything.

[CHUCKLES] Yeah. What are your thoughts-- what were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial? Anything special?

Just spellbound interest in it. And it's so happy that I always supported Wiesenthal.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah, uh-huh.

You know, one trial, one execution cannot undo the horror--

Mm-hmm.

--the individual cost.

Mm-hmm.

You can't-- you can't erase that.

Right.

And if you think the worst way of killing somebody, it's so wouldn't be enough. I sound bloodthirsty.

[CHUCKLES] What are your thoughts about Israel?

I was as a youngster in Berlin, a Zionist. I married a man who was American first. But I'm very emotionally and-- and I can't say even say financially much. But I am very much in support of Israel--

Mm-hmm, mmm.

--and very worried about-- about that situation there.

Mm-hmm.

I can't see an end in the near future.

Mm-hmm.

I don't know how it's possible.

Yeah, yeah.

And I'm very disturbed about today's attitude towards Israel. But many of our so-called friendly nations.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

It always seems to be one sided.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And let's face it, this is a country. The only democratic country in the Middle East, surrounded by nations--

Right.

--that want to annihilate them.

Mm-hmm. Are you more comfortable around people who lived through the war in Europe than others who didn't experience it firsthand like you did?

I can't really say that I am. But I don't-- I don't know many people.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

As far as friends, you know--

Yeah, mm-hmm.

--who would meet those criteria.

Mm-hmm. Do you think--

I mean, I still think of the Second World War as my war.

Mm-hmm.

It was my war.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

In every sense of the way.

Mm-hmm. Do you think more about that time in your life and that war more as you've gotten older?

No, not really, but I did realize, only as I got older, that things that I experienced at the time felt like nothing very special--

Mm-hmm.

--I realize today, oh boy.

Mm-hmm.

They left deep scars.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Did you ever need professional counseling?

No, after Robert died, I did see a--

A grief counselor, is that what you mean?



No, a therapist.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And--

When did he pass away?

Valentine's Day, it will be 11 years ago.

Ah, yes, yeah.

He had the nerve to die on Valentine's Day.

[LAUGHS] Yeah, mm-hmm.

But I did see a counselor. And I still see her as a very warm--

Hmm.

--friendly relationship.

Mm-hmm. Do you receive reparations from Germany?

No.

Mm-hmm.

Well I won't say that. When we were still down in Dover, I received-- I don't remember. I think it was \$1,000. It was a one deal for missed education. mm-hmm, yeah. What about your parents? Did they move to the United States?

Yes.

When did they come?

Oh, let me think. You know the memory isn't what used to be.

No, I know, yeah, right. In the 1950s or? Ah, it's OK. It's OK.

No, it was in the 60s.

So not till the the 60s, hmm.

It was early 60s.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

It has to be about 63 or four.

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Yeah.

Mm-hmm.

Had the children already.

Yeah. Do you think the world has learned any lessons from the Holocaust?

No.

You thinking it could happen again?

Well, to a lesser degree it's happening all the time.

Mm-hmm, yeah.

That's a very, very sad thing when you think about it. You would think it would have been a one time horror, never to see anything like it again. I don't know what it is about mankind.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Well, is there anything else you would like to add, that you would like to say?

Can you hold on one minute, please?

Yes.

The batteries running-- [PERSON IN BACKGROUND]

You know my batteries running. Let me switch to the other phone.

OK.

Would you hold on, please?

Yes.

Hello?

Yeah, are you on another line?

Hello?

Yes, can you hear me?

Oh, yes.

OK, I just--

Sorry about that.

That's OK. I just wanted to know if there was anything else you want to say before we conclude, whether how much of this experience plays a role in your daily life at this point in time? Well, I will say this. When I first saw my parents again--

Mm-hmm.

--I could not-- I did not want to hear details of what happened to them.

Mm-hmm.

By the time I was ready, they didn't want to talk about it anymore.

Ah, yeah, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

My children, my daughter in particular, knows everything about me, my experience. She and her husband are very active in the Second Generation. Her husband's-- her husband is the son of two survivors.

Oh, uh-huh, mm-hmm.

Incidentally, I have an excellent relationship with both my children.

Mm-hmm.

And Gail, her husband, and I, were going to the 20th anniversary celebration. I can't believe that is only 20 years that the Holocaust Museum opened.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Robert and I must have been there quite early on in that case. [CLEARS THROAT]

Mm-hmm. You're talking about the 20th anniversary of the United States Holocaust Museum?

Yes.

Yes, OK, mm-hmm.

I can't believe it's only 20 years.

Yes, 1993, mm-hmm.

That's amazing. It's a wonderful place. I wish there--

What are your feelings when you walk into this building?

Oh, we went there a couple of months ago, I believe.

Mm-hmm.

And there are things now that I just pass by, things that show what happened in Germany, the pictures of the signs in stores--

Mm-hmm.

You know, no Jews and stuff like that.

Mm-hmm.

It-- can I say it leaves me cold.

Hmm.

But, I mean, you know it has no impact anymore.

Mm-hmm.

There are other things, of course, that impact me greatly. But when I went down to find you people, that was wonderful. When you could research your family or friends. I had never been there before.

Mm-hmm.

And we stayed until the last, last minute, really.

Mm-hmm.

And that's where you found out about me--

Mm-hmm.

--I suppose.

Mm-hmm.

I found that fascinating. I met somebody else there, who I didn't even think he was Caucasian. But he was Jewish, a wonderful, wonderful man. We had great conversations. I think the museum is fabulous. It's absolutely fabulous.

Mm-hmm. And the fact that the war was not here--

[CHUCKLES]

But that it's still wise that the museum is here?

Oh, yes. And I'm very, very gratified that it is drawing so many visitors.

Mm-hmm.

Not just Jewish.

Right, right.

That in itself--

Mm-hmm.

--is a small miracle.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, yes. Do you have any grandchildren?

No I don't.

Mm-hmm.

My daughter married late. And my son is not married.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

One of the regrets.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

But I have-- I have made it my business to look at the positive things in life.

Mm-hmm.

And to kind of push the others aside.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

It's a matter of self-preservation.

Right, and you've certainly had lessons in that. That's--

Yeah.

That's very, very true. What are your feelings about being Jewish? Do you think, again, you were a child during the war. But did it-- do you think it made you more aware?

I happen to be proud of being Jewish.

Mm-hmm.

I happen to be proud. Do you realize we are the basis of civil law, like the Ten Commandments, of the idea of one God. I happen to be very proud of being a Jew--

Mm-hmm.

--not that I've done much. [LAUGHS] But as far as our history goes?

Mm-hmm.

Yeah. I flaunt being Jewish.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah, do you have relations with your mother's family in Germany?

No, no more. When my grandmother died that was it.

Yeah, yeah, mm-hmm.

But again, there wasn't any close family.

Yeah, right, right, right, mm-hmm. Well, is there again, anything that you wanted to add to this interview that you haven't mentioned that we haven't talked about?

Well, there is one subject that didn't come up. My parents went back to Germany. Now, it was because--

You mean after they came here, then they went back?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah. It was very difficult for me. I went to look for help to understand. Part of it was my mother's health condition.

Yeah.

And that she couldn't get health insurance here for--

Mmm.

--previous--

Mmm.

--ailments.

Mmm, mm-hmm.

Which meant, the economic effect of health care when things happen. I only know that my mother told my husband at the last goodbye, that if anything happened to papa, she would come back immediately.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

It was my father who wanted to go.

Ah, mm-hmm.

And I was told that sometimes it's like a person wanting to go back to the cradle--

Yeah.

--of his childhood, or whatever.

Right.

It was very, very difficult for me.

I'm sure. I'm sure.

And I very rarely even talk about it.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

I mentioned it here because--

Mm-hmm.

--well--

It's part of, it's part of your story. It's part of your story.

And it is, yes.

Yes, mm-hmm.

And they were supposed to come back for Ira's bar mitzvah.

Mm-hmm.

And my father got ill.

Mm-hmm.

And couldn't come.

Yeah.

Did they speak English?

Oh, yes.

They did, uh-huh.

Oh, of course.

OK.

My mother, dabbled along. My father tried to express himself, well, you know.

[CHUCKLES]

So I mean, but both of them fluent in English.

Oh, OK.

In fact, we corresponded in English. They would write me-- in our letters--

And that's interesting.

--was in English.

Mm-hmm. [CHUCKLES] That's interesting, yeah, yeah. Well that is an important part of your story.

I don't even know whether I am what ashamed that they went back.

Hmm. Mm-hmm.

You have to realize that even with this interview, it wasn't that easy for me to bring it up.

Yes, yes. Well as I said, we appreciate that you did because it is a part of your story. It's a part of your life. A part of it--

It was so difficult--

Yeah.

--for me to accept that.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And both of them died there.

Yeah. Were you able to go over after, when they died?

No, I went over before my mother died. She had been in the hospital.

Mm-hmm.

And I asked my father whether I should come. And he said no.

Mm-hmm.

Because for one thing, if she saw me, you know, it would frighten her.

Oh.

And I waited until she was home again.

Mm-hmm.

And I, she died like three weeks after I saw her.

Yeah, yeah, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

These are unfortunate and unpleasant things in my life.

Yeah.

But I've accepted them--

Mm-hmm.

--and refuse to dwell on them.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

I guess it is self-preservation.

Yes, yeah. Well you've made a wonderful contribution to the knowledge of those years. That's certainly true and the effect it had on you, yeah. And we do appreciate that you did that.

Oh you're more than welcome. It was interesting doing it.

OK, yeah. Is there anything you wanted to say before I close out the interview? Is there anything else?

I don't think so.

OK, well, I just again wanted to thank you for doing this.

Not at all. I really appreciate the opportunity. Because I hadn't done this before.

Uh-huh.



Not on that range, anyway.

Yeah, yeah.

So I thank you also. And again, my admiration for the museum--

Wonderful.

--and all its stands for and all it does for people.

Well, that is a wonderful note to end on.

[LAUGHTER]

This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Vera Levine.