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This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Trudy Schonberger conducted by Gail Schwartz on January 16, 2014 in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is track number one.

What is your full name?

Trudy Schonberger, no middle name.

No middle name. And what was your name at birth?

Trudy Wellisch.

Wellisch is your--

The maiden name.

--your maiden name?

Yes.

And where were you born?

I was born in Vienna, Austria.

And when were you born May 20, 1926. Let's talk a little bit about your family now. Your parents' names?

My mother's name was Irene Kohn, K-O-H-N, which translated to American Cohen, C-O-H-E-N, but hers was K-O-H-N. And my father was Hugo Wellisch.

And how far back can you trace your family in Vienna, or how far back can you trace your family?

Well, as far as grand parents, I did not know my mother's parents, but I did know my grandmother on my father's side. And her name was Rosa Wellisch, and she lived with us. I didn't know her husband, my grandfather.

So you knew one grandparent.

So I knew one grandparent.

How far back in Vienna did the family go? Do you know?

Well, I don't know. This is about as--

--much?

I knew my aunts and uncles.

--who lived in Vienna?

Some lived in Vienna, and some lived in other towns outside of Vienna.

You mean in surrounding towns?

Surrounding-- well, we lived in a small town called Wiesenfeld, where my father had kind of a big business.

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What kind of business?

It was like a-- you might call a general store or a department store because he sold everything. Besides selling groceries, and materials for clothing, and shoes, et cetera, he also had a wholesale lumber business and grain, like corn and-- I don't remember what else. I just remember that quite well.

And he catered to all the people in the area, and this small town of Wiesenfeld was about an hour's drive from Vienna. I don't know whether it was east or west. Best not ask me directions because-- so it was about an hour's drive.

But you were born in Vienna.

I was born in Vienna, yes. My parents were born in the country. My mother was born in a town next to mine, to Wiesenfeld, called Traisen, and that's spelled T-R-A-I-S-E-N. And my father was born-- I believe he was born in Wiesenfeld because the house we lived in was my grandparents' house.

How religious were your parents?

We were not religious, but we were well-aware and made sure that we observed all the holidays. I had to learn Hebrew. My brother was bar mitzvahed, but that was in another city, not in Vienna but in a city called Sankt Polten, and they had a synagogue there. That's spelled capital S-T, period, and then capital P-O with an umlaut, L-T-E-N. That had a synagogue, and bigger schools, and all that.

So you had-- obviously, you said you had your brother. Did you have any other siblings?

No.

And your brother's name?

Eric.

And how much older?

He's six years older.

Six years older, OK.

And he's living in North Carolina now.

Wonderful, wonderful. So let's again talk about your life. So your parents were not overly religious.

Not overly.

Did you observe Shabbat and things like that?

Not really.

No, but just the big holidays?

The big holidays.

What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews?

No Jews. We were the only Jews because it was a very small village. It was in the foothills of the Alps, beautiful area. But we were the only Jews in that town. The rest was mostly farmers, peasants, and that's where my father catered, to all

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these people, and further out, even. He had a big surrounding area that he catered to.

What language did you speak at home?

German.

German. No Yiddish or anything?

No Yiddish, no, no, no.

OK. So obviously, you went to a regular school. What kind of school did you go to, starting from when you young?

There was no school in Wiesenfeld. There was nothing in Wiesenfeld. What do they say, if you blink, you're gone, or you're done? So I had to start school in a village called Sankt Veit. That's spelled capital S-T and then capital V-E-I-T. And I started first grade to probably third grade, maybe, fourth grade. I don't quite recall.

And we walked, and it was about maybe from half a mile to a mile. And then I transferred to the other town that I mentioned, Traisen, which had a school that went to seventh grade or-- I don't recall, but I went there with my cousin, Lilly, who lived in Traisen. And they had more Jews there, not many, but a couple of families.

So I went to Traisen until I was 11 years old. And then I was sent to Vienna, to the gymnasium, which is like our high schools but a lot tougher, very tough. I had to pass an entrance exam to get in, and I was very tempted to cheat. But not for the good but so I didn't have to go. But I passed it, and I lived with friends of my parents in Vienna.

I really didn't want to go. I was kind of a homebody, and these people I lived with were very nice. They were not Jewish. They had a daughter a little bit older than myself, and we both went to that gymnasium.

How did your parents know this family or make the arrangements?

Oh, they had been friends for many years through a sibling of theirs, either the husband or the wife, who lived in Traisen. And my parents had been friends with them, and that's how they got to know each other. And they were very nice to me.

Let's go back a little bit. So when you were growing up in your village, was there-- do you remember-- and you were, of course, quite young-- any experiences of anti-Semitism?

No, I don't.

--since you were the only Jewish family there.

Yeah, yeah. No, nothing as far as--

And you played with the other children?

Oh, I had a good friend right across the street, very, very poor. And she was my best friend, and I would share my toys with her. And my mother would give her clothing and things like that.

So there was no-- and with the teachers, no expressions of anti-Semitism?

Not yet. It's coming.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, so is that school you didn't experience--

No, no. Not yet, no.

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Where you were a very athletic child?

I was not, not in the gym.

Did you like sports in any way?

Skiing, and skating, and sleigh riding. We did that. And skiing was relatively simple for us because all I had to do was put on my skis and walk up the hill, go across the road and walk up on a mountain.

Yeah. Did you like to read?

I did like to read, and when I was very little, I recall my mother reading me beautiful stories. You know.

Would you call yourself an independent child?

Not really.

You were very attached to your family.

Not really, I was very attached to my parents. But then when I had to go to Vienna, which was a good thing--

Yeah. OK, so now you're in Vienna and memories of that. You said you went when you were 11, so that was 1937.

Exactly. And I went there in August to get ready for the opening of school in September, and when I started this gymnasium, I hated it immediately. The teachers were so strict, and I was--

This was a coed?

This was girls-only, girls-only.

But anyway, I made it. And now--

Before that or up to that point, Hitler had been in power. Again, you were young, of course. Do you have any memories of this man, Hitler, in '35, '36, '37, 1937?

Not that because that was Germany.

No, I know. I know. But you spoke German, and did your parents hear him speak over the radio. That's what I meant.

I was not aware of any of that.

--of what was happening in Germany?

Nothing, no, no, didn't. If they talked about among themselves--

Yeah. They didn't say anything to you?

I don't recall that, no. The only thing I do remember was the chancellor-- his name was Dollfuss-- during '35 or '36. He was assassinated, and I heard that then because they were talking about it in school. But I thought, oh, that's too bad, but meh.

OK, so now you're in gymnasium.

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Now I'm in gymnasium, and I'm hating every minute.

Right, and it's 1937, right.

So I get through it, and now comes the month of March 1938. And I'm at home with the family, I think, ready to go to school or whatever the date was.

In Vienna?

In Vienna.

The other family, not your family.

No, the foster family, let's call them.

What were their names? Do you remember? It's OK.

Her name was [? Gisi, ?] Gisil, and Hans.

That's OK. Yeah. It's all right. OK, so you're with them.

I'm with them, and there is a fantastic commotion, and noises, and yelling, and screaming, and airplanes. And we are running to the window, and I don't know if it was the Luftwaffe or a German aircraft throwing down pamphlets and propaganda. And later on we ran outside to pick it up, but it was the Anschluss, the annexation of Austria, right then and there, poof. And shortly thereafter, Chancellor Schuschnigg went on the air and saying goodbye to Austria, Austria is no more.

Had you heard of Hitler? When did you first hear of Adolf Hitler?

Well, this was all right now at that moment.

So this was your introduction?

This was the introduction, and I don't even know whether Hitler's name came up, but Germany. What is this? I'm 11 years old. I have no idea what is going on.

Anyway, my foster mom said, when things started to come down, time to go to school or whatever it was. I went back to school. I had to go to school. And things went on sort of normally.

One week passed by. The principal came into the classroom and said, all Jewish girls, out into the hall. And at least I knew enough I was Jewish. I went out into the hall, and there were other Jewish girls already out there. And the principal said, pack up your books and whatever belongs to you, and get out. Do not come back. No Jews allowed.

So the comprehension wasn't there yet. What's going on? So I took my books, and my coat, and whatever we had. And I took the streetcar, and I went home to the foster parents. And she said, are you all right? What's happening?

I said, I'm OK, but I got kicked out of school. She said, what did you do? I said, I don't know. So I'm proceeding to tell her, the principal said, don't come back. They don't want Jews. And she-- I remember this like it was yesterday-- she sat in the chair, and she said, oh my God. I guess we have to call your parents.

And she immediately went and called my parents, and it was either my mother my father-- I don't recall-- said, I guess we'll come and get her. So I was there another day, and they came immediately and brought me home. And you know what I thought? I thought, you know what, this isn't so bad. I hate this place anyway, not realizing yet what was to come.

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So you weren't frightened at that point?

I didn't have sense enough to be frightened, really. I did sense--

--something wasn't--

--something. My parents, and the foster parents, and that excitement, not good excitement, not happy excitement--

Tension?

Tension. So I went home. Now, you can't just sit home. What are we going to do now? OK, my mother called the school in Traisen, where my cousin lived, and they asked if they would take me in school, and they said yes. So that wasn't so bad because my cousin, Lilly, my age-- we were like sisters, and she had two brothers, Oscar, older, and Otto, younger.

And so we were kind of together, and the school was right across from her house. So we would go to lunch at my aunt's-- Tante Olga was her name, Lilly's mom, and her dad, Isidore. Isidore was my mother's brother. And so things were not too bad. This is now April already. It took a while to get me in and the details of all this stuff.

Were there any banners or any symbols around?

The swastika.

--was up by then in the town?

Everybody had the swastika, everybody. I don't know where it came from so quickly.

What did that mean to an 11-year-old girl?

Just, what's happening? What is happening? And then you find out. This is how I found out how things are getting worse.

Now it's April.

Now we're finding out.

It's April.

A very nice teacher came in one morning to the classroom, and all the kids jumped up, "heil Hitler," with the arms. That was the law. And Lilly and I jumped up, too. We thought, it has to be this way. And the teacher said, Trudy and Lilly, you say "good morning." You do not say "heil Hitler." Or he said, you don't have to say-- so we thought, OK, "guten morgen." We never saw the teacher again. It was the last time. He just disappeared, never knew what happened. I would think some of the kids went home, told mommy and daddy-- away.

OK, life goes on. About a month later, another teacher said to the class-- he was our math teacher. His name was Richter. I remember that. Well, I guess you'll see why I remember him. He said, I have good news for you, children. We are going on a field trip to Linz, big city in Austria. So I am handing out the forms, and you get your parents to sign it.

And Lilly and I were-- that's great. So we went home and showed it to Papa, and he said, I guess it's OK. He had a little thinking, but I thought, well, that's Papa. He worries about everything. And Lilly went home, and she got permission. And we brought the forms back, and the teacher takes the forms, looks at them, tears them up, and says, Lilly and Trudy, you cannot go. We do not take Jews.

Then this is now-- we cried. Why? What did we do? Now it's beginning to sink in. Something is with the Jews that they

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don't like.

And he wasn't all nasty about it. He said, I'm so sorry. And that was it. We couldn't go. So now this is beginning to sink in, what is happening.

At that time, did any of the Christian children say anything to you about that?

No, I don't recall that. I think if it had been anything nasty or mean I would remember it, but there was nothing pro or con.

Neither way?

Neither way, no. So it was beginning to be quite painful. Well, then came the summertime, and there was no school. And Lilly and I spent a lot of time together because our Gentile friends were no longer our friends. They weren't allowed to play with us.

So we spent time together and did what we could. We visited each other. We couldn't go to many places. You're not allowed to do anything. In the meantime--

What weren't you allowed to do then?

Well, really, my parents and her parents did not allow us to run around and to-- because it was getting dangerous. My brother, for example, was in a gymnasium in Sankt Polten, which I think I mentioned to you, and he had just finished gymnasium. He was 17.

And he was valedictorian. And the principal or the superintendent called him into the office because they are graduating now and said, Eric, we will give you your diploma, but you cannot come to graduation. So then I knew this. Eric was talking about it, and he said, I can't go to graduation, but at least I graduated.

Eric always had a sense of humor about everything, and he took things-- I will get to that a little bit later, but now we are coming back from summer vacation and back to school. Was it frightening seeing German soldiers?

I wasn't that frightened. I kind of liked seeing them, their marching. Maybe we were dumb or something. I don't know. Or kids love to see marching. We weren't aware that the soldiers were going-- there was going to be a war. That was not-- but they marched right by my house-- I remember that-- and waving to them and-- you know. It didn't last, believe me.

But now comes September. We're back in school.

This is September '38?

Exactly, '38, and nothing much is happening. And I would go right through until November 10. And we are in school, and we went, as I said, home to lunch every day to Aunt Olga, Lilly's mom. And we're going to lunch, and it is very cold.

And we're getting there, and the door is open. And a window is open. Sometimes she used to open a window to air it out but always closed and all that. And we walked in, and Lilly calls, Mama? No answer. Again, we're running through the house. Mama? Mama? Nobody there.

And I'm yelling, Tante Olga, where are you? We are home for lunch. We only have half an hour. No answer. Lilly and I look at each other. Something's not right. I said, what do we do? She said, I know the [? Tischler ?] family here in town, another Jewish family. Why don't we go there? Something's happened.

So OK, we start going down the street when, all of a sudden, across from us-- we're walking straight, and perpendicular

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comes what we call the Green Henry. It was a green police wagon, and in it is her father. And we see this, and my uncle just waved. Goodbye.

And then we just were so scared, and we started running. And we get to the [? Tischler ?] house, and they're all women, no men, gathered in that house. And we said to my aunt-- and she said, what happened? We didn't know were you were. She said, I didn't have time. They came and chased me out. They wouldn't even let me leave a note or go get you.

What is going on? Well, nobody told us anything. The women were there, and they were very upset, an old woman, who was-- and babies. I mean, that must have been 10 or 12 people. Where's my mother? We don't know.

So I said, I'm going home. Oh, you can't go alone. So Lilly said, I'll go with you, because I will-- you can't stop me now. Now I'm getting independent. So Lilly and I start walking, and the distance was maybe a mile from where we were to my home in Wiesenfeld.

We get about halfway. I see a bicyclist coming towards us. There was minimal traffic at that time. Nobody had a car. So here comes a bicycle ride-- even that was a big deal-- come closer. Who is it? My mother.

She said, Papa is in jail. Where's Eric? He's in jail. Oh God, and uncle Isidore-- we just saw him go by. They must have taken him to jail. What happened? A Jewish kid-- my mother is saying, come on, let's go. I'm going to take you back to the [? Tischler. ?] We're all going to be together.

The story was-- and everybody has heard this story. A Jewish kid killed a Nazi official, and we're all paying. Everybody paid-- I don't know how many marks-- plus being imprisoned. So that's what that day was, Crystal Night. They took my father into a jail in some other town and my brother, and they were sitting there.

And my mother-- they were taking my mother, too, but my mother-- if you want to know somebody feisty, she was. She said, you're not keeping me. You can shoot me first. You're not keeping me here. I got to go get my daughter. She didn't do anything. She's 11 years old.

And they said, OK, go, go, go. So that's how she got out. So we went back to the house, and all the women-- what are we going to do, and kvetching, and crying. My mother said, you know what, we don't have time for this. We better sit down here and think about what to do.

So perhaps we could find-- she just made things up to keep them busy, to get some clothes together or get whatever we need, get some suitcases maybe, do whatever we have to do. Even if the suitcase empty, just-- you never know what we have to do. And they said, OK. And I don't know what they did, but by that time, things were coming towards suppertime.

And my mother said, now maybe we could find something to eat, could make a sandwich, have some fruit. And so we all did that. They did that. And now it's getting later and later, and now there is a banging on the door. It must've been eight 8:00, 9:00 at night.

Open. Open up. It's the Gestapo. So everybody's cowering. My mom goes to the door, and she said, yes? And he said, how many of you are there? And my mother said, I don't know, 10. Get out.

So my mother said, what do you mean "get out"? You get out in the street, all of you, now. You can grab what you can and go. And so people who had been futzing around and looking for clothes, they had stuff, and they had a coat and whatever we had. And we were on the street now.

It's cold, quite cold. My mother says, what are you going to do with us? We decided-- there were three of them-- you are going into that factory that's a few streets-- I don't recall where exactly. It was an empty factory, and they were going to put us in there. And we were to stay there.

And this was a cement floor and nothing else. So we get there, and all of a sudden, my mother stops. And she said to

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them, excuse me, sir. I want to tell you something. And he said, yes? What do you want? She said, when we were young and I lived in that house where Lilly lives now and my aunt-- I used to live here, and you used to come to the back door and ask for me. And when I came out, you tried to kiss me.

And he said to her, shut up. She said, but you did. What if I spoke very loud, and everybody would know that you, a Nazi officer, kissed a Jewish girl? And he said, if you don't shut up, I'm going to send you and the kid to Dachau, meaning me. She said, that's very good, officer. You can send me and my kid, but before you do, I'm going to scream it all over this town that you tried to kiss a Jewish girl.

He said, what the hell do you want? She said, all I want is to take these people, instead of putting us into the factory, to my home in Wiesenfeld. I have a big house, and we can stay there. And of course, they argued that they can't do that, and who do you think you are? And she said, OK, it's your choice, but I can scream. And I thought he'd shoot her right there.

Go ahead, he says. Take them and go. I have to laugh at her. And she said, but it's so cold. We can't just walk. We got this old lady and a baby. And he just-- he was getting crazy, this man. And the other officials-- I heard them say, what does she want? She can't walk. She says, I want a truck. And they said, get her a damn truck.

They got a truck. They loaded us on. They got us a driver, and they got us a bodyguard with a machine gun or whatever. And they drove us to my parents' house. So she saved the day.

Now, it took some time to find out what happened to my aunts and uncles and for my father to be released, and in the meantime, while we were all mulling around in my big house, my mother sent a telegram to a cousin we had here in the United States, my cousin. It was my mother's niece, who married an American physician, and this physician had gone to Vienna years before, in the 20s, to study at the University of Vienna.

So you'll continue?

Well, he went to study postgraduate work at the University of Vienna, and he met my cousin. And they dated while he was there, and he was there about a year or so, and came back to the United States, and sent her a telegram, will you marry me? And she sent back yes. So he came back again, and they were married.

So lucky for us, now she's in America. He's an American citizen, and my mother sent them a telegram, can you send us an affidavit? We got to have something because Hugo is in jail, and Eric is in jail. And they sent an affidavit to Eric to get him out first, my brother, because they were really after the young men.

So they sent Eric an affidavit, and to make a long story short, they let Eric out. And this was maybe December now. Crystal Night was November, so December. And he was able to get a visa and a passport to come to the United States, and he came alone. And my cousins-- they picked them up, and they took him in. And they took care of him.

Was there any destruction on Kristallnacht in your town or in your father's store?

Not in my father's store.

No destruction?

No. I think he was a very well-known man, and he helped a lot of people, not that it'd make any difference to some of them. But it did help. I'm sure.

Do you did not see any destruction?

I would recall it. But no destruction, no. I think there were a couple of people who came to our door at midnight to see if they could help, good people, solid people. One woman was my mother's washerwoman, and she risked her life to come to do whatever she could do. She even brought bread. She thought we were starving.

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But before that, I forgot to put this very important element in. Right after the Anschluss, not much time passed when a Nazi officer came to my house. And I happened to be-- it was a two-story house, and downstairs was the kitchen, and a dining room, my father's office, his business. Upstairs were bedrooms and a music room, and I had a Baby Grand piano and an old-fashioned bathroom. We did not have running water. We had a beautiful home, but there was no running water yet. My mother wanted to institute that, and they hadn't gotten around to it, blah, blah, blah.

So this Nazi officer came to the door and said-- I was alone-- where's your mother? I said, she's upstairs. Take me. So I take him, and I called her. And I said, [INAUDIBLE], somebody to see you. She comes out. He says to her, where's your piano? Show me. So she shows him. It will be taken within the hour.

And my mother said, what? What do you mean it'll be taken within the hour? He said, don't you know yet, lady, that Jews are not allowed to have anything of value? And she's thinking that this is a joke. And he said, now, I'm going to give you a chance. Make a decision. It's either you or the piano. They were going to take either the piano, or they'll take her.

Now, what do you do? Even when you're feisty, you can't stop them. So that was-- I forgot all about that. It was at the very beginning.

Do you remember them taking the piano?

Oh God, Yes.

What were your thoughts?

Crying.

You stood there crying.

I was crying. But we still had the house until two weeks after that, and they came again. And they saw my father, and they said to him, you know that you cannot possess your house any longer, no business, no nothing. I want you to sign an IOU.

And my father said, I'm not signing anything. What do you mean my house? We are here to take possession of your business and your house. And my father said, and what are we supposed to do?

He said, well, we are not evil people. We will allow you to live upstairs. So it took a while to straighten all this out. It was awful. We had to move upstairs, and if we wanted to cook and eat-- the bathroom happened to have a stove for heating, so we had to cook on that. There was a bathtub in their. Toilet was somewhere else.

And we had to go buy our own groceries, and the house was no longer-- he had to sign it over to the German regime. It wasn't Austria anymore. It was all German. So that's how we lost everything.

What was your father's state of mind then?

My father was a very-- he coped with everything. He thought things through, and he said, this is what is happening. Let's figure out what do we do now. And it was very difficult for him, of course, my God.

So OK, now that's gone. Then later-- that was March, I think. Hitler took in March, so as the weeks went by, all this happened. So then, as I said, Crystal Night-- I already explained that. Papa is still sitting in jail.

At that time, you knew what had happened in Germany on Crystal Night?

Oh, yeah, because we knew it happened in every--

How did you know that? Do you know how your parents knew it?

Well, we had a radio.

You had a radio, OK.

And we were allowed--

You still had a radio.

--to have the radio. And the talk going on-- and you can't just whisper these things anymore. It's out now. And so we are now old enough to know what's going--

I understand, yeah.

And especially, after Crystal Night, it was totally clear for Lilly, and me, and her brothers that they hate the Jews, and God knows what's going to happen to us.

So now comes the affidavit for Eric. Now he's allowed to go. What's going to happen to Papa now? What's going to happen to us?

So Eric comes to the United States, and he's being taken care of by the American physician and his wife. And Eric is learning English, and he gets himself a job. They lived in New York, so Eric is in New York now, Woodside, Long Island, which is almost part of Manhattan.

And somebody from Europe told them that there is a guy in New Jersey, and he works in a factory. And he used to know Papa, and Eric, why don't you try to contact him? And it worked. He contacted this man, and the man got Eric a job in that factory.

In New Jersey?

In New Jersey. It wasn't all that bad to travel, to commute.

Who had the money to pay Eric to come over?

My father.

Do you know what ship he was on?

No, I don't know what he was on. I can only tell you later what we were on.

So he is offered this job in New Jersey.

So he takes the job, and a man said to him, Eric, you look a little bit depressed all the time. What's the matter? And he said, I'm worried about my parents and my sister. They're still over there. And this man said to him, well, why don't you write to President Roosevelt and tell them?

And Eric said, yeah, right. I can't even speak the language. I can't write, and I'm going to tell the President, hey-- you know. And this man said, well, you never know. And Eric said, no, I'm not going to do it.

This man kept pushing. He said, Eric, you got to try things, and Eric finally said-- he got disgusted. He said, OK ready. Will you help me? And the man said, I'll help you write the letter.

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So Eric writes this letter, Dear Mr. President, whatever, my parents, my little sister, I'm very worried, it's a terrible time, sends it, forgets about it. Two, three weeks pass by. A letter comes from the Office of the President, from his press secretary. Dear Mr. Wellisch, the President has been made aware of your situation and has directed me to tell you what to do and how you can get your parents out.

And it had to be a farmers visa because the United States had a quota, didn't let everybody in. But if you knew anything about agriculture, you had a chance. Luckily, my father owned a farm. I got pictures over there. I can show you later. He owned the farm right in Wiesenfeld. It was a big farm. He owned it, but he didn't run it. It was somebody else who ran it.

But Papa was the kind of man who was well-informed about everything. He owned a farm. He knew about farming. He knew about lumber, and everything that he did he was well-informed about.

So my brother was able to communicate to Papa to apply for a farmer's visa. To make a long story short, he got it, but it took from January or February until the end of August for us to get out. We lived under the Hitler regime for a long, long time, and things were getting harder and harder. But he did get the farmer's visa, and he was able to have enough money to have transportation for us to come to the United States.

And the ship we were on was called the Volendam. So in August 28 we arrived in New York, and this was about a week before Poland was invaded, when that was it. Nobody got out.

We will get to that, of course. You said things got worse between January and August, when you left. What kind of things-- how did your life change? What weren't you allowed to do?

We weren't allowed to do anything. We were just sitting tight. My father was allowed to go to different offices to try to get the visa. He got to do that. And you have to get a passport, and you have to get stuff together to-- what are you allowed to take out? What are you're not allowed to take? That kind of stuff that he was allowed to do to go to Vienna and do that. But other than that, nothing.

When did he get out of prison?

Well, he must have been-- from Crystal Night, November 10-- I don't know, about a month.

A month?

Yeah.

Yeah. What other restrictions did you have in that January to August time span?

Well, I couldn't play with anybody as far as child is concerned. I was able to go to Lilly, and we could be together.

--together.

She was with us anyway. They were in my house until-- all these people that my mother rescued--

Had brought, yeah--

--kept us busy because there were a lot of people to feed and the bedding.

And so they were up on the second floor with you?

Yeah, in different bedrooms. My grandmother lived with us, and she had died. But we were able to use where she lived, and she had a kitchen and two or three bedrooms. So we were able to put these people in there, in my parents' bedroom, my bedroom, that lovely music room. Everything was used. And we left them there.

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Did you see any signs on the street about Jews not being able to do certain things?

Not there in this town. There was nothing, except where my brother was in that city, in Sankt Polten, there were signs on the benches around the schools, "No Jews Allowed." They couldn't sit there.

And my uncle, the one whom I told you we saw in the green wagon-- he was taken to Vienna to scrub the sidewalk with a toothbrush. You've heard about those things. So he was one of them, but he made it.

Now, the sad part is that after we were here already, we were very concerned about the rest of the family, especially, and Lilly-- I was worried more about Lilly. We were like sisters, and the edict, more or less, was that the Nazis were after the men and the young boys. And so my uncle and Lilly's older brother were able to get out through some Jewish organization here. I don't remember which one.

And they left Austria. They left Wiesenfeld, where they were, in my house, and came to the United States. And my uncle thought he could get his wife and Lilly out and never made it. So he's here with his son and with the guilt, why did I do this? And you know how you can--

My cousin is still living in St. Louis, Lilly's older brother. He's OK. But there are so many stories attached to what I'm telling you that it will take me all day.

Let's talk about your leaving. Why did you say to Lilly when it was time to leave.

When it was time to leave, I said nothing. My father told me to be very quiet. We are leaving midnight on a train. We didn't have a school in Wiesenfeld, but we had a train station, which, to this day, doesn't make any sense. We were going to take a train to Vienna, and from Vienna we were going to Holland. And I'm not to say anything to anybody. It was too dangerous.

What did you take with you?

We had a few things we were allowed to take. At that time, it was still not as bad as later on. It's ridiculous to even mention it because nobody lived anymore. But we could take our clothing, and my mother had some silver spoons. And she had that in the suitcase, and that was OK. And this necklace-- that's hers. That was my grandmother's. Now, I don't remember how she got that out.

But that and nothing else as far as jewelry is concerned because one day the Nazi came in and asked again, where's your mother? Where's your jewelry? It's in the drawer, wherever. Open it. She opens it, and he goes through it. And he finds her engagement ring, which was a gorgeous ring, an emerald surrounded by diamonds. Ah, OK, in the pocket.

And I had a little ruby that I loved. Oh, is that the kid's? Oh, that's mine. Yes, oh, OK, that kind of thing. But Papa said, that's not the worst. We're getting out now. So when we did get out, this was in the dead of night in August, and I couldn't say anything. And I was pretty upset about that.

Did you take anything besides clothes like books or anything? Nothing?

Yeah, we took books. My mother had a beautiful library, and she packed them in some kind of box. And I don't know. I guess-- of all things, but when you're in a situation like this, you want to take something that you--

Did you take any dolls or anything?

No, I couldn't take anything, not that, mostly clothing and no linens, nothing, mostly clothing and a few odds and ends.

So it was August. And what port did you leave from when you went?

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Well, now, this is another story.

You took the train to Vienna, you said.

Took the train to Vienna, and my father's aunt was there at the train station. And I don't remember much about anybody else, but she was there because she was my very favorite aunt. And she hugged me, and she said, you should be very happy. You know why?

I said, why should I be so happy? She said, not only because you're getting away from here but because you won't have to go to school on Saturday in America. And we cried, and she said, my darling, I don't think I'll ever see you again. And I never did.

So we got on that train, and we get to the border. The Gestapo comes on, checking papers, comes to Papa, papers, passport, takes the papers, walks away, and brings another officer, and says, there's something wrong here. Get off the train. Take the kid. Take your wife. Get off.

We had to get off. The train goes away. That was hell. They took my father into an office, and they told my mother and me to sit and wait. And we sit, and we wait, and train after train is coming and going, our train long gone. No Papa. Now what?

I said to my mother, I think we're going to die now. And she pushed me, and she said, we are not dying. If I have anything to do with these guys-- they could have killed her more than once. She had a mouth.

And it was about three or four hours later when Papa came out. We can go. What happened? They did not believe that he knew anything about farming because he was a businessman, and they brought in a knowledgeable agricultural expert who grilled him for two hours about cows, and milk, and what have you.

And Papa-- thank God. He knew the answers. He was well-informed about everything, and they finally had to-- well, they didn't have to let him go, but they let him go.

So we got on the next train and went to Rotterdam, and the Jewish committees and even the Dutch people-- they met every train coming from Germany, and they put us up in private homes, in hotels, wherever there was room. And we were put up-- at first I think it was a hotel. We didn't stay long because the ship was leaving anyway, but they treated us like royalty. They were so kind, the Dutch people.

And when we did finally get on that ship, it was, of course, the Volendam, a Dutch ship, Dutch crew. And they treated the immigrants beautifully, and I remember having to eat brick ice cream. Three times a day, they brought this ice cream, and to this day, if you show me brick ice cream, I go blech. And we got here.

Were you sad about leaving Europe, leaving--

Well, and I was distracted a lot. First of all, you get into Holland. You meet another country. You're going to a hotel, so much distraction. But then it hit me what's happening.

You're leaving your home.

Am I ever going to go home again? What's going to happen to Lilly-- Lilly, Lilly, Lilly-- and all my other relatives? Lilly was killed with Otto and my aunts in the 40s in Sobibor or someplace like that, shot in a mass grave. And other people-- horrible stories that my family suffered, like so many others.

So anyway-- this is interesting-- we come on the Volendam. It took us, I think, almost two weeks because we found out later from the captain that the ocean was mined, and he was trying to figure out what the best way would the Germans not put a mine. So that's why-- luckily, we avoided that. The Volendam went from New York to, I believe, Cuba with some refugees, dropped them off, went back.

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And that's all I ever knew, and after I was here and married already, my brother-in-law took us to a very fancy restaurant in New York. There was some kind of celebration, and he took my husband and me and he and his wife, and each table almost had their own waiter. It was a bit much. They'd come and put the napkin on your lap, and I'm not--

And this one waiter spoke with an accent, and he was very nice and very courteous. And I said, so where are you from? And he said, I'm from Holland. And I said, you know, your people a wonderful. And he said, oh, madam, do you know anything about Holland?

And I said, well, I just tell you briefly, we came from Austria through Germany, and your people helped us. And he said, oh yes. And he said, may I ask you what ship? And I said, the Volendam, and he said, oh, almost like, oh. I said, are you OK?

And he said, at that time, I was a crew member on the Volendam, and we had a trip to Cuba. And on the way back, we hit a mine, and all my crew members died. I'm one of the very few survivors. I said, I think that's the end of my dinner. I can't-- can you-- that was quite a-- so that was one of the stories that made me very sad, but I said, I'm so glad you're alive. He had tears in his eyes, and he walked away.

Yeah, I'm sure. Do you remember the organization that helped you, and the Jewish was it the Joint Distribution Committee? In Holland, when you-- you said there was--

Well, the Jewish-- what else is there?

There were other organizations.

We had so many organizations.

Yeah, there so many. OK, so now you're in the United States. What did the United States mean to you as a young girl?

Well, I tell you, the first impression seeing the skyscrapers was-- I said, this cannot be. I come from this little town in Wiesenfeld. Vienna is gorgeous. Have you ever been?

Yeah, yes.

It's a beautiful city. It has some novel, but this is ridiculous. So I was very impressed but very-- my English was minimal. I did have English in school.

Oh, you did?

Yeah. But it's difficult when you're in the country, and you try to converse with people. You don't understand it because it's-- you think, why do they talk so fast?

--fast, yes.

But I had to go to school, and I was admitted to sixth grade. Now, here I am 13 now, so I'm the oldest in the classroom. And the children were very nice to me, and the teacher explained-- her name was Mrs. Sachs-- Jewish lady-- that Trudy has just come from another country. And she was trying to put a little history in there to tell the kids why this is happening, why I'm here. And they were listening, and very polite, and very sweet, and, can I help you, and all that.

So the teacher said, you don't have to do anything, to me. Just listen to the language. And I'm listening, and I guess I'm learning. And three months passed by, and she said, we're having a vocabulary test today. We're going to have 100 words. And I raised my hand, and she said, yes?

I said, could I try it? And she said, yes. I got 100. And the next day-- this was after she comes in, and she said, I have an

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announcement to make, class. We had this vocabulary test yesterday, and I want you to know that Trudy got 100%. And they all stood up, and that made me-- that was America, my goodness, whereas in Europe you have to sit quietly, and most of the time you have your hands on the table. And you don't say a word, and you don't-- and here the children are up and celebrating this. I thought, America is wonderful.

So where were you living then?

Woodside.

Woodside, yeah.

And then I skipped sixth grade and went to seventh grade.

--seventh grade.

And I was in seventh grade for a few months. I don't remember how long. And I skipped to eighth grade, and then I moved to New Jersey with my parents. And both my parents worked in factories and had a little room. I couldn't live with them. They had no room. I lived with my cousin, the ones who brought me.

I stayed with them for, oh, a year or two while my parents were looking for work. Oh, boy. Was that hard. So they only had one room.

Were you in touch with Lilly at that point?

No more. Once you left--

Once I left, no more.

--you had no communication with them.

No, no, no, no. So at any rate, then my parents were able to get a little apartment, one bedroom, and they got a couch so I could sleep in the living room.

Where was your brother then?

Let's see. Now, my brother-- this was already-- oh, my brother-- he got a job after the factory on a tobacco farm, and he worked there in the summer. And again, somebody said to him, Eric, you seem like a smart guy. You want to do this for the rest of your life?

And Eric said, no, I don't want to do it, but right now I don't have much of a choice. And this man said, did you know that Johns Hopkins is giving out scholarships? And Eric said, so what? And this man said, you are smart. You ought to try it.

And again, the same thing, with the way he spoke about Roosevelt. Oh, he says, don't be ridiculous. To make a long story short, he applied, and he got it, got a scholarship to Hopkins, came for an interview, and the dean, whoever interviews, said, we have these two scholarships specifically for immigrants.

So that's the good news. You're definitely in. You want to hear the bad news? And Eric said, oh God. No, I had enough bad news, but what's the bad-- he said, you have to do it in three years, not four. And Eric said, so what? That's not bad news. I could do that.

So he said to him, if you think you can do it in three years, you're in. What would you like to study? And Eric said, law. The man leans back. He said, Eric, I don't think so. You have such an accent. You'll never make it as a lawyer. Pick something else.

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So Eric said, well, OK, I'll be a chemist. That's what he became, went right through Hopkins in three years. The war came. He enlisted. Then he came back and went to Columbia, got a master's, and then Purdue and got a PhD. So it worked out OK. Now I can take a

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