This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Rosa Weinstein, conducted by Gail Schwartz on September 19, 2013, in Chevy Chase, Maryland. This is track number one. What is your full name?

It's Rosa Grundberg, my maiden name, Weinstein.

And when were you born, and where were you born?

I was born November 19, 1935, in Vienna, Austria.

Let's talk a little bit about your family. Your parents' names?

Was Temy Druk, and my father's name was Simon Grundberg.

Do you know where and when they were born?

They were born in the Ukraine. Deliatyn was where my mother was born, and GwoÅºdziec is where my father was born. My father migrated earlier to Vienna, and my mother after the First World War.

Do you know when they were born?

1905, I believe, was the date.

So your father left first and came to--

Vienna.

--Vienna. Do you know why, or what the circumstances were?

I think probably for opportunity to work. A lot of Jews at that time from Eastern Europe went into Vienna to have a way of life. And then, after the First World War, my mother and her mother and brother and sister migrated to Vienna. The father, Nashulum Druk, had been killed by the Russians. He was a banker in the Ukraine. And when the Russians invaded and set him to work in the fields, he didn't work fast enough for the Russians and was killed. And so, that's the reason my mother's mother and my mother and her family moved to Vienna.

And how did your parents meet?

Well, I must tell you this. They were actually cousins. And it was customary in Eastern Europe for cousins to marry each other. Being family, that's how they knew each other and married.

What year did they get married?

I believe it was 1930 or 1932. And then I was born in 1935. They first had stillborn twins, and then I was born a year later in Vienna.

Did you have any siblings after that?

No siblings at all. I was an only child. And the winds of war were already rampant in Europe at that time. And my parents had a grocery store in Vienna, which the Nazis closed down after the Anschluss.

Yeah, we'll talk about the Anschluss in a minute. Let's talk pre-Anschluss for the time.

They had a grocery store and I believe--

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In Vienna.

--in Vienna itself.

Do you know what street, or do you know--

I'll have to get the records on that, sorry that I don't have that. It was in one of the residential sections of Vienna. They carried herbs and spices as a specialty in the store. It was a comfortable living, and I had a maid-nanny who took care of me while they manned the store. And my mother's mother lived with us at the time in the apartment. I'll think of the apart-- 29 Heiligestadt Strasse was the name of the place where we lived. And I'll tell you when we get to the post-war section what became of that house.

Were your parents very religious people?

No, they weren't. They were observant to a degree, but not very religious at all. They observed the holidays, and I believe kept a kosher house.

And Shabbat?

And Shabbat, but I think that not extremely religious.

Were their parents, your grandparents, religious people?

My father's father was a very religious person. In fact, he was what I believe was called a bochur boy. He studied at the yeshiva. And his first wife, my paternal grandmother died. We believe it was about 1917, 1918, at the height of the flu epidemic that hit, and she died and is buried there in the Friedhoff in Vienna. And then my paternal grandfather remarried. My paternal grandfather and paternal grandmother had four children: Adolf, Clara, Simon and Benjamin. And after my grandfather remarried, the children left the home and lived elsewhere.

What about your mother's family? Were they religious?

I believe that my grandmother was observant, but I don't know to what degree.

Do you know if they were Zionistic at all?

That's a very good question.

Let's say your parents.

Oh, my parents-- My mother always wanted to go to Israel and always wanted an Israel-- and I'll tell you something post matter when we get to that section, too.

But I'm talking about in the '30s. Do you know? Obviously this is what you've been told, you were a newborn and into child.

Right. I believe my mother was always pro-Zionist, and I think my father was more neutral about that.

Do you remember what language you spoke at home?

German.

You spoke German.

It was combination of German and Yiddish.

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And Yiddish.

Ja. When we get to the part of during the war, I will tell you the story of my aunt, the daughter that was born of the second marriage. Would you let me know when that's--

OK. So, your first memory would be what?

My first memory was of my grandmother. I must have been in my crib at the time, and I remember my grandmother raising the shade, and light coming into the room in our apartment in Vienna.

You lived in an apartment?

We lived in an apartment. And the second memory is after the Anschluss. And when you're a toddler you're a certain height, and so I remember leather boots of the Nazis. And I remember hiding in a closet with my parents as well. I guess we were visiting and some Germans came to visit, necessitating our hiding in the closet. And I remember my father holding his finger up to be quiet. And the third--

So you were like three or four years old?

I was close to four. I must have been three and a half at the time because we left when I was four. And the next memory--

Do you remember if-- and again, you were a child-- do you remember if your parents explained anything to this toddler about why he had to hold his finger up to his mouth?

I don't remember an explanation.

That's understandable.

It may be that they wanted to spare a toddler, or feared what a toddler might divulge.

Right, of course. So you and your folks hid in the closet.

Yeah.

Must have been very frightening.

Very frightening time.

Because it was dark, I assume.

Dark. And the sounds outside the closet, and the fear transmits itself to a child, so you could feel it. And then my last memory of Vienna is our getting into a taxi very hurriedly and my asking, why isn't my grandmother coming with us? And the reason we were leaving so hurriedly was that morning we had received a notice from the Nazis to report to camp. So we left quite hurriedly in the taxi. My father had been trying to leave Vienna since 1932 when he saw what was happening in Germany.

Even before Hitler became Chancellor.

Even before Hitler became Chancellor, he watched what was happening in Germany and warned the family and went to his siblings and his father and said, we should leave. Let's all go to South America. And the family said, no, nothing's going to happen here. It's Germany. It will straighten itself out. We have our businesses here and our houses. And so, my father continued to persist for his own family. He would go every day to the American Consulate in Vienna, but

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there were no visas to be given at the time.

And finally, his uncle in Taunton, whose name was Moshe Grundberg, obtained a visa for only three members. He had to choose which of his family should get them. And because my parents were cousins, he figured this was the greatest remnant of both sides that he was saving. So that's how we got the visas.

But there was no money because the Nazis had shut down my parents' grocery store and there was no way to earn a living, except that my father secretly took apart the shells in the grocery store and made trunks for those Jews who were able to migrate. And the neighbors in the house were very fine because they didn't report us to the Germans. They must've heard the hammering.

These are non-Jewish neighbors?

These were non-Jewish neighbors. So, that's how he was able to earn a bit of money to support us. With the store closed there was no other--

Do you know when the store closed?

In 1938, right after the Anschluss. I presume that after a while even that way of earning a living petered out, because we had no money after a while, to the point that we had to eat in the soup kitchen. And I discovered this only from the notes that Harris was able to get from the Holocaust Museum, which has the records, apparently, of the Jewish Council, who were given the unpleasant job in Vienna of deciding which Jews could leave and which could not.

And my father, when he went to the Jewish Council, said that he could support himself because his skill was as a trunk maker. That's what he had done before he opened the grocery store. And he wanted to take with him, in addition to his wife and daughter, his mother-in-law and his niece, Susan. And the Jewish Council, because they were limited by the Nazis, couldn't allow his mother-in-law, who is over the age limit-- the age limit was 70 and she was 72. And they denied also Susan coming with him. So Susan escaped with her mother and father and brother Max to Belgium, and from there to France. And they were imprisoned by Klaus Barbie. So they never made it.

They did not survive the war.

They did not survive the war. No one else did survive. None of the brothers or sisters really survived, with the exception of one brother, and I'll tell you the story of that. I've lost track of, how I was going--

What you were leaving, you--

Oh, we left Vi--

The day that you got the notice to report.

Oh, we got the notice, yes. By that time, once we had the visa, we had no money because of the store closure.

Right.

So, my father's uncle, my great-uncle, Moshe in Taunton went to a philanthropist by the name of Dewey Stone. And Dewey Stone was a behind-the-scenes philanthropist, and he made available $400 for us to get passage on a ship.

Now, where did Dewey Stone live?

I believe he lived in Brockton. It was somewhere outside Boston. And he was one of these people that helped found the Weitzman Institute and brought--

In Israel.

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In Israel. And helped to bring President Harry Truman's partner to Washington to convince Harry Truman to recognize Israel.

Partner from the haberdashery store.

Partner from the haberdashery store.

From Missouri.

And so, with that money in hand, the $400 bought our passage. And we went in that taxi to the train station, and from there to Trieste.

Do you remember this?

I remember the boat trip, which was the Saturnia. But we were not in the upper decks. We were in the lower level.

Did you take anything special? You were a little girl. What did you take with you?

My parents brought several pieces of silver, which I've since distributed to our children, and a feather bed.

Feather bed.

Feather duvet.

A duvet.

And the candlesticks, which had been passed down from mother to daughter. I am guessing from these candlesticks-- they're very heavy brass-- that they, about 1860, were passed down from mother to daughter to grand--

Were these Shabbat candlesticks?

These were Shabbat candles. And so, those we brought with us, and very little clothing, very little money, if any. And we sailed on the Saturnia.

From?

From-- does Trieste sound right?

Yep.

From Trieste, then. And onboard the ship were two young boys from the Vienna, whose parents could not get visas for themselves, but could get it for the boys. And so the captain of the ship put these boys in charge of my parents, and my parents took care of those boys on the trip. Harris later found those two boys, who are now living in Florida and now own nursing homes. They were met by their relatives in New York, and we went on to Taunton, Massachusetts.

What were their names, do you know?

I don't remember, unfortunately. I must give you information on that. I'll dig up and we'll fill the record.

As a small child, did you take any special toys with you? Did you bring a doll or anything?

I don't believe I brought any special toys.

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Nothing.

After my father died I found a package that consisted of the clothing I had when we came. It was a lovely hand-embroidered dress with a Viennese store label inside.

This was for a four-year-old.

For a four-year-old. And black Mary Jane shoes. I sent those to Tammy, our daughter, who will be the curator. And some embroidery that my mother embroidered beautifully. And I don't know whether it was embroidery that she did or that her mother did, but it's Eastern European style and Eastern European colors, so I tend to think that it may have been her mother who embroidered it in the Ukraine. So, those were the minimal things that we brought.

Any other memories of the voyage?

Only being on board that ship. My father bought an English newspaper and an English dictionary. And on that journey, which I think must have taken a week and a half or so, I don't remember how long, he taught himself English.

What about your mother?

My mother spoke many languages. I think English was difficult for her, but I think she spoke enough, because when we came to this country they both went to work in a factory to earn a living, and my mother managed to communicate in that way.

Do you remember docking in the United States?

Yes, I do. And I remember Ellis Island. I believe--

Can you describe that?

It was Ellis Island. I don't remember the actual docking itself. One sees pictures of immigrants waving flags and looking at the Statue of Liberty, but I don't remember that.

Yeah, well, you were so young.

I do remember going through immigration and the procedures that were--

What was that like?

One had to strip completely, and I remember feeling a sense of humiliation from my mother. Not from me--

Even though you were so young.

Even though I was so young. Feeling a little angry, also, that she had to go through that kind of-- But it was a quick passage, and we must have gotten onboard a train or bus. That part I don't remember.

Was it frightening, a frightening thing? Did you know where you were? Did you have any idea of what American was?

No, I only knew--

Again, you were so small.

I only knew it was a transition. And I knew it was a big transition because we left behind Vienna, and we're in a new country where strange language and strange phrases-- but I don't remember the other part--

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Yeah, such a small child. OK, so now you get up to Massachusetts?

We got up to Massachusetts.

Did anybody meet you in New York, at all?

No, I don't believe so. It may have been HIAS. I know my parents always felt grateful to HIAS. And it may have been someone met us there, but I truly don't remember that.

Somehow you three got on a train.

Somehow we got to Taunton, Massachusetts, where we stayed with my uncle for a week or two. He had obtained for my father a job in the US Trunk Company, so that we could earn a living when we came, because at that time you were not allowed in the country unless you could ascertain and support yourself, and that you wouldn't be a drain on the government.

What month did you arrive here?

I believe it was October '39, because--

October '38?

'39. '39.

You said you left right after the Anschluss.

It was a year after on the Anschluss, sorry.

Oh, a year after--

Yes, thank you for that. No, a year after-- we lived under the Anschluss for a year.

I see.

And my father was beaten by the Gestapo.

How did that happen?

I don't remember the circumstance. I don't know the circumstance. He never told me why. It was in the store, and I suspect that it had something to do with maintaining the store. So, we arrived in October of 1939 because in November of 1939 I turned four. So that is how I remember.

Even though the war had started in Poland in September?

Yes.

'39-- you were able to get out.

We were able to get out. I think we were one of the few at the last minute to get out of Vienna.

Since you said you were there for a year after the Anschluss, any other experiences you had during that year that-- you were such a young child.

Such a young child. I don't remember. I simply don't remember.

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The boots-- you said you remember seeing the boots.

I remember the boots because they were toddler height.

Did you hear marching noises as the troops marched through the town? Did you--

I may have, but it doesn't register.

OK. OK. So we're now in Massachusetts.

We're now in Massachusetts. My great-uncle wanted my parents and me to stay longer, but my father felt he wanted to begin working and be independent as soon as possible. So we came to Fall River, Massachusetts, where this trunk factory was located, and got a first-floor tenement owned by a Polish woman, who was lovely because she--

A Polish Christian?

A Polish Christian. She owned the house, but she took care of me while my parents worked. Took me to church, and I remember the incense and going up with her to the altar. And she was what the French call a bricoleur. She made use of what there was. I remember sitting with her in the park, and she had bought some vegetables, some carrots, and I suppose I was hungry at the time. She wanted to clean the carrots, so she bent down, picked up a piece of broken glass, washed it in the fountain, and scraped the carrot for me. And this was the very practical way that she lived. She raised chickens, and I, being a naughty four-year-old, used to love to chase the chickens. The rooster would get very angry with me that I was chasing his flock, but that was my early childhood there.

If we can go back to Vienna for a minute--

Sure, of course, of course.

I'd like to tell you the story of my Aunt Toni, who was in the Resistance. Toni was the child of the second wife of my paternal grandfather and his second wife. Toni was in the resistance, and they lived in an apartment house where the postmaster and his family lived. One day there was a knock on the door-- and I believe this was in 1938 or maybe toward 1939-- and there was the postmaster in Gestapo uniform. And my grandfather said, Herr so-and-so, you've joined the Gestapo. And the postmaster said, I had to, to protect my family. But I've come to warn you, the Gestapo is coming for your daughter. She must leave immediately. So Toni ran down the back steps. Around the corner, the Gestapo were putting her compatriots in the Resistance into the car. She escaped and was sent later by the Russians to a camp in Siberia.

She played the mandolin there, Russian music, and worked in the camp that the Russians had sent. And one day, she was walking back from work and this man followed her. And he said, I don't mean to frighten you, but you look very familiar to me. Where are you from? She said, Vienna. He said, what street? The same street. What number house? It turned out to be Adolf, my father's eldest brother. And because he had with his siblings left the house at an early stage, when the stepmother came in, they hadn't recognized each other. Adolf, too, had been sent by the Russians to this camp. Adolf unfortunately died. Typhoid was endemic in the camp, and he died of typhoid.

Toni met her future husband there, Eli, and they migrated to Israel in 1948. And they lived in these primitive huts that Israel had set up, and later moved to Nazareth Illit. Eli and Toni had two children, Soshe and Jacob, named after their grandfather. And Soshe became the principal of a high school in Nahariyya. She was the principal of the high school. She thought her charges should see Europe, where they came from, and she took them to Poland, Auschwitz, and visited.

And then on the way they stopped in Vienna, and they wanted souvenirs to bring back to families in Israel. And they went into a candy store, and who should be the owner of that candy store? The daughter of the postmaster who had warned Toni and his family. And so they had a marvelous reunion. I suppose that they started talking, where are you

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from, my mother Toni is from Vienna, and the rest followed. And my aunt actually went from Israel to Vienna to visit Ami. Ami unfortunately died before we got to Vienna, so I didn't have a chance to meet her. So that was the amazing coincidence there. But life is full of coincidences, isn't it?

It's amazing.

So, we came to America, and I enrolled in public school there.

Were you able to pick up English quickly?

Yes, a child can pick it up fairly quickly. I couldn't pick up certain phrases. Colloquialisms were difficult to absorb. And I remember the woman upstairs in the tenement showing me a picture of Roosevelt, who was treated as an icon because there was a sheaf of grain underneath it, much the way people put a sheaf of grain in their icons. There was a sheaf of grain under Roosevelt's picture, and she said, do you know who this is? And I don't remember whether I knew at the time that it was Roosevelt. And I said something or other, and she said, how come? And this phrase would not translate itself in my mind-- how come? How come? And this was how I began to learn English, with its colloquialisms.

Idioms, yeah.

Its idioms. We lived in Fall River till I was 17, and I had met Harris that time because he lived in New Bedford.

OK. Let's go back here, now-- starting kindergarten, how did the other children treat you? Do you have any memories?

I think I was a bit different because I wasn't essentially an American.

Right. Did you dress differently than the other children?

Good question. I think I must have been because I think some of the clothing I had were hand-- handovers? Handout?

Hand-me-downs.

Hand-me-downs, yes. Here we go again, with idioms. I remember the butcher, the kosher butcher, very kindly giving me clothing. I think my mother may have refused it because she felt some pride in not having to take it, but I think my clothes were not fully American style yet. And my language wasn't yet fully-- and my mannerisms weren't really fully, fully American. But I was able to make friends, and I became Americanized over time.

Obviously your parents were aware of what was happening in Europe--

Well, that was a very difficult time because my parents--

How much did you know, also?

I knew what was going on because it was an unhappy time. My parents continually were trying to find out what happened to the family. My parents actually wrote to John F. Kennedy, who was senator at the time, or had something to do with-- some sort of liaison--

Now, you're talking about your father?

John F. Kennedy, who later became the President, was working in Massachusetts as a representative. And so, I remember my parents--

Because he was in the war. He was in the Navy during the war.

Oh, that's right. This must have been after the war.

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I'm talking about during the war.

Oh, during the war itself. Well, they were continually writing to Europe. I know my parents, in the early years of the war, were sending what money they could and clothing and food to try to reach their parents in Vienna. And the letters that came from my mother's sister, Regina, who was at the time in France, saying that they were being deported. And that was the last we heard.

Did they share any information with you as a young child?

No. That was a period, and I think it was common among refugee families, that you didn't say very much to the children. It was a difficult time and a lot was held back. But I do remember the atmosphere in the house, and it was difficult. It was difficult. It was sad. You could sense the sadness. Then my mother died when I was 12.

So that was 1947?

That was 1947, I believe.

So, what were your memories of when the war was over, in '45? Anything special, any celebration? Do you have any memories of the war being over? You were 10, right? You were 10 years old.

I remember the general jubilation in the city, left town of Fall River but--

Nothing special.

Nothing beyond that of the family. I think we still hadn't known what happened at that time, and the tension of that still prevailed in the house.

When did you start feeling American?

I think in my teens I began to feel American. I think up to that time, I was still very European. But in my teens I joined Young Judaea, which was a great help in assimilating into American society.

So, when you were here, how religious were your parents when you came to Massachusetts? Did they keep up observances? Did you--

Very little. Very little. I remember unpacking Passover dishes, and the special feeling of special foods.

Did you go to Hebrew school or anything?

No, I never did because there was not money for it. When I was 12 years old, I had a friend who went to Temple Beth El in Fall River, who did go to Hebrew School. And she told me about the religious school, and I decided I would like to go at age 12. Having no money, I went to see the rabbi. Rabbi Ruderman was his name. He was a very severe figure to the congregants, but he was the loveliest, kindest individual. And he said to me, if I would learn Hebrew over the summer, he would accept me and I could go gratis to Hebrew School and graduate from Hebrew School.

So I had a book of Hebrew, and that summer I sat down and learned the Hebrew print. To this day, I cannot read the script because I was in a hurry with the summer months to learn the Hebrew capital letters. And so, I can read the capital letters, and I read for the rabbi in September, and he accepted me, and the rest-- and it was lovely. I learned history, which I knew a bit. My mother would occasionally tell me Bible stories. But I really didn't know very much about history, and it was at the Temple Beth El Hebrew School in Fall River that I learned.

When you were in elementary school, did the other children, American children, ask you about where did you come from? Did you tell them? Were you open about your background?

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Yes. You remind me of an incident, because I don't think we had been in this country more than a year when I went to the playground. And there were two Christian children in the playground. I remember I was swinging by myself, and these two children came over and said, do you believe in the Virgin Mary? And do you believe in Jesus Christ? And having just escaped the Nazis and learned to be very quiet in what I say, I said, yes, I do. And they left me alone, saying, oh, she's all right. And when I went to elementary school, I think I must have been a little bit different. And it was largely the teachers who would say to the children that I was from Vienna, I had escaped from the war, and I was welcome in the classroom.

So the teachers were warm and welcoming.

The teachers were welcoming and warm and understanding.

So, now it's the late '40s, let's say, and you're getting to be a teenager.

Yes.

Were you active in other activities?

In the drama club and in the band. I took up the flute.

You said that's when you first started really feeling American.

Really feeling an American. I took up the flute. I didn't play well, but it was fun being in the band and with the band members, and Young Judaea. And later, at age 14, I met Harris, who became my husband because-- I think it was a Young Judaea function. And I drove-- no, I must have been driven at 14-- into New Bedford, where he lived. And that's how we met.

That's how you met. Did your mother work? She worked in the factory making clothing, and at that time, there was a shortage of workers. And since she could always sew, she was given this job. I think later that factory--

Did she start working as soon as she came to America?

Yes. She started working as soon as she came to America, as did my father in the trunk factory. And after a few years, they saved enough money to buy a house, and we moved out of that-- it was more a blue collar neighborhood-- into, how should I put it without sounding--

More middle class.

More middle class neighborhood, yes. And we lived on the first floor and rented out the other floors, and in that way we could manage to live.

When your parents found out what happened to their relatives-- are there any lasting impressions that you have, when they heard the sad news?

I think my mother died before they found out. But I'm not sure if it was 1947 or it may have been 1946. She died before we found out what happened fully. And I think my father later found out that his sister Clara had died in Treblinka, and I don't think he ever found out, nor did we ever find out, what happened to his brother Benjamin, who had a clock shop in Vienna. And Adolf, we learned, had been in the Russian camp and died.

Any other relatives you know about? Any other extended relatives that you can say their names and what happened to them, that you know of?

The other relatives died. On my father's side, there were some cousins that made it to America, who lived in America,

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and South America also. But the immediate family all died in the Holocaust.

Were there other refugees in Fall River that you were friendly with, other refugee children, or were you the only one?

I seem to be the only one.

That you knew of.

That I knew of. The other Jewish children were already from well-established families.

Did you think about Vienna?

I think I was too young to think about Vienna. And once my mother died, we switched completely from German and Yiddish to speaking English.

Oh.

So that probably helped in my feeling more like an American from 12 on.

So you and your father lived together?

My father and I lived together and spoke English to each other, yes.

And then you went off after-- you went to a public high school?

Public high school. And then, from there went to NYU for two years. And when I became engaged to Harris, I went to school at Boston University so that I could be near him. And then we were married when I was 20 and he was 21.

Oh, my. And then, where did you live after that?

We lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, because Harris was going to MIT at the time.

As an undergraduate?

As an undergraduate. He finished his year and then went for his master's in mathematics. And we lived in student housing, which had been condemned in 1940, but we lived in it in 1956 for $300 a month-- or 30-- oh, I added a digit. $30 a month, we managed to live in that house.

When you were a young wife, did you think about your family history before you had children? And you were just a young married couple. Did you think about Vienna? Did you think about the war? Did you think about what happened to extended family? Was that a part of your thought process?

It was a part. It's a part of the thought process that never leaves you. I did, but as a young wife and then later a mother, I was so busy trying to raise a family in happy circumstances. The children knew that family had been in Vienna and that I was from Vienna, and they were aware of the circumstances of the war. But we tried to make it a happy American family.

Now, did your husband's family-- were any of them survivors?

Yes. His grandfather came in 1890 from Lithuania and settled at an early time in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he had a peddler's cart. And it's very interesting that New Bedford had quite a large ethnic group, partly because it had been a whaling town, and so many people of many ethnicities came, including Japanese. And so, Harris's grandfather's picture is in the New Bedford Whaling Museum, along with the other ethnic groups, the Italians, Scots, the Japanese. It's a lovely little memento of New Bedford's time.

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Did he have any extended family who didn't leave Europe and who did not survive the Shoah?

Not that he learned of till many years later, in fact, just about five years later, when we went to Lithuania on a trip, and he learned that there was some distant relatives. But most of his extended family and his mother-- his grandmother had 11 children-- lived in New Bedford. So it was a very close-knit family. And it was an unusual thing for me, to go from no family at all to this great extended family.

So then you finished in Cambridge, and then what happened?

Then we moved to New York because Harris got his master's in math and decided that he would like to be a lawyer. There were seven lawyers in his family, so I guess it was in the DNA. He was accepted at Harvard, he was told, if he would wait a year. But we were 26 at the time and needed to get going rapidly in our lives, and so he was accepted at Columbia. I got a teaching job in New York after, and in Massachusetts I worked as a training instructor at John Hancock Insurance Company. But we left Cambridge and moved to New York. And we had an old Nash at the time, and we loaded meager belongings on it, including a mattress on top of the roof of the car. And the sticker said "MIT" on the Nash, and it was quite another transition to make. And I remember saying to Harris, do you know what MIT stands for? Madhouse In Transit.

Ha ha. That's wonderful.

But we moved into New York, into an apartment, and I got a job teaching public school, PS 141. And Harris was in law school.

He was a full-time student.

Full-time student.

And no children yet?

No children yet. In my third year of teaching I became pregnant with our daughter, and the principal of the school very kindly kept me on till the end of the year. He was a lovely man, Mr. Robinson. I've never forgotten him. The vice principal was a very staid, prim spinster, whose brother was the bishop of-- I believe it was in New York.

And at the time, Christian schoolchildren were dismissed from school for religious school. The Jewish children waited till the end of the school. The dictum came down from the Board of Education that children were no longer be to be dismissed early. I had a student in my class named James, who was used to being dismissed for Christian class. He came up to me and said, Mrs. Weinstein, I have to leave. And I said, terribly sorry, James. The ruling from the Board of Education says you need to stay till the end of the school day. He came back the next week and said, Mrs. Weinstein, I need to leave. And my priest says that if you don't let me go, he will report you to the bishop.

I went down to Miss Flannelly, his sister, the vice principal, and I said, Miss Flannelly, you're going to get a very bad report about me from your brother, and I need to tell you about this. It was the only time in the entire time that I worked in that school that I saw her laugh. And she said, don't worry about a thing. I will take care of it. And from then on, poor James never came up to me. But I felt very badly because I was a Jew telling him that he couldn't be excused. But I had to follow the ruling of the school board.

Did the other faculty and staff know your background?

No.

They did not?

They did not.

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Did you have any accent at that point?

I had no accent except a slight Massachusetts one. But no European accent that they could detect.

So you never talked about your experiences and the Anschluss?

No, no, I never never mentioned it to them. I was just another member of the faculty.

As your father aged, did he talk about his losses and what he went through?

He didn't talk about his losses. He was a stoic in that way. But he did tell us, and I've told the children and he told the children, and he would tell people how he had, very early on in 1932, detected what was going to happen. And at the last stage of our being in Vienna, before we got the visa and when he was continually denied the visa from the American Consulate, he was prepared to walk us over the mountains to Switzerland. But fortunately, that visa finally came through, yes.

So, now you're in New York, finished your three years. You got pregnant, you said?

And Harris got a job clerking for Judge Hastie in Philadelphia. He was a lovely man.

So you moved to Philadelphia?

And we moved to Philadelphia, to Elkins Park. And when our daughter was born, Harris went to the synagogue there in Elkins Park, which was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. And if you go to the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv, there is a model of the Frank Lloyd Wright. It's a beautiful-- you've seen it. And we lived there a year, and moved from there to Washington when Harris got a job at the law firm here.

Then he joined a law firm in Washington.

He joined a law firm in Washington.

And did you have any other children?

Yes, we had our daughter in Philadelphia, and then in Washington we had our son, Josh, who is named after Harris's grandfather, Moses Joshua Weinstein. And then we had Jacob, who is named after my grandfather. And so he and my cousin in Israel have the same name, and it's Jacob Solomon Weinstein. I remember one of Harris's cousins, who lived at the time in Washington when our son was named. He said, are you going to give him boxing gloves? Because he's going to need it with that name.

And do you have any grandchildren? We have six grandchildren. Our son lives in Santa Monica. He's a comedy writer. And he has twins, a boy and a girl, who are 14. Our daughter lives in Wilmette, Illinois, and she has two grown sons, one of whom is married to a Romanian girl. And we have our son Jacob and his wife Lauren, who live in London, and they have two children.

Wonderful. Let's talk now about some of your thoughts about what you went through. Number one, you feel very American?

Oh, yes. I remember my father saying he was on a trolley, and-- this was years after we came, and someone asked him directions. And my father gave him directions, and he said, I feel like an American. And I feel the same way, America has given us this opportunity to live, and I have this feeling of gratitude. And this is why I so much enjoy the work I'm doing now.

Which is?

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Which is teaching and nursing in retirement homes. We began a program 22 years ago, which is now called the Himmelfarb Mobile University, which goes to senior sites-- runs the spectrum from retirement homes, senior centers to nursing homes and Alzheimer's units. And we are a group of teachers that bring classes to these homes so people's minds stay active. And I particularly love going to the army, the service, homes and the Merchant Marine and Navy and Coast Guard, because when I go there, to people who serve their country, I feel I'm serving the country, too. So yes, I feel like an American now.

Did you have any additional education besides your undergraduate degree?

I went back after our children were grown. I went back for a master's degree in liberal arts at Georgetown University, and was lucky to have some fantastic teachers, including Jesuits who are masterful teachers. And I learned about anthropology because, up to that time, I had a business education, which stood me in very good stead at John Hancock as a teacher there, but I felt my education was very limited. And by earning this master's degree, it opened up a vast horizon. And that's actually the subject that I'll teach in these nursing homes, is anthropology itself. So Georgetown gave me that opportunity.

Any more education after the master's?

I went for a few years to Catholic to work toward a doctorate, but I never did get my doctorate.

Catholic University in Washington.

At Catholic University. But that certainly widened my horizons as well.

In what field?

Anthropology.

Oh, in anthropology. When your children were your age, when you were so little and the Anschluss happened, when they were three, four, five, did it resonate with you? Did it bring back memories of what you went through as a child, you know, seeing German boots and things like that?

Yes. Yes, yes, it did. I wanted to protect them from that, but they needed to know that, on a very mild, superficial scale, that there's evil in the world, and that one has to be watchful and careful, but not to an extent where they would become fearful or psychologically bothered by it.

Are there any sounds today or sites that kind of remind you of the difficult time you went through before you left Austria?

Yes. I'm trying to think what sights and sounds they are that-- they do evoke a memory. Marching sounds do do that. Boots do that. Even when state troopers wear their boots, it gives-- I have to analyze why I have an uneasy feeling, and then I realize why and dismiss it because this is America.

Right. Do dogs bother you? Did you see German--

No, no, oddly enough, they don't. German shepherds, perhaps when they bark viciously, do, but--

Do you remember seeing them in Austria?

No, no, I don't. I remember pictures, of course, but no, I don't remember that per se.

Did a man named Adolf Hitler have any meaning for you when you were little?

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Yes, it did. And I remember hearing a broadcast after we arrived in Massachusetts, and there was a radio show where someone talked of meeting Hitler. And I suppose I was 5 at the time. And I remember this person saying, Hitler kissed her hand in this European manner. And I remember saying, huh, if I knew Hitler was going to do that, when I met him I'd put poison on my hand. But certainly, Hitler was a known name in our household.

And you could understand what he was saying.

And I could understand what was being said about Hitler, yes.

Are you angry that you had to go through those difficult times, and children in the United States did not?

No. No.

No anger?

I have guilt, I think, that I managed to escape and others didn't. But I think that's an integral part of what many refugees feel. But no, no, I'm not angry that-- that's their life and they're entitled to their life, so there's no anger there. There's anger at ignorance, at revisionists who will deny the Holocaust, or an ignorance of it, which I feel is a worrisome thing. But you and the Holocaust Museum are preventing that, hopefully. But anger at children who didn't have-- no, not at all.

Did you lose a part of your childhood?

Yes, that's a good question. I think I did I think I did. But, then again, it doesn't hurt to lose a part of a childhood. You just mature at an earlier age, and you end up having a certain empathy for humanity, whoever they may be. So, it's not a lost childhood, in that sense. You gain by it. Also, by being stronger, you--

I realized later what I do is what the Japanese call Bushido. The warrior, the samurai, would distance themselves from the emotion of the time so that they could fight. They would distance themselves from fear, anger, and simply concentrate on what they had been trained to do. And I find myself doing that in difficult situations. I set myself apart from it, don't allow myself to feel the emotion, so that I can go through what has to be done. And that, I think, is part of my being a refugee from those times. So that's what I mean that it doesn't hurt, it helps.

It gave you skills that you ordinarily wouldn't have had if you were born here.

Right. It gives you an outlook, and inner and outer strength. Inside may be turmoil, but you don't allow it.

Well, that was going to be a question I was going to ask you, which I-- interested in your answer. Are you two different people, someone on the inside and another person on the outside?

I think I'm a unified whole, but I've learned to control. So if there's anger at a situation, it's not anything to do with the Holocaust. But if there's anger in a situation, I've learned to cover it up so that I can go ahead with what needs to be done. So, there may be anger, but I don't show it. Or there may be sadness, and I try not to show it, in that sense. But does your question mean, am I in turmoil because of the two cultures that I'm straddling?

And the fact that you have to escape with your parents.

Well, I count myself fortunate that I was able to escape, and badly that there were others who didn't, that we managed to escape and unfortunately others didn't. So, there's no elation over it. There are no extremes of feeling over it, simply an acceptance. It is what it is.

Are you more comfortable around people who were refugees like you than people who were born in the United States?

That's a good question, let me--

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Do you feel a connection to someone who--

Well, here I think I straddle two cultures again. If someone is European, I do feel a certain connection. I think there's a certain behavior pattern of Europeans that isn't American. And yet, there's a certain behavior pattern in American that isn't in European. So you simply straddle the two cultures, and it's not that you're a chameleon and take on the coloration, it's simply you have a certain empathy with these different cultures.

So you're comfortable with those who also came from Europe, like you did.

Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

What are your thoughts about Israel? Well, I've always been pro-Zionist, and certainly my belonging to Young Judaea fostered that. I feel it's crucial that we have and Israel because with our nomenclature of the Wandering Jew, hopefully this ends that period. And I fully believe that the full extent of the Holocaust would not have happened had we an Israel. A homeless, stateless people is a very vulnerable people. And I remember reading about Hitler and the Armenians. And when no one really came to the Armenian aid, Hitler saying, the world didn't watch out for the Armenians, therefore we can do the same with the Jews. So, I feel that Israel is an essential absolute necessity.

Have you been back to Vienna?

We've been back now five years in a row. Next spring will be the fifth year in a row. I didn't go back--

In other words, you go back every year, is that what you're saying?

Because Harris mentors his group of students at Catholic University, and they go into this arbitration debating that meets in Vienna. So that's how we get back there each year, otherwise--

Had you been back before? That was your first time back?

Back in 72 years.

So what was your reaction? Did you have memories?

It was like walking on a moving sidewalk because it was not a secure feeling. But yet, it had been home. And so it was a strange feeling. It is such a beautiful city and such a monumental city that, after a while, I began to feel at home again. We found a wonderful Polish driver who chauffeured us to the places, the house where I had lived in, the apartment house.

This was a Polish driver?

This was a Polish driver, lovely man, lovely man.

Polish driver in Austria.

And a Polish driver in Austria. And he took us all around to the place where my parents store had been. That was in a courtyard, and the building had a plaque on it. The Viennese love to put plaques on buildings. And the Allies apparently didn't bomb Vienna till rather late in the war, so the building had a plaque on it, said, this was bombed by the Allies in 1943. It was 1944. And then you enter a little gate and there was a courtyard that is now-- where my parents store had been is now a garage. But I felt the feeling, a memory, of the courtyard.

And then the Polish driver took us to the apartment house. Couldn't find it. We drove around and around. And he finally had the wonderful idea to ask a postman. And he said, oh yes, that building there had been 29 Heiligestadt Strasse. It was a new modern building. Jacob, my younger son who lives in London, had gone to Vienna several years before and gone to that house and taken a picture of it.

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Before it was knocked down?

Before it was knocked down. It was a lovely old stone building. We had an apartment in it. But that had been knocked down to make way for a clinic. And we went into the clinic, and I wanted to ascertain that that was the building. And because it was a long line of ill people, I didn't want to break into that line, so I went to an office where there was no one. And I said in my poor German, excuse me, I have a question. And they looked up and said, get into line. And I said, but I'm a tourist, I have only a question. Get into line.

So, we went out of the building and waited till a person with a friendly face came out. And then in our bad German, my bad German, said, can you tell us how old this is? And she said, it was two years old, so it fit. And it was perfect site for a medical clinic because the U-bahn, the fantastic rail system that they have, was just a door or two down, so people could make it easily.

We went back. We found the house where my grandfather had lived, and my Aunt Toni, which is now in a heavily Muslim building. A man there very kindly asked if we wanted to come inside. But we didn't. We didn't want to intrude. We didn't know what apartment it was. So then, we had another driver, a fellow from Turkey, who took us to the Friedhoff, which is the cemetery where my grandmother, Rosa, is buried. This was my maternal grandmother, who died in the flu epidemic. And we tried to find her grave in the Jewish section. Could not. The Turkish driver was marvelous. He ran up and down the rows trying to find it, till we finally had to say, we're afraid we have to get to the airport, now. We need to stop. But he was willing to try. He worked very hard. He was lovely.

In contrast, I had a taxi driver from Vienna-- well, shall I tell you the story? He was very angry that he had to drive me to the Marriott, which was the edge of Vienna, from the center of Vienna. And he guessed from my poor German, he understood that I had been there before. And I said, yes, I was born there. He said, why did you leave Austria? It's a wonderful country. And I thought, ugh, if I have to explain, there's no sense in it. But that was my meeting with the Austrian driver.

So, we have been back several times since, and I've gone to the wonderful museums and it gives me a chance to practice my poor German. Although, invariably when I speak German, the Viennese break into English. Shows you how bad my German must be, but I try to practice it before we leave so that I can at least get us about Vienna.

Did you take German in high school?

I did. I took a little bit of German in addition to French, and it was an easy class for me because of it. And Yiddish, of course, stands you in very good stead as a dialect.

Because you and your family were deprived of your civil rights in Austria, were you when you were an adult active in the Civil Rights movement here in the United States? I know you had young children.

Well, we campaigned for gun control. And when Martin Luther King was assassinated, we and some friends went to the capital to distribute gun control pamphlets. I actually had the pamphlets knocked out of my hand by a man who said, what are you, a commie? But we continued to work for gun control. Hasn't worked very well, but we worked in that. When we lived in Crestwood, our daughter wanted to enroll in a brownie troop. And we went to the local Baptist church where she was a member of the scout troop. Unfortunately, she was not made welcome. She was the only white child there. And it made very clear that she was not welcome. And after a year of trying to participate, we left.

What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial?

Well, it was interesting to watch these trials. I was very happy that he was caught. We support the the Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. It was a painful trial but a very necessary one because, as the Holocaust deniers come out, as the Holocaust survivors die off, without your good work and the Holocaust work, there's a danger that the world will forget. I was very glad that this trial was brought to bear.

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Have your children been affected by the fact that their mother had to escape from Hitler?

They are sensitive to it. They are sensitive to it. We never emphasized that, but they know from history, from our history, and so they are very sensitive to it. Our older daughter in particular because she is the first child, but the boys are quite sensitive to it also, quite sensitive. And as our grandchildren-- I think they are being taught about the Holocaust.

Do the older ones ask you about what you went through as a young child?

Not too much. Not too much. I think they see certain habits which come from-- being hungry as a child, I cannot throw food away, and they see that in me. Food cannot be wasted.

And they know why.

And they know why. And they know why because I explain why-- what it's like to be hungry. So, I think they understand.

They intuit it.

Yes, yes. In addition, I do try to explain in a fairly light way. Also, a degree of watchfulness is something else that I've tried to instill in them. You know, Jefferson said that evil can prevail if enough good people don't do anything, and I want them to be alert to antisemitism, to wrongs done to any group. Everybody's got a responsibility to watch for that. But it's hard. When you grow up in comfortable circumstances, it's hard to imagine it. So, we're a generation already removed from that. So it's hard to inculcate that in a way, but you do what you can when the moment comes, without hammering it in.

Were you, do you think, overprotective when you were raising your children?

Yes, I think I tended to be overprotective, and that's another common thing, I think, that refugees have.

That something can happen at any moment.

That something can happen any moment. You know, I read a poet-- I wish I remember his name, of Israel-- he said, every Jew is born with a knife in his heart. Of course, he was talking about Abraham and Isaac and the sacrifice that didn't take place. But I think every Jew feels that, and so you worry that your children-- and then, it extends even to your grandchildren, it never ends. Yeah. But then, you don't have to be a refugee to worry about your children. I think an Italian can be a Jewish mother as well.

What are your thoughts about whether the world has learned anything from the Holocaust.

I'm not sure the world has learned enough. This is the concern. This is the best-- why do things like Sudan or Ethiopia-- Syria-- I don't think the world learns. It's a part of our survival technique as human beings, I think. We are able to-- what's the word. Categorize.

Compartmentalize.

Compartmentalize. Thank you, that's it exactly. We compartmentalize. And so, we take note of evil when it happens, but then we are so busy trying to live that we put it aside. But I think the world needs to continue and needs to be reminded continually.

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

Excellent. Excellent.

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It's in the United States, even though the war did not take place in the United States.

It is the place. It's the nation's capital. People come from all over, and they need to come, and they need to know. I vividly remember, when we went to Krakow, Harris was teaching a class there, and the Jagiolian, Jagi- Jagiellonian--

University.

I have to take a running start to say that word. It's named after Jagiello, the King of Poland. And he established a law school there, and we've been there several times for Harris to teach. And, of course, Auschwitz--

You've been to?

I have not been. Is a half hour to an hour away from Krakow. And I remember one morning seeing two couples from England, Christians, going to Auschwitz. They were laughing. They didn't know what they were going to see. I think they were probably going to see the salt mines, which are an interesting thing to see also. They were laughing and gay. They came back utterly drained and gray. And I said to myself, I know just where you've been. And I think the world needs to see the Holocaust Museum, so they know where the world has been.

So, I am thoroughly in favor of it I'm rather glad to see-- never mind, rather. I am glad to see that there are Holocaust museums throughout the country and in Europe as well. A needed reminder-- the needed reminder to the world.

Well is there any message you wanted to leave to your grandchildren during this interview? Anything you wanted to say to them?

Stay alert and stay human. I think they're nice human beings to begin with, but they should remember they're menschlichkeit, their humanity, that they're a part of the human race. And we're not just Jews or Christians or Arabs. We're humans. We've all evolved from the same source, so stay human.

Is there anything else you want to add before we close?

Is there anything you think that I left out that I should? I'm turning it back with a Jewish question. Answer a question with a question.

Well, thank you very much for doing this interview and your willingness to be interviewed.

Thank you very much, Gail, for doing it. It's a lovely thing that you're doing. You're keeping memories alive for a very important reason. You're keeping memories so that activity can stay.

Can follow.

Follow, yeah.

This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Rosa Weinstein.

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