

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Alice Barzilay
January 23, 2014
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PREFACE

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ALICE BARZILAY

January 23, 2014

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Alice **Barzilay** conducted by Gail Schwartz on January 23rd, 2014. It is taking place over the telephone at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and in New York City. Please tell me your full name.

Alice Barzilay: Alice **Schachter** Barzilay.

Q: And where were you born and when were you born?

A: No, I was born in Vienna, Austria, November third 1926.

Q: Your parents, please tell me their names and a little bit about them.

A: My father's name was **Josea** Schachter and he was born in what was then Poland, **Bolochov** [ph]. And was a textile merchant. Imported locally as well and wholesale business and textile business. My mother's name was **Nezhia**, born Kramer, Schachter. And she was born near, in the same area as my father. And married him. He was living in Vienna at the time of their marriage.

Q: What brought your father to Vienna?

A: I don't know. The post war feeling, post-World War I. I don't know, wider horizons I think.

Q: Ok. And did you have any siblings?

A: I have, had a sister who died in 2006.

Q: And she was older or younger?

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A: She was four years younger.

Q: And her name?

A: Her name was Ruth Schachter **Morgenthau**. She lived, married to Henry Morgenthau the third and she was living in Boston, in Cambridge actually. And Rhode Island. And she was very active politically and she was very highly educated.

Q: Let's talk about your schooling. What kind of school did you start out at?

A: I started in a public school in Vienna with -- an academic public school.

Q: Was it a coed school?

A: No, girls only.

Q: Girls only. And any experience at that time of any anti-Semitism among the children or the teachers?

A: Not that I recall or was aware of yet.

Q: Was your neighborhood a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews?

A: Many Jews and some non-Jews. It was a good neighborhood, overlooking the beautiful park and the Danube.

Q: Were you in a house or an apartment?

A: In an apartment.

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Q: In an apartment. How would you describe your family's status? Was it middle class, upper middle?

A: Maybe upper middle. I mean well, well off and I think quite well off and comfortable.

Q: What kind of sports did you take part in as a child?

A: I did ice skating regularly from the age of three on. And my father loved to go ice skating and he did a lot of skiing and bicycling as well. But I did skiing with the school, once I was in the gymnasium which was above the fifth grade. We went with the school, skiing, so I skied a bit. Until we left for Cuba.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: At home we spoke German.

Q: You said you were interested in sports. Any other hobbies that you had?

A: I can't recall.

Q: Let's talk about how religious your family was.

A: Quite religious, modern religious. Secular education was stressed rather than Jewish school, but we did have an education in Jewish studies as well. Privately.

Q: Privately. Was a tutor at the house or did you go to a Hebrew school?

A: Actually no Hebrew school. Actually what was done in Vienna was several times a week or maybe it may have been only once a week, the various kids, children in the class would go to their religious class. And so I would go to the religious education with the Jewish children and so

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forth. And at home, my father saw to it that we learned a lot, through ritual and later on we had private lessons. But that was in this country.

Q: You observed the holidays and Shabbat.

A: Very much so, very much – Shabbat as well.

Q: At that point you said you had not experienced any anti-Semitism.

A: To the age of ten or so, yeah

Q: What about your extended family, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins?

A: My grandparents lived in Poland which was 24 hours by train from Vienna. So I saw them once. We went there once. My mother took us to meet them once. That's all. I had no real contact with them because that was a tremendous distance.

Q: No aunts, uncles, cousins in –

A: No, my father was the only one that came to Vienna. They had lots of friends and people came to visit us.

Q: Were your parents Zionists at that time?

A: My father was quite Zionistically inclined in his youth, from what I understand. He once decided he was going to walk to the ocean and go to Israel but we were not you know I mean, not that I'm – not in my, let's say I wasn't that much aware of. I knew there was a Palestine and I was for it. But we weren't very much involved in the organization.

Q: You had Jewish and non-Jewish friends you said.

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A: Definitely.

Q: When did you start hearing about a man named Hitler? Do you remember your first time that you heard about him?

A: I, it was a sequence of various political upheavals in Austria. I don't remember the details too much, but I remember someone being president called **Dollfuss** and then somebody being shot and then somebody by the name of **Schuschnigg** and then – but I do remember that in March 1938, I think it was the –

Q: The Anschluss.

A: The Anschluss of the – but I had the flu and I was home. And so when I returned to school a week later, everything had changed.

Q: In what sense?

A: Well children, we were seated in the back of the room. We were treated totally differently.

Q: These are the Jewish students.

A: Yes, yes, yes the Jewish children. Moved to the back of the room and everything was outside was unsafe on the streets and otherwise. But I may have heard of – I mean the over, the night that Hitler marched into Vienna of course, and my mother got sick and knew right away and my father was you know, they knew immediately that we had to get out. But I wasn't totally aware of it until I got back to school. And eventually we were told that our school would have to close and that a different system was going to be taking over.

Q: What were your feelings in the beginning when you first came back to school and you had to stay in the back of the classroom?

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A: I didn't understand.

Q: Were you frightened? Do you remember being frightened?

A: I just totally amazed. And I didn't quite understand it.

Q: Because up to that point you had not experienced any anti-Semitism.

A: Not there. I had many friends that were not Jewish.

Q: And you would go to their house and play and they would come to your house.

A: Yes, yes. Yes. We played more in the park than in the houses. It wasn't as many dates as there are in this country.

Q: There you are in the back of the classroom with these other Jewish girls. Did you talk among yourselves about what was happening?

A: Oh I'm sure not. I'm sure we were frightened now that you get to it. I'm afraid we didn't have to talk because immediately we realized that it was dangerous to walk in the streets. That –

Q: How did you know this? You're 12 years old right?

A: Yeah. So when we went back from school or going to school, or going back from school there were hordes of other kids attacking us and –

Q: Physically attacking?

A: Yes, I mean my sister who was four years younger, they spat in her face and pulled her by the pigtails and then there were big signs on the benches saying no Jews allowed and we were not allowed in the parks overnight. So this all happened really very quickly.

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Q: And what is the reaction of a 12 year old child to this? Is it something you talked about with your parents?

A: Oh, we talked about it but we just existed from day to day and watched what was going on. Our maid was leaving. She wasn't allowed to work for Jews anymore. And we got somebody who had already been a refugee from some other part of Austria.

Q: This was a relative who came to your house you mean?

A: No this was a poor soul who had a sister and a father and they were, they came from **Klagenfurt** which is the provinces and they had been chased out the very day that Hitler arrived. And all she could do to get food on the table was do domestic work so she came to us. And a very sad soul whom I remember to this day. And then my father –

Q: How did she know you all?

A: Oh she didn't know us. My mother somehow -- recommendations. I don't know, somebody recommended a needy case. My mother was always ready for needy cases. And my father –

Q: Before the Anschluss, before 38, had you heard of a man named Hitler, because he got into power in 33 and I was just wondering?

A: I probably, I had heard of it but it didn't affect me. I mean it didn't hit home.

Q: Had you ever heard him speak over the radio before 38 any of his speech –

A: I remember sitting in the living room with my parents, listening to the radio but I didn't take it seriously. I was 11.

Q: I was going to say, you were a child.

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A: I was 11 and, when they marched in and I was even younger before. When it began.

Q: So that's when the big change happened at the Anschluss. Did you see Hitler at that time?

A: I never saw him.

Q: You never saw him.

A: No but I saw the guy you know the SS and I saw them marching in front of my windows and screaming and you know that was immediate. The night that he marched in, we still had the gentile woman working for us and my parents happened to be at the theater that night and weren't home. And it was very frightening, hordes and hordes of people marching in front of the windows. And you know my sister was even younger. She was seven so.

Q: How did your nursemaid, governess, handle that?

A: That was actually the maid and that wasn't our governess and she didn't handle it all that well. And when my parents came home, they found that the gas was on. So she didn't stay with us much longer. But it could have, if they hadn't come home when they did, god knows what would have happened.

Q: Right. What was it like to see these soldiers marching and hear the sound of the boots and things like that?

A: That was frightening.

Q: What about, did the swastika have any meaning to you? At that time?

A: It conveyed a lot of enthusiasm of the masses from which I was excluded. That's what you

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know, it didn't quite hit me just what they were doing. Yeah, that they were going to kill my grandparents and everybody else.

Q: The Anschluss happens and then and you go to school and you have to stay in the back of the room and then what was the next development?

A: The next development was we were told that we, in my school that, it was a gymnasium, an academic gymnasium, that we could not continue there. That the school was closed down. And that only the top students in the city would be allowed to enroll in the one Jewish gymnasium that existed.

Q: But the gymnasium you were in was not a Jewish –

A: No, but women's, you know not institution but a women's school. So they had to qualify for that other gymnasium with grades and so forth and I did qualify and I was accepted to it so I was happy that I could continue my academic education. And my sister was younger so she –

Q: She was in the earlier school?

A: Yeah and that could continue til fourth grade. So there was no issue. I went to that school in September in 1938 but it really didn't have the greatest effect on my life, except that I felt good about being there because we left you know several months later. You know four months later.

Q: With your relationship with your parents, did they talk over as things were –

A: They were very supportive all the way whether here or in Cuba or anywhere else. It was fantastic when I think about it.

Q: But I meant when you were younger, before you left Austria, were they open with you in discussing what was happening?

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A: They didn't hide it. I didn't feel that they hid anything, were hiding that. It couldn't be hidden. It couldn't. They were open I think. Maybe not completely. I mean we were children. I just can't gauge that.

Q: But you weren't allowed to go out on the street then?

A: By myself, anyway. And we were, you know I was afraid to be. And going away in the summer and for instance on the ski trip that, with the school that was just the week before March in _____ where you could, there you could feel the Nazism in the mountains. It was completely so.

Q: How did you feel that, in what sense?

A: You just felt it, that we were surrounded by enemies. And the amazing thing is we were on the slopes and it was a second year gymnasium which is the sixth grade class. Skiing and on the slope with us was the Duke of Windsor who had just abdicated I think or something. He was in the process of marrying her, the Duchess of Windsor. But anyway, we felt it there. I mean totally because we stayed at the type of place that you know in the mountains where there were no Jews. It was obvious that it was their town.

Q: You yourself didn't experience any direct anti-Semitic –

A: Well it was coming pretty soon. I mean my father's business.

Q: What happened with that?

A: That, a commissar was put in which meant that he oversaw the whole business and eventually it was taken over and he had a lot of good friends among the gentiles who suddenly became big shots in the Nazi party. But so I think that he was somewhat – he was somewhat in better shape by some unseen protection you know. But so that, the business was going and what else. How did –

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Q: Do you know if they had any, if your father or mother had any relation or communication with their families in the other, you know far away?

A: Well that, they immediately tried to get us out. I mean they knew we had to leave. So –

Q: To go into the countryside you mean?

A: No, no, to go abroad. Is that what you're asking?

Q: No I was asking, your relatives you said were not in Vienna.

A: No, they offered to take us into Poland. My father didn't think that was a good move.

Q: Right. Ok.

A: So we didn't move. He wrote to relatives in other countries.

Q: So that's when he started to write to –

A: Yes, immediately. So they wrote to Palestine and to the United States and I had some cousins in Palestine and his brother and the cousin didn't answer and my sister years later said it's a good thing. But anyway so didn't answer. I had cousins in New York who did answer.

Q: Who did answer.

A: Did answer and who you know gave us an affidavit and helped us elaborate the roads through Cuba and all that.

Q: At that point, what did America mean to you, as a 12 year old?

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A: An unknown promised land.

Q: But something very positive?

A: Yes, yes. I had met actually those relatives were on their honeymoon in Vienna a couple of years before and other people too and whom, you know it sounded like an unknown wonderful place.

Q: Your father got papers, got the affidavits from the New York –

A: From the family in New York, in New York. And then there was another issue that, you know the Kristallnacht. You know that. So do you want the sequence was that they came to our house and they went from door to door and took out all the men from the whole building. You know and they came to our door. They read the name. The name is Schachter and somebody gave the order, skip that door.

Q: Oh?

A: So they skipped our door and went on and we could hear the screams in the streets and could hear the glass breaking and everything else but we were saved for the night.

Q: Do you know how that happened?

A: No, I never found out but we were sitting in the ante room, the large ante room, actually waiting to be invaded and my father said would you like me to go out so that we get it then over with. And so we said no. And that's when they skipped us and, but we could hear everything and I've never forgotten it. In the streets and then after Kristallnacht when the others were transported you know to god knows what destinations. My father was contacted by some Aryan friend of his or formerly friends and now Aryan. But they were still friendly and was told that he had to leave the country by December 31st, 38. Otherwise that nobody could vouch for anything. That wasn't likely to leave.

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Anyway so they intensified their efforts to get the exit possibilities and the, so America was so, I mean the United States was the possibility. But we also needed a document called an **unbedankleischide** [ph] to get out of the country which had to be gotten from the Nazis and which wasn't available so quickly. We might not have it by December 31st. So we decided, my parents decided to split the family up. And so that my father and my little sister who was adorable would go on New Year's Eve and try and cross the border because the guards would be drunk. They thought.

And we would stay and wait for the paper and then see if we could exit properly and perhaps ship some of our stuff overseas and so await us later on.

At any rate they did proceed accordingly. In the meanwhile the people from -- the cousins helped us get a visa into Cuba, which was obtainable at that point by depositing \$500 per person as a guarantee in Cuba and sending us tickets to go to Cuba. And –

Q: This was your American cousin who told you.

A: Yes.

Q: What were their names?

A: Their name was Max and Ida Rothschild. They lived in Great Neck. And so they, it was my father's first cousin. Anyway they, where was I. They arranged for the Cuba. So my sister and my father got through. They were drunk and they went, it's really amazing, to Switzerland and then went on to England, very soon after, with the idea that we would join them in England, where we had very good friends.

Q: How did he stay in contact with your mother?

A: Well we didn't -- I mean there wasn't much time involved. And we left two weeks later. It so happened.

Q: No, once he left your house and got over, do you know how he stayed in contact with –

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A: I don't know. I don't know. But, when they got to England they called us for sure. I don't know. I just don't know. Anyway we stayed behind and we did not have the paper. I can imagine how my mother felt when they said goodbye to each other. At any rate, eventually the paper came and they packed the list van you know with our belongings with the SS watching every bit of the way what we're taking, what we're not. And my mother was very smart and she'd give some away and you know she'd bribe them and all the way. So we got some things together. And they were shipped to the United States to await our eventual arrival.

Q: What did you mother take with her?

A: With her to the –

Q: Or sent on?

A: Sent on. We had furniture and everything, everything. Rooms full of belong -- you know

Q: She was able to ship all that over?

A: Yes, yes. Yes, part of it, yes. So the first apartment that we had in, which was Washington Heights here was furnished with our furniture.

Q: What did you take as a child, what did you take with you?

A: What I shipped was all my books and they were children's. It was ridiculous.

Q: Your books.

A: Some of them, no value to me. In the end, I gave it to, you know when you give -- I love my books. I didn't want to give them up.

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Q: Right. Did you take any personal, besides books, anything very personal, any –

A: I'm sure we –

Q: Dolls or things like that?

A: I'm sure I did but I don't recall too much. We went with minimal luggage to England.

Q: Let's back up for a minute. How did you feel about leaving Austria? Did you feel very Austrian?

A: I felt this was home until that March. I felt this was it, that's how I was --

Q: You were Austrian.

A: But Jewish, always knew they were Jewish.

Q: Now you have to leave. What's that like for a child?

A: It's stress. Will I have new shoes when I need them. When my feet grow. All sorts of things and we won't have money. We knew that you know.

Q: Did you tell your friends you were leaving?

A: Everybody's leaving. Everybody's leaving.

Q: Was it something you talked over with your friends?

A: We talked about it I'm sure but they, many of my friends had already left and others were -- made new friends because I was in a new school. So there wasn't a continuous friendship possible.

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Q: I also meant to ask you with Kristallnacht, did you see any damage, any building damage?

A: Oh we saw a lot outside on the streets they demolished the showcases. Anybody, you know the windows of stores. Everything and I heard screaming men in the back. We had talk and even the back and in the front and you could hear them lugging the men away from their homes.

Q: Was your father's place damaged? Business damaged?

A: Not terribly that I'm aware of. No, I think that the commissar must have had a high position – I don't know

Q: So now you're leaving Vienna with your mother. And --

A: Joining them in England where they --

Q: How did you get there?

A: We took, from Vienna to a train and the Channel. I think the train went over, all the way to – I can't remember whether it was --. To, via Holland and I think then a ship to England, then on to London. I'm not quite sure.

Q: Did you know any English at that point?

A: Well yes, because when Hitler came to Vienna, the French governess left. She went, she disappeared almost immediately. And my mother decided to hire somebody else because she was working part time with my father. It was a large business. And the one she decided to hire this English speaking. She thought it was better for the children. And it was. Yes, I knew some English.

Q: You knew some English?

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A: Not perfectly but I knew, yes.

Q: Now you're landing, you're in London.

A: Yes and we went to school. We went to a public school for about two months and then we left.

Q: What was it like living in London and what were your memories of that? What are your memories of that?

A: It was positive. But we were living with an elderly lady in her 80s in her home. And there was but nothing permanent about it. Just she was, they were friends with both the sons and her and they were very willing to keep us but it wasn't, and the people were very nice and --

Q: These were people your parents knew?

A: They knew from Vienna.

Q: They knew from Vienna yeah. And so did you go to school or did you stay --

A: I went to school for the two months. I didn't know how long we were staying because they were trying to convince us to stay. And my father said no, we've got to get out of here.

Q: And what were the British children, girls' reaction to your, or boys and girls reaction to you?

A: They were all right. They sort of ridiculed the English a little bit, but that's ok. There wasn't enough time to form great relationships in two months.

Q: Then the next step is what?

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A: The next step we sailed on March 9th 1939 on a -- from Liverpool to Havana. We went from London by plane actually which was a whole new experience, because my father wanted the children to experience an airplane. And it was a very bad flight but at any rate we did experience the airplane. And then we took the boat and it was a 17 day trip to Havana.

Q: Do you know the name of the boat?

A: Yes, yes, it's Oropesa, O-R-O-P-E-S-A.

Q: On what line?

A: Pacific. I don't know. I did know but --

Q: Again, what were your thoughts about leaving Europe? Here you're going --

A: At that point one was in motion for the best, getting to the best possible destination. It was -- you will hear . When we got to Cuba. I mean it was an interesting crossing and there were others going to different parts of Latin America, different ports. And similar families. Similar situations and when we landed in Havana, we, men came up to inspect the, the boats and the papers and everything and then transported us into small boats in the harbor. And told us all to go into small boats. And we went into these boats and we thought we were going into Havana. But we weren't. They shipped us to a small island off the coast. And where they had an orphanage for Cuban children and they separated the men and the women. And they wanted us to buy our way out.

Q: So were you with your mother at that --

A: I was, well we slept with my mother and my father was in the other, they were bunk beds, double deckers and we weren't the only ones taken off the boat. There were other people landing there. And so we stayed there and none of the people that were there had money really to buy

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their way out. But the Joint Distribution Committee in Havana did this, helped and we eventually got out. And we went into Havana harbor and you know a number of days later and –

Q: You said there were many refugee families and children. Did the children stick together? Did you –

A: Yes, we made friends on board ship and sort of, after 17 days you do under those conditions. It was all a nice pleasant experience.

Q: Did you, as kids, did you talk about Hitler? Did you talk about Germany? Did you talk about those kind of things?

A: I'm not sure, I'm not sure. I can't be sure. Probably did but I don't know.

Q: Now you're in Havana.

A: In Havana we went, the first step was a hotel. And called the **Moraya**, in the **Calle Moraya** in the street. And they, each family got moved into one room. The four of us and –

Q: How old were your parents at this point?

A: My mother was 33 and, she was 33 and my – she was young. And my father was I guess 44 or something like that. She was 32 or 33. My mother was born in 05 and my father in 94 so but they were young. She was particularly young.

Q: Was she a strong woman? Was she –

A: She was a terrific woman and loved by everybody whether they spoke her language or not. She was absolutely wonderful in relating to people.

Q: What was, and in handling crises that you were going through?

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A: Terrific, terrific, terrific, absolutely terrific. And my father was able, in his _____ too, very business-like, not as broad a horizon but my mother was absolutely an unbelievable woman. And my father, I mean he made all the right decisions so they were both terrific in their way. I don't – so that's you know otherwise we wouldn't be here I don't think.

Q: Did any of your extended family who were far out from Vienna get out when you did?

A: Just one sister of my mother's eventually many years later. And her husband was actually at the World's Fair buying machinery when the war broke out in Poland. They were living in Poland and couldn't get back and so it's a whole story in itself. So that one came to this country and that sister only just died at age of 104. And her husband the same 103, 104. Yeah. Others, none of them got out.

Q: None of them got out. To get back to Havana.

A: Yeah we're in Havana and we were in this one room arrangement which has semi walls like cab --like in offices where --

Q: Half way up?

A: That's correct with family next to each other. Anyway we got to know some families and three families moved together to a lovely section in the suburbs, living they cost that way so we each family got two bedrooms. So, it was a beautiful house and a huge kitchen which was shared. And with a coal stove. My mother had to light the stove. A big change from what she was brought up to do. But she was terrific. And washed the marble floors and everything. And my father went into town and tried to establish relations with the textile trade. I don't know how because he didn't speak Spanish. And the first day that he went to town he was robbed of his good watch, a gold watch which was inherited from his father. But at any rate, he managed. He did establish friendships and relationships and imported textiles for the trade there. I don't know how he managed, I mean really I don't know. And they arranged for us, they didn't like the

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schools, the public schools were impossible. And so they arranged for us to go to private school. And they found a very good private school which without money in my, they called it the English School at the time. And my father used to pay it with fabrics, you know and this woman, a missus, she took us in and we were very fortunate. So we went to school with all upper class Latin children.

Q: And now you were learning the language?

A: Yes, I did –

Q: Did you pick it up easily?

A: Very easily. I had Latin in Vienna and I had French in Vienna and I spoke German and I had Hebrew lessons. Languages are not my problem.

Q: Were you with a lot of other Jewish children?

A: No, no there were not in the school no, but out in the community, yes. A lot of transit refugees waiting for visas.

Q: What did you know at that point that was happening?

A: Well I knew that for instance we came in March and in June the, another boat came and with refugees called the St. Louis and I saw it in the harbor and I saw yes, yes. We used to go down to the harbor and watch it every day and then one day we went and it left so –

Q: What were your thoughts?

A: That was very stressful.

Q: Did you see the people on the railing and things like that?

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A: But in a distance. You know it wasn't that close. We could see forms but not you know. It was really bad.

Q: Again did you talk this over with your parents?

A: Oh I'm sure my parents took us down to see it. And –

Q: Were they noticeably affected cause they obviously knew what was happening?

A: Well there's nothing you can do. You know, I'm sure they were affected. I can't judge that this late in the game.

Q: How was your younger sister doing? She was how much younger at this point.

A: She was ok, she was ok. She was an exceedingly able person and she was doing ok, all –

Q: Even as a young child?

A: Yeah, well yeah, it wasn't as obvious as later, but she certainly did exceedingly well.

Q: Life just continued on. You were going to school.

A: My sister she was always a leader. I mean like president of the high school, at Hunter College high school and all that type of thing. So this was, she was always –

Q: The seeds were there when she was younger.

A: Yes, definitely, maybe this instigated it. You know she says, it said so on her obituary in the Times, so.

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Q: Did you do anything besides go to school? What else did you do in Cuba, in Havana?

A: The community was many factions of Judaism so it was funny. There was a large contingent from Frankfurt so they had services in each other's homes. I mean that wasn't the children. It's not, you're asking me the children or the community?

Q: Both, both.

A: Ok, so they were you know different people. Some were religious and some were not. Of the three families where we lived, the ones came from, they had lived in Italy, the one family. They had two teenage boys and they second family had – were Germans and were totally un, were not educated and didn't have the same vision of wanting the kids to be that well educated either. So there, you know you got used to various types of people. And what else did we do? The school day was long enough and the community was friendly. So but we mixed mostly with our own. Yeah. My father mixed with the trades. And we stayed friends with those Cubans for years later.

Q: Any communication with the people back in Europe?

A: A letter, a card came once from my mother's parents and that was it. That was it. Yeah, and I know she lost her grandfather who with us. Anyway, they all perished, except for this one sister who lived underground in Poland whose husband was here and who eventually got out but and then moved in with, back to and moved to Lakewood, New Jersey.

Q: So life just went on in Cuba.

A: Yes, and we waited for the visa. Some people went sooner, some went later. It depended on where your parents were born and some people had nervous breakdowns in the process. I remember several.

Q: Really?

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A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: That must have been very frightening to a young –

A: Yeah, I do remember the mother of one child had, went berserk and never was allowed into the country in the end. Had to stay in Cuba. And the father and the child went. That's really, you know it's very terrible. Yeah.

Q: So then you stayed there, in Cuba for how long?

A: 18 months.

Q: 18 months. And I'm sure you were very fluent by that time.

A: I was. I eventually worked in, using my Spanish.

Q: And then the papers came through.

A: Yes, yes and we came and we went I'm just trying to say how that went. From Havana to Key West by boat and from Key West to New York by Greyhound bus.

Q: How did you feel leaving Cuba?

A: I wanted to go on. I liked it you know but it was time to go. It wasn't a permanent thing.

Q: And so you left. What month did you leave? Do you remember?

A: September 1940.

Q: 1940. Ok, let's back up. In September 1939.

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A: Oh wait a minute. Yeah, September 39 I was in Cuba, the war.

Q: The war. So you heard about this obviously.

A: About the, yes and it was followed very thoroughly in the newspapers and discussion groups and I kept a diary. I have a diary.

Q: You did?

A: In school, yes, in school. They made me keep it. Robert and – nice diary. I'm glad I have it for the grandchildren.

Q: What, do you remember some of the things you wrote in the diary generally?

A: Well the diary is actually strictly political because it was an assignment. But you know they progressed from the Maginot line to this or that. That type of thing.

Q: So the description was like –

A: Descriptions with some maps from the newspapers.

Q: Oh I see. It wasn't your thoughts or your –

A: No, no, no. But my thoughts, I did what I could and wrote something for the children down to my grandchildren.

Q: You mean later on. But at the time, war has what kind of meaning to a young teenager?

A: Terrible. At the time, you mean in Havana. I don't, I didn't feel that, I mean it's not, it's frightening. That's all I could say. You know but –

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Q: And how did your parents get the news – from the radio, from newspapers?

A: Yes. Yes, radios and newspapers and discussions. There was, there were multiple people living there and meeting, you know getting together and following it very eagerly and hoped for the best. You know, you can't get frightened every day. You live from day to day. As a child. So just hoping for the best, that the right people would win.

Q: Your health was good and your parents' health?

A: Yes, knock wood.

Q: And you had enough food?

A: Yes, never felt deprived even though god knows we didn't have much money. Never felt it. That's, I must compliment my parents. Always making us feel positive.

Q: And so then you get out and you went to Florida.

A: Well no only to get the bus.

Q: Right, and then you got on the bus

A: Yeah, and got to New York.

Q: Got to New York. And again your thoughts or were you just exhausted.

A: I guess, you get to see what's going on. What's the next step? Positive, hoping for the best. I can't really recall exactly.

Q: But you were saying that your parents always had a positive attitude.

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A: Yes, precisely. Yes.

Q: Wonderful. Were you met by your relatives when you arrived?

A: By an elderly aunt who actually, she and her husband, they were the parents of the Rothschilds. Mrs. Rothschild, Ida Rothschild and she wanted us to stay with her which she was, actually had a grocery store and a small apartment in Brooklyn and I don't know if she thought my mother was going to work in the grocery store. We stayed very briefly and my brother in law, the one that had come from Poland and for the World's Fair to buy some machinery, had by then lived in Lakewood and purchased a farm. And so we had, they thought that the most intelligent thing in the way of moving was my mother and the two children would go to Lakewood and my father would try to establish himself in New York and make connections during the week and come just on the weekend. Anyway we moved, the whole furniture, everything to Lakewood and we stayed there and about five days after we arrived, we had an episode at night where somebody was climbing up the ladder and my brother in law took a shotgun. They used to – and looked out the window and it was my father. He didn't shoot, who had come to say that the family had to stay together. No matter what. This is no good. So and that's a good thing because my brother in law was ultra-orthodox so it would have turned out much different. To live with. In general too. I mean this is a very orthodox community in Lakewood. Anyway, my father got us. No, my father and mother went to New York and got an apartment in Washington Heights and we moved to Washington Heights. And I've been in New York ever since. And that was you know with the whole furniture and everything.

Q: Right so you had all the Viennese furniture.

A: It was, not all of it but a good part yeah.

Q: Now you're a teenager and you're in Washington Heights and your English is good?

A: Yeah, good enough. I was valedictorian of the graduating class. That's junior high school.

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Q: Did you live in a community of other refugees?

A: Yes. Washington Heights was such a community.

Q: Did you think a lot about Vienna at the time? Did you miss it?

A: I don't think so. No that wasn't an option. I mean it was sort of -- that's over. That's was over. Onward.

Q: Was your mother very protective of you girls?

A: No, she was always encouraging us to be –

Q: To be independent you mean?

A: Independent and yeah, yeah.

Q: So then you started high school?

A: Yes, I went to Hunter College High School which is one that you have to qualify for and test and so forth. And rather competitive school. And –

Q: What was the reaction of the other girls there at the school? Did they ask you about your background?

A: No, I mean – there were others also like it but at that time you know, it wasn't that relevant I think. I mean it was relevant but I guess I just didn't make the cut of the ___ side or whatever, just a question of performance. I don't think so. I mean I don't –

Q: They didn't ask you what your experience was. That's what I mean. Did they ask you about your experiences were in Europe, in Vienna?

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A: They weren't that eager to talk about it as they are now. This generation. We didn't talk about it that much.

Q: What about the teachers? Did the teachers ask you anything about –

A: Not that I recall. Not that I recall, just a question of achieving there. And I had lost a year in that – by the system in Cuba so that I was eager to accelerate which is what I did and I only stayed at the high school for two years and then graduated. So I didn't really take full advantage of it because I think you need the full three years or so. Anyway so.

Q: You traveled by yourself to school?

A: Oh definitely yeah.

Q: What about your sister?

A: Everybody. Traveled by himself on the double decker bus.

Q: What about your younger sister?

A: She did, well she was in public school first and then four years later she went to the same selective school.

Q: Oh she did. So now you've – are you still following what's happening in the war?

A: Oh I'm sure yes, I'm sure.

Q: No more communication for your folks with relatives.

A: No, no, no. I had one cousin in Israel but no, no communication.

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Q: Did your parents know what was happening to the Jews in the 1940s in Europe?

A: In Europe. Of course yes.

Q: While it was happening.

A: Yes, yes. They knew. They tried to, whatever channels but it wasn't that easy.

Q: Right. And did they share this information with you about what was happening?

A: Yes, yes. Yes.

Q: But you don't remember being frightened and being in the United States?

A: No, I felt good.

Q: You felt good.

A: Yes.

Q: So now you've finished high school, and then what?

A: I went on to college. I wanted to go to a coed school.

Q: Because Hunter was all girls?

A: Was all girls so I applied to NYU and I got a scholarship and I went. And I went, I mean partial but anyway I went. It was so cheap anyway. Anyway so I went there and I made Phi Beta Kappa and did well and then I was out.

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Q: You went for four years?

A: I went for four years yes and I loved going to college. I mean I loved school in general. All the way. And then—

Q: What did you study there? What did you major in?

A: Languages, actually. So I, for a while when I graduated, my father wanted me to help him and I did. But eventually I went and worked for the Israeli mission to the United Nations in the Latin American department which with people that spoke Spanish.

Q: What year did you graduate?

A: I graduated in 48 so it was just the interesting part of Israel was coming. So.

Q: The state hadn't been declared, wasn't made.

A: Well I was working at my father's then and in 50 I started to work at the —

Q: So there was a state of Israel?

A: Yeah, yeah. I think in 48 it was — it was about the same time, yeah. Did I graduate in 44 or 48? I can't remember any more. 48 it must have been, yeah. Anyway —

Q: What was your father's business when he came to the United States?

A: Well again started with the fabrics. At the beginning he went back to Cuba to continue with that, because he had nothing. So he'd go for six or eight weeks and we'd stay alone. And then eventually he came back and he established, he got a job with a very good textile firm. A **Steinham** and company and but he was the kind that wanted to be independent. And so he didn't

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continue there but wanted to open his own office. And then did his own selling here too in the fabric market and textiles and so forth. Not, I mean he always, he was super careful about not making too much money with customers. He didn't want to charge too much. And he didn't make a fortune but he managed and it was you know all right.

Both of us went to college. My sister went to Barnard, then to Oxford and the Sorbonne and then she went out to Africa, specialty was African affairs. So far from the orthodox beginnings.

Q: When the war was over and it all came out what happened to the Jews and the camps and stuff, you were beginning to be a young adult at that time. Any memories of what you –

A: I didn't have people in the camps so –

Q: No, I know but just when it came out generally what was happening.

A: Thank god for this one but it's not immediate that I was aware of. The relatives that I had didn't live in the same country as I did and –

Q: So you're working for that Israeli mission.

A: Yes.

Q: And then?

A: I don't know if it was 50, 51 whatever you know. And I worked there for a number of years and I got married in 55 and –

Q: Is your husband from Europe also?

A: Far from it. His great grandparents were born here, a Sephardic background from Holland. And he was –

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Q: How did you meet?

A: At Park Avenue synagogue at a meeting. A friend of mine brought me. She was going out with him and I wound up marrying him so –

Q: And you got married when?

A: In 55. And he was working for the New York Times.

Q: As a journalist?

A: Yes. He worked for the New York Times all the way. I mean he'd been in the war but and worked for the New York Times.

Q: And his name is?

A: Robert. Robert A. Barzilay.

Q: And did you work? You had children you say?

A: Yeah, we have two children. And five grandchildren.

Q: Did you work?

A: I worked in the Israeli mission and then eventually I didn't, when I had my son, I didn't work full time and then I worked somewhat again. And then I started to work at, in admissions at the Rodef Shalom School initially. Once I had the children. And so I worked there from 1970 on.

Q: Wonderful. Can we talk now about your thoughts and your feelings about what you went through? At this point in your life do you feel Austrian or Viennese in any way?

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A: No, no, no. I feel American.

Q: What are your thoughts about Austria and Germany now in today's world?

A: I don't quite trust it. I mean you know I'll always like a Viennese waltz. We were there briefly about 10, 15 years ago and I remember sitting in a restaurant where there were, had big tables and we sat because everybody ate jointly in a pub of some sort. And they were talking German and then they were talking to us. And I answered in German and they asked me how come I knew German and I said I was born here and after that nobody talked to me. So yeah. So they figured it out.

Q: Do you mind speaking German?

A: No, I don't speak it well but I, I don't speak it. I have no need, no need for it at all. That was the only time I had need for it.

Q: But do you have any negative feelings towards speaking German?

A: I hadn't, I haven't done it. I wouldn't do it. I mean I just – if I had the need then I would communicate because that's the thing to do but you know I have had not many more positive experiences with the Spanish speaking –

Q: When your children were your age and when you had to leave Vienna at the time of your age, during Kristallnacht and all that. Did that bring back memories for you about frightening sounds and sights that you saw then? Did you connect your children's age to that time?

A: At my children's age, I sort of marked it, I think. I didn't think about it too much, didn't think about it too much. I mean I do occasionally think about it. One of my granddaughters for instance is now the age that I was exactly and I think how it was different it is what she's into living, you know. Television you know it's just fantastic. It's different.

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Q: How much did you talk about your experience when your children, to your children when they were young?

A: Less than I do now. Not so much.

Q: When they were growing up?

A: Somewhat, but not tremendously. More so now that I'm older.

Q: Because?

A: I don't know. It's somewhat removed, different. And also because I'm the only one surviving at the moment.

Q: In your relationship with your sister of course, you both went through the same thing, though you were at a different stage in life. Was that something you two girls spoke about a lot, about life in Vienna or –

A: I did not. I did not that much. She talked about it more I think.

Q: She did? How did it affect her? She was younger, four years younger.

A: I don't know how it affected her but she devoted herself to helping the hungry and she did a lot for the – she actually, it affected her. That's what, she had a big write up in the Times and it affected. What she did in life.

Q: What she chose to do.

A: Yeah, doing, yeah working with people that need help and so forth and education and _____

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Q: In a government capacity or private?

A: No, no, no. In the government capacity. Yes.

Q: In what –

A: Well she was in, you don't really want me to take out the -- should I take it out and read it to you.

Q: No, but just generally.

A: Generally well she worked for the United Nations, one of the committees. She worked in the World Bank. She worked at the hunger in Mexico, she devoted a lot of time to that. And various other things of that nature and Africa particularly. Her interest in Africa was her specialty and just everywhere. And that, I would say to a great extent so she individually, as a family they also do things. That's a different story.

Q: When she was alive, did you speak to her in English?

A: Oh yes. We spoke English from the day we came here and didn't speak anything else. Even the parents, never spoke German yes.

Q: Because?

A: I don't know. We just did. They wanted it and they, we did it. That's enough.

Q: How did your parents learn English?

A: They spoke at home only English also.

Q: How did they learn it?

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A: By speaking it, I guess. I don't know why people don't do it now.

Q: Do you think that you lost a part of your childhood because you were exposed to such terrible times in Vienna? Did you grow up more quickly? Did something change?

A: I'm sure it had an effect but it would take some professional to determine that. I can't judge. But I feel I had a good youth and I was lucky to maintain my parents and I was lucky to be able to do what I – and I have terrific grandchildren and you know and children so yeah.

Q: Are you angry that you had to be uprooted and leave your home and –

A: No. I mean I was angry at the events that took place but I, it's just part of life. No, I can't say that.

Q: Well that you had to do that and other people who lived here in the United States didn't have to, you know.

A: A lot of people have to do it in various generations. I don't give it too much thought. At this point it's even interesting to be born elsewhere. At that time people thought you were a refugee but at this point I don't feel that way. Yeah, I mean it's added an extra dimension to my life.

Q: Ok.

A: I mean you know it wasn't easy for my parents, particularly, but I don't think it's, the effect is all negative. Many experience it.

Q: What about your political views? Did it affect your political views or influence your political views at all?

A: I imagine so.

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Q: You all were deprived of your civil rights. You couldn't sit on the benches. You know as a child, you were, couldn't go to the school –

A: It was briefly though. You know and it wasn't a permanent, you know it was briefly. I didn't –

Q: You were deprived of your civil rights.

A: Oh I definitely feel that it's very important not to be you know.

Q: Were you active in the civil rights movement here in the United States in the 50s?

A: No. No. I think I was afraid of joining things to a great extent in my youth. Now that I'm thinking about it. I wouldn't have joined – I remember being in college and people being in the Communist party and this, so or all sorts of things were going on then. And I wouldn't have joined anything after I saw the mass eruptions all over the place. I think I was not that eager to join. And I think that persists.

Q: Cause it had a negative connotation.

A: I guess it must have, yes, yes. Marching en masse and all that business.

Q: Can the Holocaust happen again?

A: It hopefully not but yes. I don't want to predict such a terrible thing. The hatred is gathering. But hopefully it will not.

Q: Traveling back to Europe, did you do it frequently?

A: We traveled but not back to where I came from.

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Q: You never –

A: I went back once when we won a trip and I didn't want to go back but I did go back.

Q: Why did you not want to go back?

A: I didn't want to, I didn't you know I had no, nobody to see and I was more interested in seeing other countries that, where I didn't have all those memories. But I did go and –

Q: What was that like? In other words you saw the house where you –

A: That's right. I saw the house and I saw the school and I saw the frame of mind that, in the restaurant. So it is a beautiful city and that's it.

Q: You've just been back once?

A: Once and then on a cruise for one day as well, but really once, once for five days when we won a trip. Not to Austria, but we won a trip with the United Way and went to several countries and we went to Vienna as well.

Q: What are your thoughts about Israel?

A: Oh I'm very enthusiastic about it. But I wouldn't immigrate.

Q: Have you been there?

A: Yes. Several times, yes. But I was younger and then once with my husband.

Q: Do you remember the Eichmann trial and if so what were your –

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A: I don't remember too much but I well –

Q: Or what your reactions were?

A: No, I don't remember. I can imagine what they were but I had no – I can't give you too much of it. Recall on that. He deserved it.

Q: Do you feel totally assimilated into American life?

A: I really do. I have no other possible roots.

Q: You are American. You are not Austrian, you're not Viennese.

A: No, no way, in no way. I mean I'm Jewish but that's, you know that.

Q: Do you get or did your family get any reparations?

A: I get \$400 a month or something like that. \$500. \$400. It depends on the rates.

Q: What about your parents? Did they get reparations?

A: Nothing great but also something like that. And that only briefly because they died. And you know it wasn't settled that early in the –

Q: Right.

A: But no major reparations, no nothing. We have nothing

Q: In what way are you who you are today because of what you went through as a young girl?

A: In many ways the experiences have formed me.

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Q: In what sense? It made you what?

A: I, it's difficult for me to judge but it's made me more a citizen of the world I think and I feel at home and I love traveling. I, we can't do it now but, and I think perhaps it's made me more accessible to different kinds of people and vice versa. But I really totally feel American.

Q: You are comfortable around people from other countries?

A: Very, very. I enjoyed it and the citizens are everywhere. And I relate well to people from many countries.

Q: You are fluent in so many languages.

A: A few languages and that helps.

Q: So you do feel that lessons have been learned from the Holocaust or –

A: What type of lesson, what?

Q: Well was that what happened as you said you think it could happen again but –

A: It might happen again. I don't know that lessons are learned. It's a new generation. It has no hatred. Different ones but it needn't always be directed at us. But it's terrible. And it's more dangerous now than ever.

Q: Did you raise your children very Jewishly?

A: Not very, no not very. Very, reform and but they should know who they are and where they come from. And I'm part of that and that they're aware of and very much so.

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Q: Is there anything else you wanted to talk about or any message you wanted to leave to your grandchildren? Anything that we haven't covered?

A: I think that we've covered. I love my grandchildren and they're interested in their roots as well and they're very interested. In their fashion.

Q: In how, in what sense?

A: Well I mean not an orthodox upbringing, that they wanted to be bar mitzvah and the parents left it totally up to them. And they're very warm and receptive, great human beings and I have two granddaughters, one at Harvard and one a graduate from Harvard and is now at Cambridge in England and then I have three here. Three littler ones. And they're from eight to 16 in school in New York and all are very loving and caring human beings as I couldn't have wished for better. And they're willing to do good and wanting to do good and that's I feel is the achievement of the long life that I've been fortunate to have.

Q: And do you feel that the part of that was the byproduct of what you went through and how you imparted your message to your children?

A: I, it may be so. It probably is you know. And I don't want to take total credit for that. I think a lot of things enter it. Parents and so forth. But I think that did have an effect. It made them also more receptive to people from other nations I think.

Q: Did your sister write down any of her experiences?

A: I don't know if she wrote her experiences, but she wrote several books but I don't know. You'd have to ask her. He's 97 and in Washington and I told you I think. He lives in Washington and you know the name of the place. I talking about. On Military road. So I don't think, I'm sure she's written something.

Q: It sounds like you two girls, you two sisters shared in some kind of very special terrible time.

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A: But we were fortunate because we could live with parents and the immediate family alive and the ones that sacrificed I didn't really know that well. You know it doesn't affect you the same way. You know you would have wanted to have grandparents and relatives but we didn't' really know them. It's not quite the –

Q: Your connections with, your relations in Israel?

A: We don't have very close relations at this point. My sister's children and my children are very close. They're very close yeah. Like siblings are, they are very close.

Q: That's a nice note to end on unless there's something that.

A: Thank you very much and I wish everyone, certainly my children and grandchildren all the best and I want to thank you for making this possible.

Q: Well thank you for doing that. Let me just close off by saying that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Alice Barzilay.

A: Thank you, thank you.

Q: You're welcome.

(end)