

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Arlette Grossfeld. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on December 18, 2014, in Potomac, Maryland. This is track number 1.

What is your full name?

Arlette Grossfeld. Can you hear me?

Yes, you're sounding fine. And what name were you born with?

Zarnowski.

And where were you born?

In France.

In what city or what town?

A suburb of Paris, Saint-Maur.

All right. And when were you born?

When? February 7, 1930.

1930. Yeah. Let's talk a little bit about your family. Tell me your parents' names.

Wolf Zarnowski, my father.

His first name is?

Wolf.

OK. And was he born in Paris?

No. He was born, I believe, in Poland.

Do you know where in Poland?

I don't remember the town.

OK. And your mother?

Caroline Gold.

Oh and was she born in France?

Poland.

And you know where she was born?

No, not really.

And did you have any brothers or sisters?

I'm sorry?

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

One brother.

And his name?

Lucien Zarnowski.

And was he older or younger than you?

Younger.

Younger. How much younger?

Five years.

Five years. OK. What kind of work did your father do?

He was a furrier.

Oh, OK. And he had his own business?

Yeah.

Did your mother work with him?

No. No.

Was your family a very religious family? Was your family a very religious family?

No, not very religious. My grandparents were extremely religious.

Both sides were religious?

Yeah. Uh-huh. [INAUDIBLE] grandfather.

So did you observe any holiday?

I mean, we practiced, yeah, things like that.

Like what?

Every holidays and everything. Not too old, yeah.

Do you have any special holiday that you liked as a child?

As a child?

Yeah. Anything-- did you have a favorite holiday that you liked?

All of them were good for me, yeah. Passover.

Yeah. And when you celebrated Passover, were there other relatives around?

Yeah. Yeah. All relatives.

So there was what we call an extended family? Did you have aunts and uncles and cousins?

Yes.

Nearby? And you did you see them frequently?

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. OK. What about-- let's talk about your schooling. What kind of school did you go? A public school, or a religious school?

A lycée. In Europe, that's the way.

You started off at age five?

Six.

Six. OK. And did you speak French at home?

Yeah.

Yeah. Did you speak Yiddish at all?

Not too much.

Did your parents speak Yiddish?

Yeah. Yeah, they did.

So you understood?

Yeah.

Yeah. And what other interests did you have as a child? Did you like to read or play any games?

Games, I think.

What kind?

Yeah, read too, also.

What?

I liked to read also.

You liked to read? Did you have any special books that you liked?

I can't remember. I still like to read.

Wonderful. Wonderful. And these were books in French? Children's books in French?

Yeah.

Yeah. Good. And what about-- who were your friends?

Did you have Jewish and non-Jewish friends, both?

Yeah, we did have non-Jewish friends also.

Uh-huh. And did you play at their houses? Go to their houses?

Yeah, we were friends.

And what about sports?

No. Not too good. I went swimming, things like that.

Oh, you liked to go swimming? Well, that's good.

Played tennis, but I wasn't good at it.

Well, but you did it.

For fun. Just because I was-- but we had fun.

Did you have any close friends? Girlfriends?

Oh, yeah.

What were some of their names?

Oh, you mean in Europe?

Yes. When you were a child.

I had quite a few. Yvette, one was Simone.

Do you remember their last names?

No. One. Yes. Yvette Klein. That was a long time ago.

Yes. Yeah. Was there any antisemitism that you noticed when you were very young?

I'm sure there was, but I don't think I noticed it, we noticed it. We weren't treated badly or anything, until the war.

Yeah. Did you feel very Jewish as a young child growing up? You knew you were Jewish.

Oh, yeah. I knew I was Jewish.

Did you have any Jewish education? Did you go to Hebrew school?

No. My brother went.

Your brother did?

Yeah. They had girls mostly.

Right. It was the boys.

Yeah. Mostly boys. He was bar mitzvahed-- the usual of a Jewish family.

When-- what year was he born?

1935.

He was born in '35. Oh, so he was bar mitzvahed in '48, after the war.

Mm-hm.

Yeah. OK. So you had kind of a quiet childhood in this suburb of Paris, you said.

Yeah.

And things were going along.

We had a good childhood.

A good childhood. Yeah. Was the neighborhood a Jewish and non-Jewish-- and mixed neighborhood?

Mixed. Mixed.

Did you live in a house or an apartment?

An apartment.

How would you describe your family? Were you middle-class, upper-class, upper-middle, middle-middle?

I don't know. Middle. Middle-middle.

Yeah. Did your mother have any help in the apartment?

No. No.

No, she didn't? OK. But you had a telephone?

Oh, yeah.

And a car? Did you have a car?

Yeah. At the end of-- we had for a while. Yeah. I even forgot.

Oh. OK. So when did you start hearing about a man named Hitler? Do you remember when that was when you first heard of this--

When we were children, in '38, '39.

Yeah, when you were eight and nine.

We heard the radio, what was going on.

So up to that time, it was a normal childhood of going to school and playing with friends?

Yeah.

And neighbors were fine? No antisemitic--

No. We never knew antisemitism at that time.

Yeah. And then comes 19-- so you hadn't heard of Hitler until 1938?

Yeah.

Were you old enough to know about Kristallnacht or not? No, you were too young.

What did you say? Kristallnacht?

Kristallnacht, yeah.

Yeah, we heard about it.

You did. Was that very frightening?

I was young.

I was going to say, you were eight years old.

But you know, people talk, the radio. I didn't know what it meant--

Of course.

--at that time.

Of course. Yeah. Did you understand any German, or was it just French?

French.

You did not understand German.

No.

Did you notice your parents getting more concerned? Did you notice a difference in your parents?

Oh, yeah. Because you heard them talking. You heard talking and everything. My parents, with friends.

What kind of things did they say? Do you remember what kind-- some of the thoughts they expressed?

No.

They just talked about what was happening generally?

Right. Yeah.

And did any refugees come to your house, come to your--

Sometimes.

From where?

They came from Germany, or Vienna.

These were relatives of yours?

No. Oh, my uncle came from Vienna, and my grandparents. They lived in Vienna. My uncle. But you forget that. And my grandparents--

It's been many years.

They were kicked out of Vienna.

Yeah. And what was uncle's name?

Gold. Leo Gold.

Oh. OK. And was that very frightening to a young girl, to hear a story like that? Here's your uncle coming. Was a frightening experience for you to know about your uncle having to leave and come to your place?

No, we didn't realize it this way. They were coming. We had an uncle coming.

Yeah, they were visiting. Yeah. Because you weren't aware.

We were too young to understand. We heard Hitler. That's all they were talking about at the time. You knew there was, but we didn't really realize too much at the time. I was eight years old, I think.

You were eight years old. Yeah. OK. So when did conditions start to change? When did you notice things weren't--

When they invaded France. That was '40 or '41.

1940. Yeah. So in 1939, when the war started in Poland, and Hitler invaded Poland, do you have any memories of hearing that?

No.

You don't. So your life went on normally at that point. OK, now let's talk about the Germans invading France. So you were still in your-- were still living where you had grown up?

Yeah.

And what was the first change that you noticed?

About '41, I think, we went south, south of France, because it wasn't occupied at that time.

What did you notice before you went south? Did you notice any changes in your town? Any signs? Any flags?

No, not until--

There were no swastikas, no--

No. That came later.

Oh. OK. And were there any German soldiers in your town before you left?

Not before I left, no. But they came later, '41, '42.

OK. So you your parents tell you that you're going to have to move?

Yeah.

You and your brother are going to have to move. And how did you feel about that?

Not too happy.

Did you understand why?

Oh, yeah.

What reason did they give you?

Hm?

What reason did they give you?

The truth-- the Germans are coming and we have to hide, or hide you. Something like that.

So you are, what, 11? Aren't you? 11 years old then?

Yeah. First we went down to the south. Nice. The south of France.

Yes. That was your first stop?

That wasn't occupied right away.

Right, in the south of France.

The French had still handled this.

Right. Right. Yeah. Let's do it slowly.

What's the-- the town of Pau, but we weren't there long. It's a town but we came first.

When you left Paris, you went to Pau.

When we left Paris.

And how long did you stay there?

In Pau?

Just a few days?

You know, I don't really remember those details sometimes.



That's all right.

I know I was there.

Yeah. OK. That's all right. Now, when you left your house outside of Paris, did you take anything special with you? A special-- books, or toys?

No.

I mean, you were only 11. What did you bring with you?

What we did-- clothes, some toys, things like that. We couldn't--

You couldn't carry a lot, right.

We couldn't, no.

Did you have a special toy that you liked? That you brought with you or something?

I don't remember.

OK. Yeah. And what was your brother's reaction? Of course, he was much younger.

Yeah. His reaction? He didn't realize at first.

Right. He was so little.

Yeah. I didn't realize too much, either. We knew there was a war. We knew we had to go, some things like that.

Were you able to say goodbye to your friends?

Not all, no. Some of them were in the same situation that we were.

Right.

Have you seen, on television, people walking? They called it-- they had for that. They used to walk south when the war started.

OK. The refugees would walk south. Yeah.

We took a train. We were lucky.

So you went by train from Paris?

From Paris, yeah. But a lot of people decided to leave Paris, because the Germans were coming. Everybody, not only Jews. And they walked. A lot of them had to walk wherever they could. It was no fun.

Did you have enough food on the trip? On the trip going south?

At first, yes. You know, we were the lucky ones, my brother and I.

You were lucky because--?

Because we had food. We were at a farm. We lived in a farm during the war.

Oh, no, I'm talking about on your way down. Yeah, we're still on your trip down south.

I can't remember those details. Yeah, I think we did. I don't remember being hungry.

So your mother packed enough food?

Yeah. Yeah.

OK. And this was a passenger train that you had tickets for? OK. And after you went through Pau, then you went down to Nice?

Yeah.

OK. And let's talk a little bit about what that was like. Where did you live in Nice?

Well actually, we were happy in Nice for awhile.

How long?

It was a beautiful city. How long? My parents stayed there the whole war. But they sent us to a farm.

Nearby? A nearby farm?

Oh. Let's just not, OK? Is that for me?

No, that's OK. OK, but let's-- before you go to the farm-- we'll get to the farm in a minute. Now, who else left with you when you left Paris?

My aunts, cousins.

Any other grandparents?

Yeah, of course.

So there was a big group?

Yeah.

Of cousins and aunts and uncles and grandparents?

Yeah.

Yeah. And you all stayed together?

Yes. They were in Nice too. Yeah.

And where did you live in Nice? In another apartment?

An apartment.

With all those other relatives, or were they--

Yeah, they-- not all in one apartment, but yeah.

How did you know-- you were very young, I understand that-- but do you know how your parents got that apartment or not? Do you know how they were able to find that apartment? Did any organization--

Yeah, we found apartment.

Yeah. Did any organization help them to find the apartment?

Maybe. I don't remember. Certain things, children don't know.

Of course. Of course.

I know we had an apartment, decent.

And so did you start to go to school in Nice?

Yeah, I went to school.

And what did the other children say to you?

They didn't care. Children don't care.

So you fit right in? You fit right in with the other children?

Yeah.

Did you tell--

We were all French. We spoke the language with children, and it's nothing.

Yeah. And the teachers were pleasant?

Hm?

The teachers were pleasant?

Yeah. Normal. Strict, but they were all right.

But again, no antisemitism?

No, not then.

Nothing.

OK. And did you see any posters on the--

Children don't realize if there was antisemitism. I didn't know.

So nobody ever said anything nasty to you?

No. Oh, I know what you mean, like Jew or something like that. But not to me. I'm sure there was.

Yeah. But you yourself did not experience it?

No.

All right. And so you were going to school, and then you said you eventually went to a farm?

Yeah.

Where was that?

In the middle of France.

Do you know what town, or what area?

Hm?

Do you know what town or what area?

Yeah. It was near Chateauroux.

Near where?

Near a city, Chateauroux, the middle of France. Not north or south. It's hard to explain.

So what reason did your parents give you for sending you to a farm?

Well, we're in danger here. You will be safer in a farm. And it was my cousin, too. But he was in a different farm. And another friend. There was a few Jewish children too.

So a group of Jewish children were put on farms?

Some of them that we knew. The Jewish children were-- they hide. For them to be safe. And it was a good thing.

And how did you feel about leaving your parents?

Well, it was hard. But the child gets used to everything. I was with my brother, with my cousin. And they were friends of my parents there, that sent us to farm for us.

Oh, I see.

So we did the best out of this.

Yeah. And the family that owned the farm?

They were very nice.

What were their names?

Hm?

What were their names?

Their name? Marchais.

That was the family name of the people who owned the farm?

Yeah.

OK. And any--

Can I look at this?

Sure. Well, that's what I was going to ask you-- in Nice, did any of the soldiers-- German or Italian soldiers--

Italians.

Italian soldiers came?

Yeah. And what happened? Describe what happened.

Well, we knew about it. The Italian occupiers also.

And they came to your apartment?

Not Ital-- at that time, they didn't come. Because the Germans were not down in Nice yet. They just occupied Paris.

So did any soldiers come to your place in Nice?

In Nice?

Yeah.

Let me think.

And they were looking for children? When they were looking for children, did they--

Yes. Yes. I think.

Did you see them come to your place?

No, but I knew they came. We weren't home.

You weren't home. And then you heard later that they were looking for you?

Yeah. For about '42, '43, we were all right, more or less.

You were still in Nice at that point?

Nice, yeah.

Right. Yeah. And then you went--

So my father had friends that were already there. So they found a farm for us and my cousin. We were in different farms, next-- parked right next to each other. Because no farmer would take a lot of kids. I was with my brother, my cousin in another one, and another friend in another one too.

And let's talk about life on the farm. Did you have to work?

No.

You did not have to work. You didn't have to do any jobs around the farm?

No.

Did you go to school?

No. We couldn't.

Were you able to use your name? Were you still Arlette.

No.

You had a different name?

We had a different name, yeah.

OK. What was your name?

Romanier.

What was that?

Romanier.

Is that your last name?

That was the last name.

And what was your first name?

The same.

Oh you kept Arlette?

Yeah.

You kept Arlette. You just changed-- was that the name of the people that owned the farm?

Yeah.

Oh. OK. Tell me about that family, the farm family. What you remember.

They were very good to us. We were fortunate. Even my cousin, they were all were very good, those people.

Did they have children themselves?

Grown up, one daughter. She was 20.

Oh, OK.

Yeah.

OK. Was it hard for you to take a new name?

Huh?

Was it difficult for you?

No.

To take a new name?

It was like a play or something. No, my father explained to us that we couldn't keep, because they had ration for food. So we had our name, Zarnowski. But that-- we would have been caught right away. So we took another name.

Right. Did you feel very Jewish then, when you were on the farm?

The farm? No. We were children, we weren't unhappy.

Was the family a Catholic family?

Yeah.

Yeah. Did you go to church with them?

A few times, yes.

What was that like?

Something different.

Something different.

You think like a child, from the start.

Of course, I know you were young. Yeah.

OK. It's another thing.

Another thing to do.

But they weren't religious. We went for Christmas a few times, a few holidays.

Did you learn any of the prayers?

Hm?

Did you learn any of the prayers?

No.

No. OK. So what did you do every day, just played with the other children?

Yeah. Little chores, sometimes.

Like what? What were some of the chores?

Like in the field.

Yeah. What did you do?

We helped them plant, things like that or something. Nothing major.

Were there any frightening experiences that happened then?

At the farm, no.

No soldiers came by?

No, no.

Now, what kind of connection or communication did you have with your parents? Were they able to come--

I wrote letters, and they wrote back. Yeah.

Yeah. And did they come and visit?

No. They couldn't. It was too dangerous to take a train from one direction, because they were checking the trains, the Germans, not only for the Jews, in general.

Yeah. And what kind of identification papers did you have? Did you have your own ID papers?

Just a card for food.

Just a ration card, for food.

Yes, that was it. We didn't need papers. We were children.

Oh, I see. Yeah.

We had no papers.

Yeah. So again, let's just go over what-- you went in '43? When did you go to the farm?

It was either '42 or '43.

Yeah. OK. And you were 12, 13.

Hm?

You were 12 and 13?

Yeah.

Yeah. Did you miss your parents a lot?

Yeah. Of course.

It must have been very hard. It must have been very difficult.

Yeah. But they were very good to us, those people.



The people. Yeah.

Yeah. Very.

Were they affectionate with you?

Yeah. Especially with my brother. The farmer loved my brother. He took him all over. He was good. He didn't have a son, so it was like his son. Like I said, we were the fortunate ones, in a way. Because a lot of kids suffered.

Yeah. So while the war was going on, and you're on the farm, did you know what was happening in the rest of Europe?

Not really. I don't think we knew.

Did they get newspapers or listen to the radio? The family.

No.

So you really were in your own little world out there in the countryside?

Yeah, come to think about it. Yeah. We were in a normal-- we didn't suffer really. We missed our parents, but we didn't suffer.

And what about going into town?

We went sometimes, with them. We even went to a movie sometimes, in the town.

Really? Do you remember what the movies were?

No.

Yeah. And you still felt very French?

Hm?

Did you still feel very French?

Yeah. Yeah. It was a country that was good to us.

Good. Yeah.

And you know, too, who? The Italians were good to us also.

Tell me about your experience with them.

Hm?

Tell me about your experience with them, with the Italians.

They never bothered us. They never did anything.

They were not too antisemitic, I believe.

How did you communicate? Did you ever talk to any of the Italian soldiers?

Not really, like children talk or something. We were not old enough to be-- adults, to discuss certain things with them.

Yes. Of course.

We were children.

You did go to school.

No. We couldn't go. Not from the farm. It was too dangerous. Because they came to school to take children out.

The German soldiers came to the school?

Hm?

The German soldiers came to the school?

Oh, yeah.

Or the French?

They were not ashamed. They would get to schools to get children there. They looked at the names or something. So nobody went. For a while, for a while, but then we didn't.

And you stayed how long on the farm?

Two years.

Two years.

So you did not see your parents for two years?

You did not see your parents for two years?

They came and picked us up in '45, when the war was over. The Americans had landed.

Did they talk about D Day, June 1944?

What?

When D Day happened? In the North of France, in June of 1944. Do you have memories of that? Or hearing about it?

Yeah. Oh, yeah. We knew. Everybody was happy.

Yeah. And did you celebrate or do anything special?

Oh, yeah. They celebrated.

How did you celebrate?

Hm?

How did you celebrate?

Nothing. We were with them. They had a nice meal. They were happy.

This is the family you stayed with?

Yeah. I was still there, with the family.

When you were on the farm, and the farmer's friends would come to the house--

Sometimes.

--what did the farmers say to these people who you were?

Nothing. It's not uncommon for farmers, before the war, to take children. You know, because the parents work. The mother works. She would send them on the farm. And so it was not an unusual thing in France.

So you were with-- it was you and your brother. Any other children in that particular family? Was it just the two of you?

In this particular farm, yes.

Just you two. There weren't other children?

Not with us. But 1 kilometer-- my cousin was not too far away.

And you were able to--

Sometimes. Yeah, we saw each other.

Now which cousin-- what was the name of this cousin?

Hm.

What was the name of the cousin who was nearby?

My cousin? Lucien.

And the same last name, or a diff--

No, no. Not the same.

What was the last name?

Arnstein.

Oh OK. Yeah and when you got together with your cousin, did you talk about being away from your family?

I don't remember. We played like children, things like that.

So now it's June '44. It's D Day. And you celebrated.

And then how did life change after that?

We went back home to Paris. My parents picked us up.

Oh, you didn't go to Nice?

No. They came to get us. They were in Nice.

Your parents stayed in Nice.

My parents. When the war was over, they come up to pick us up at the farm. Yeah.

Tell me what you remember about seeing them after two years. Tell me what it was like after seeing them.

Very happy. We were very happy.

Was your mother very emotional?

Yeah. Of course. Yeah.

And you and your brother obviously looked different. You were two years older.

My brother was-- he almost didn't recognize them. He was young. He was he was very attached to the farmer, my brother. In the morning, he took him to the fields. He missed them after we left, the farmer.

That's lovely. Did you become attached to the mother, to the wife?

My brother visited them a few years after the war. When he got married, he went back to France.

Good. Were you very close to the wife in that family? The farmer's wife?

Yeah.

What was she like to you? What did she include you? Did she teach you how to cook? Did she--

No. But we helped, if we wanted. She was a good cook, come to think about it. She cooked everything.

Did you have your own room, your own bedroom?

No. [INAUDIBLE] It wasn't that big. With my brother.

You shared a room with your brother?

We shared, yeah.

And he was happy?

Yeah.

Did he cry for your parents? Did he ever cry?

I don't remember. Maybe in the beginning. Yeah.

Did you talk about your parents a lot with him?

I don't remember. No.

And you said you wrote letters? I guess-- was he old enough to read and write?

Hm?

Was he old enough to read and write?

No, I think I did the writing. Yeah. He's younger than me.

Yes. You said he's five years younger.

Yeah.

OK. So now your parents have come, and seeing you after all those years. Were they paying the farmer and his wife?

Oh, yeah.

They paid them.

Yeah. All of them, the parents paid.

The farmers?

They paid the farmers.

OK. And then you go back to Paris. When was that? Do you remember?

'45. I think it was '45.

Do you know what month?

I don't know.

But the war was over?

Oh, yeah.

Yeah. Any celebrations when you heard that the war was over?

No, but when we came to Paris, they were dancing in the streets, they were so happy. Oh, yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. You went by train?

Yeah.

Yeah. And where did you stay then in Paris?

We got our apartment back.

You went back to your-- oh my. Oh my. Did it look the same?

Yeah.

And was all the furniture there?

No, no, no, come to think about it. Because the Germans took out all the furniture from the empty-- they did a good job. Yeah.

So you came back to an empty apartment?

Yeah. I remember now, because we got furniture again.

What was your parents' reaction to walking into an empty apartment?

They weren't happy.

Yeah. And so then you moved in, and you started life again?

Yeah. Like before, just like before. We kept everything up. My father worked. We went to school.

What happened to his business?

He worked again. He started to work again.

In the same place? Was his store in the same place?

Yeah.

Yeah. So it went back--

Then it was normal afterward.

And what about the French neighbors? Were they welcoming you? Were they welcome?

What?

When you came back, did the French neighbors welcome you back?

Oh, yeah.

They were glad to see you?

Yeah. They were glad to see us.

Good. OK. And then you went back to your old school?

Yeah, we went back to everything like before. We had to go to school. He had to work. My father had to work.

And then, of course--

And then he decided to come to America, later on.

Yeah. But you stayed in France until--

Yeah. Yeah.

What happened when your parents found out about the destruction of the Jews?

Hm?

Do you know if your parents had any reaction? What they thought? Did they say anything special when they found out

what happened to the Jews of Europe? The terrible--

Oh, terrible.

Did they talk about it with you?

Oh, yeah. Everybody did.

Because you were older. I mean, you were 15 when the war was over.

15. Yeah. Right. Yeah.

What kind of things did they say?

Oh, it was terrible, the things they found out.

Yeah. Did they--

But you should know, right? What they did and everything.

No, but I meant, did they discuss this with you, as a teenager?

Mm, not really. They didn't discuss with children, some things.

In those days, you didn't discuss with children.

Yeah.

Did they lose any family, any relatives? Did your parents--

My father did a lot. Yeah, my mother, too.

Who did they lose?

My mother lost a sister and a brother.

Oh my.

My father lost almost all his family.

Now these were family that were in Poland?

Yeah. Those in Poland. But no, they died right away, because Poland was the first--

Was the first, in '39. Yes.

Yeah. They lost some relatives.

Yeah. Because those people stayed in Poland?

Hm?

Because those people stayed in Poland?

My father didn't like Poland. When he was 18, he left. And he came to France. He was more French, because the French were good to him. There's not that much. I'm sure I'm not a fool, that there is antisemitism. But not really that bad.

Well, fortunately--

And here we are.

And here you are. Fortunately, he did come to France.

[INAUDIBLE]

Did you have any relatives in Amsterdam?

Yes.

Who?

My aunt.

What was her name?

Oh, no. It's The Hague.

The Hague?

Yeah. What was her name?

What happened to her?

Oh, she died. Most Jews perished.

Yes. Do you know where she was taken?

She has a name, sure. But what did you ask me? What was her name?

Do you know where she was taken? And what her name was.

I don't know. All those camps, Auschwitz. At that time, we were cut off from Holland. We couldn't communicate. Yeah. She had a daughter, too.

Did the daughter survive?

No. They did a good job.

Yes. Unfortunately.

So you stayed for how long in France? You stayed how long in France?

After the war, you mean?

Yeah.

We came in '49.



To the United States.

To the United States.

And how did that happen? Did somebody sponsor you, or--

My uncle. He was in America. He sent for us.

On your mother's side, or your father's side?

My mother's side.

Your mother's brother?

Yeah.

And his name?

He sent for us and my aunt and cousin. We were about eight people. He sponsored us.

Oh. Yes. Yeah. But up to that time, you were back in your old apartment, going back to school?

Yeah. Until we left. We were known after that for a while. But my father wanted to leave. He was so upset over everything, he wanted to leave Europe.

He wanted to leave Europe. What about your mother? Did she want to stay?

No. No. People were afraid. There was always wars in Europe. Always wars.

Another war.

Yeah. That's what my father said. He said, I have a son, and I have to go, and things like that. So here we are. We all came.

So 1949, you said, you came to the United States?

Yeah.

How did you get here?

Boat.

What was the name of the boat?

Oh. You know, I can't remember all those things.

No, I know. OK.

It was a nice boat. We had fun on it for a week.

You did. Were there are a lot of children? Were there a lot of children on the boat?

No. Not a lot. There was. But not a lot.

And how long did the voyage take?

Eight days. A week. That I remember.

And so you came-- and where did you-- to New York? The boat docked in New York?

Yeah, New York.

And then what happened? Was your uncle there to greet--

We started to live normally. We had an apartment.

Where?

Brooklyn.

You went to Brooklyn.

Yeah.

Is that where your uncle was, in Brooklyn?

Yeah.

And was your father able to get a job?

Yeah. He worked as a furrier. He worked.

Now, did you speak any English?

I did, a little, because we had taken it in school. Me and my cousin.

After the war, you took English in school?

Yeah.

So you could speak.

It's like here. They take the language when they go to school. So we did, too. We could manage in English. We understood at least. And then, young people learn fast.

I know. I know. Did you want to leave also? Your parents wanted to leave. Were you happy or unhappy about leaving?

We didn't know. We were confused. We wanted to say, and then want to live free. But we got used right away to New York. We were happy when we came.

Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

Hm?

Did you see the Statue--

Yeah.

What did that mean to a teenager?

They don't stop you at the Statue of Liberty anymore. You just pass it.

Yeah. Yeah. But what did that mean to a teenager? You were a teenage girl at the time. What did that statue mean? Did it have any meaning to you? Did it mean anything?

Yeah. I settled with freedom. It was nice to look at it. Something different.

What did you know about the United States when you came? Did you know anything?

A little bit, but not too much.

Yeah. And you said you were able to make friends?

What?

You were able to make friends easily?

Oh, yeah.

Oh good. And where did you go to school?

I didn't go here.

Oh you didn't? You didn't go to high school?

I was finished. I was 19. I finished in Europe. I was all done.

That's right. Of course.

By that time.

That's right.

Yeah. My brother went to school.

Yeah. So did you get a job? Did you work?

Yeah.

What kind of work?

My uncle was a doctor. In his office I worked.

Oh. Yeah. And then you stayed there. You lived at home, and worked in your uncle's office. And then what happened? How long did you stay at home?

Oh well, I was 19. About two or three years. Then I got married.

Oh, tell me how you met your husband. Was your husband from Europe?

Yeah.

Where was he from?

My friends knew. I got married by-- I met him at friends.

You met him through friends. Where was he where was he from?

Poland.

Poland also. What city or what town?

Poland. From Poland.

Yeah, what town?

Radom.

Oh, Radom.

Oh, you know Poland?

Radom, sure.

Are your families from Poland?

No. No. No. And when had he come to the United States?

He came about the same time. Well, I didn't know him then, but--

No, I know. What was his experience during the war?

Oh. He had it bad. He was in a camp.

He was. Do you know which camp?

A few. Auschwitz. Right, it was Auschwitz? That was the--

Was he in Dachau? Was he in Dachau?

He was to a few. I don't remember. I know he was in Auschwitz too.

Yeah. Yeah.

And his brother [INAUDIBLE].

Did his brother survive?

Yeah.

And your husband's name?

Phillip Grossfeld. But he's dead now, his brother and him. But they really had it bad.

Yes. And what-- so you met, and was he working? Or was he--

Hm?

Was he working when you met him?

Yeah.

What kind of work did he do?

He was a decorator.

Of houses?

Yeah. No, he had a store. But he made drapes and things like that.

He made drapes. Oh, wonderful. Yeah. So then you got married. Tell me about your wedding.

Huh?

Tell me about your wedding.

Oh, it was a nice wedding.

Where did it take place?

In Brooklyn. We all are from Brooklyn.

No, in your parents' apartment, or in a--

Huh?

Did the wedding take place in your parents' apartment, or in a synagogue?

In a place. A synagogue, yeah.

In a synagogue. OK. And did a lot of people come?

Not much.

And was your husband about your age? How old was your husband?

How old was he? He was a little older.

A little older than you. And then where did you two live after you got married?

In Brooklyn again.

In your own-- were you able to afford your own place?

Yeah. Yeah. We had our own apartment.

OK. And you both were working?

Huh?

And you both were working?

Yeah. OK. And then what happened?

I got pregnant. I got children.

And your children's names? What are your children's names?

Gail. John here, and Robin. I have a few.

Oh my goodness, so you have three children?

Six.

Six children. Oh my goodness. That's wonderful. That's wonderful.

All grown up now.

Yes. Yeah. So you stayed in New York. And did you stay home? Or did you continue to work, or you stayed home with the six children?

I stayed home after this.

Yeah. Did you ever work again? Or was--

Yeah. I worked at the bank when they grew up, my children.

You worked at a bank?

Yeah.

Oh. OK. And then, have you retired yet or are you still working?

No. I'm retired.

Oh. OK. And so you stayed in the New York area?

Always. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Can we talk a little bit about some of your thoughts about what you went through? Do you think about the wartime years now that it's so long ago?

No.

You don't think about it?

No. It's over.

It's over. Yeah. Do you feel very French? Or do you feel American?

I don't know, really.

Do you feel Jewish?

Yeah. I'm mixed up everything, I think.

And how did you raise your children? Did you raise your children--

Jewish.

As Jewish, uh-huh.

Yeah.

They had a Jewish education?

Yeah.

OK. What are your thoughts about Germany today?

We don't talk about it.

Because? Why don't you talk about it?

Huh.

Why don't you talk about it?

They're too horrible things. What could we say? I guess to everybody, not only us. It was a bad war. Most people suffered. And there's nothing we need to say. The only thing-- we didn't have it too bad. We are lucky that way. We weren't killed. We weren't tortured. What can you say?

Right. Do you get reparations?

Hm?

Do you receive any reparations from Germany? Any monthly--

My husband did.

He did.

Because he was in a camp. You had to be in a camp to get money or something.

You had to be in danger. Yeah. So he did. Yeah. Do you continue to get his reparation? Do you continue to get his?

No.

No. Once he passed away, it's done. Yeah.

That's not fair. Right?

Right. Oh, he got his part of that. Only those who were in the camp.

Have you been back to France since--

Yeah. Two years ago we went.

Was that the first time you went?

No. There's a few times before.

You have gone back to visit? Did you go back to visit the farm family?

We did. The last time. They're not alive anymore.

Yeah. What was it like seeing the farm again?

Oh, very exciting.

Was it?

Yeah. Yeah. Very nice.

And did you walk around?

Yeah.

And did it bring back memories for you?

Yeah. We just missed them, because she, Janine, just died, the woman.

The wife? The farmer's--

The wife. Yes. Yeah. So that's life, huh?

And what about your brother? Has he been back?

Yeah. He went back before me, even.

Where does he live?

Now?

Yeah.

He's in North Carolina. He moved.

Now, when you talk to him, do you talk about the war years? When you two-- when you and your brother are together now, do you ever talk about what happened during the war when you were children?

Not too often. We are alive. We're lucky. We're happy. What's the point? It's the past, really. That's so many years ago. You don't forget.

Do you think it could happen again?

Huh?

Do you think it could happen again?

I don't know. Do you? What do you think? You seem smart. You never know.



You never know. Yeah.

Tell me what it was like to become a citizen? You're an American citizen?

Yes.

Yes. Tell me what that was like, when you became an American citizen?

That was nice. It was good, you know. I remember I was sick when I went there.

This is in New York?

Yeah. New York. I had a very bad cold with 104 degrees. But you can never postpone. Yeah. Isn't that silly? If you don't go, you could never get the citizen. If you don't go at the time that they give you. So here I was, 104.

Oh, that's terrible.

A nasty judge.

Oh really?

Yeah, he wasn't nice. Nothing personal, but he just wasn't nice, I remember that.

And what kind of questions did he ask you?

Oh, I don't remember.

Anything important?

They give you a little book. They were not hard questions. They were. And here we are.

So did you become citizens when your parents and your brother became-- did you all four--

Yeah.

-- did you go together, and became citi--

Yeah. All of us. Yeah. A lot of French criticized us for that.

Did you have to give up your French citizenship?

No, I think, let's say if we went back to France, they wouldn't recognize the American citizenship, I think.

Oh, that's interesting. Yeah. Yeah. Are you are you more comfortable around people who are from Europe and lived through--

What?

Are you more comfortable being around people who came from Europe like you did?

No. All those years, I've made friends American, yes.

Who were born in America.

Yeah.

Yeah. You feel just as close to them as you do people who didn't share what you went through?

We made a lot of-- we're here longer than we were in France, all of us.

Yeah. Yeah. During the Civil Rights movement in the '60s-- the Civil Rights movement in the United States during the '60s and the '70s? I know you had all these children at home, but were you active at all at that time? Here your civil rights were taken away when you had to leave.

Oh no. I wasn't active.

You weren't, because you had a lot at home. Yeah, I understand.

Not at all. Yeah, the '60s were a lot of changes.

I ask because here you were, your civil rights were taken away, and you had to escape to a farm.

Yeah.

Have you been to the Holocaust Museum in Washington?

What?

Have you been to the Holocaust Museum in Washington?

No. I don't think so. Was I? With who? With you, or with Gail? Oh yeah.

That's OK. Yeah.

It was pretty bad, huh?

Do you think-- would you be a different person today, do you think, if you hadn't gone through what you went through? Here you were separated from your parents for, you said, two years. Did that make you into a different person, maybe a stronger person, or not?

I don't think it affected me.

It did not affect you.

No. No. We were too young for that to be affected. I think I would be the same. Now, it was a bad experience, yes. But compared to-- I always tell them, compared to a lot of people, we were very lucky. We didn't suffer. Because it was terrible, even for non-Jews. They were starving. They did a lot of bad things, the Germans, to everybody. OK, more to the Jews. But they did it to everybody, I think. Terrible. Unbelievable things. I think.

Is there any message you wanted to leave to your children or grandchildren?

What?

Is there any message, any thoughts that you wanted to say to your grandchildren or your children before we close?

I don't know. Because this is something we didn't have control of what happened. Hopefully it will never happen, something like that.

Happen again, you mean.

Right? Yeah. We had no control. It happened to a lot of people. Their lives were changed.

How did it affect your husband? He went through such terrible times. Was he bitter? Was he--

Well, I didn't know him before.

Well, that's true.

So I can't--

As an adult, was he angry or bitter about what he went through?

I don't think it changed him. I don't know. A lot of people might be changed by such bad experience and everything.

Do you still feel very French? Do you still feel very French?

I like French, but I'm American also. I've been here much longer, let me put it this way.

So do you feel American?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I'm here very long. I had children here and everything.

Right. Well, is there anything you wanted to say before we--

Mm, no. But I think it's been nice talking to you.

It's been wonderful.

I just wanted to say, when your children were the age that you were when you had to leave Paris, and when you were living on the farm as a young girl-- when your children were that age, did that bring back memories for you? Did you think, oh my, when I was that age, I was escaping from Paris, or I was on the farm? Did that bring back any memories for you?

Sometimes. Sometimes. But I feel, like I said, they were worse, worse things than what happened to me. You've better start to not to think about this anymore. In the beginning, maybe, when we came, but now--

Yeah. When did your husband--

It's amazing that-- I'm sorry. Instinct. It's amazing that something like that happened, the war and everything, and the things that was done to people, children and everything. Really, you wouldn't believe that this could happen. That people could do those things to other people.

Do you read about--

But it's over.

It's over. Do you read about the war all?

Sometimes. Not particularly.

Or see movies?

I heard enough about the war.

Right. Or go to movies about it?

And at the time, the children don't react like a grown up. To a child, they forget things. But to a grown-up, it's more serious. I think. Right?

Right. But we're all here.

We're all here. Yeah. Well, that's a nice note to end on. That's a nice note to end on, that we're all here. Is there anything else you wanted to add before we close?

I don't think so.

Well. OK.

That's a big job you do. Do you like it?

Just a moment. Let me just close by saying that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Arlette Grossfeld.