

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Marianne Selinger
January 13, 2015
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PREFACE

The following interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

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[Note: The interviewee's volume was substantially lower than interviewer throughout the recording. Periodically, interviewee mentioned that she could hardly hear interviewer. There was also static or other noise that made it difficult to hear both speakers]

Gail Schwartz: The following is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Marianne Selinger. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on January 13th, 2015 and is taking place over the telephone in Palm Beach, Florida and at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Marianne Selinger: Marianne Rosenthal Selinger, but my maiden name was Winter.

Q: How do you spell that?

A: Just like the ____.

Q: Oh winter. And where were you born?

A: I was born in Vienna.

Q: When were you born?

A: I was born September 24th, 1921.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family now. About your parents. What were their names?

A: My mother's name was Anna Winter. My father's was Max Winter.

Q: Where were they from?

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A: My father was born in lower Austria, in **Adelsdorf**, near Vienna. My mother was born in **Deutschebrode** in Bohemia, Czechoslovakia.

Q: What kind of work did your husband do?

A: You mean my father.

Q: I'm sorry. Your father.

A: Father was a banker until I think the collapse of the whole vest system in the lower 30s. I'm not quite sure why he quit but he was let go and he received two years' salary for his efforts. And he started a perfume company after that.

Q: This was in, where was this? In Vienna or –

A: Everything was in Vienna. We stayed in Vienna until we left.

Q: Did your mother work?

A: My mother was a trained pianist. She graduated from the Vienna Music Conservatory. Very unusual for a woman in her time. And she played the piano and then she got married and that's how she met my father, actually. She was playing in **Marish Ostro**. That was in Czechoslovakia for wounded soldiers in a quartet. And my father was one of the patients from the war and he fell in love with her and they got married after the war.

Q: So he had fought in World War I.

A: Yes. An officer.

Q: He was an officer. Did you have any siblings or do you have –

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A: I have a younger brother who lives in Boston.

Q: What is his name?

A: Stephen Winter.

Q: Was your family a religious family?

A: Not at all. The only time I remember going to a service was to visit my mother's, my father's mother who only went on holidays. But then I was actually confirmed in the major Vienna Temple. It was called **Seitenstetten Temple**. But that had to do with the religious education in my school.

Q: Let's talk about your school. Was it a public school or a private school?

A: Well the first six years or four years I'm not sure was a public grade school and then I went to a private school.

Q: Was that a Jewish school or secular?

A: It was a school around an educator in those days, advanced type education and she was very liberal. And I had a good time until the fifth grade or sixth grade in that middle. It was called **Middel shul**.

Q: But was it a Jewish school or was it a secular?

A: No, no, no. It was a public school.

Q: It was a public school

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A: But it was a private public school.

Q: Ok. What language did you speak at home?

A: German.

Q: You spoke German. Tell me about the neighborhood that you lived in when you were young. Was it a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews?

A: Yes.

Q: So you had friends who were Jewish and non-Jewish.

A: A lot of Jewish friends because when I was about 13 or 14 my father met the head of the Vienna Jewish Sports Club which was pretty famous at the time and he was impressed with this man and he said I could join that, that club and so I went to the swimming. And I became a very avid swimmer and very happy with the friends there.

Q: What was the name of the man who –

A: The man was Dr. Victor Rosenfeld.

Q: You did competition? You swam in competitions?

A: Yes, but I did swim in an Austrian master, master thing and I won a first prize. So I'm an Austrian junior champion.

Q: OK. So you had Jewish and non-Jewish friends.

A: Right, all was mixed.

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Q: Was there any sense of anti-Semitism in the very early years of your schooling?

A: No. Yes, we had one teacher in the grade school who my parents declared was an anti-Semite. I don't remember why they said that. I didn't really feel anything personally but that was a, I was told that was, he was anti-Semitic.

Q: What did that mean to a young child?

A: Not much. I didn't feel any, anything negative so I just went to school. Maybe I wasn't very observing but it didn't bother me.

Q: As you said, you had a confirmation but you had nothing really religious in your life.

A: Not at all. My parents weren't religious at all.

Q: But you said your mother came from a religious family or not?

A: I didn't know my grandparents on my mother's side very well but they lived in Bohemia and I only remember my grandfather very vaguely and my grandmother died early on so I don't know when but I think she died in Vienna. But no particularly religious family.

Q: Did you have a large extended family of aunts and uncles and cousins?

A: Well, it's strange. I had, on my father's side, two, three uncles, two uncles, two uncles and an aunt. But they had no children ever so I had no cousins. On my mother's side there were some cousins and aunts but most of them lived in Czechoslovakia and at that time you didn't just go back and forth. Met them once or twice. They came to Vienna or I visited but they were all older than I was because my mother was the youngest of five siblings. So by now I have no relatives really except my brother and a couple of cousins who I see.

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Q: Did you have any other hobbies, any other interests besides swimming?

A: Not really, I went skiing which we all did because Austria was a ski country. Went skiing with the school. I went skiing with my parents. I went to dancing school. I learned, yes, I had a madam at home. She was an old lady who was supposed to give me piano and French lessons. Neither of which I learned very well I must say.

Q: Was she a Jewish woman or not?

A: No, I don't think so. She was a war widow or something like that.

Q: And she lived in your, did she live in your house?

A: The house. She came I think three afternoons a week. All I can tell you is I was very bored. Learned some French and very little piano. It was hard because my parents were very musically inclined. My mother played in a quartet in our house at night. I didn't really profit from her.

Q: How old were you when you had to take these lessons?

A: Hard to say. I must have been ten or so.

Q: When did you first start hearing about a man named Hitler? Do you remember your first exposure?

A: Well we heard about Germany having trouble but it wasn't very clear but then there was a plebiscite in Vienna. And I remember meeting a classmate in the street and I said what's going to happen and she said don't worry. We'll fix it. We're going to get rid of this Hitler, you know. Her father was in the government and they thought they could somehow get around Hitler but of course they were wrong. Weeks later the Germans marched in. And my mother got very upset.

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My father was a war veteran from World War I. He didn't really think they were going to hurt us, but my mother was very upset and wanted to just leave, leave, leave.

Q: But Hitler first came in, in 1933, do you have any –

A: No, I don't even remember that.

Q: That part you don't remember.

A: But nothing very horrible. As a matter of fact, even when I went to Czechoslovakia which came after we left and we heard about the Kristallnacht, I remember I wasn't as impressed as I would be today if I heard it. It sort of ran off me. I was a teenager.

Q: Right, you were still very young. So you went, you had a regular life. You're swimming. You're going to school. And then the first change was what?

A: In 1938 my parents decided they would try to leave. We had no relatives anywhere but in Czechoslovakia, so where could we go? So my father said I had correspondence with a Campfire Girl in Pennsylvania, through my school. And she was really then the reason we were able to go to America.

Q: So you spoke English at that point?

A: I spoke very good English. As a matter of fact, it turned out because when I handed over some memorabilia to your partner in the Jewish, in the Holocaust Museum, there were some letters I wrote to her and my English was really totally fluid and perfect. The only thing I couldn't say instead of saying I had a good time. I said we had a gay time. They appeared in that letter, but other than that it was really faultless and perfectly well spelled.

Q: You learned this at school? You learned English at school?

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A: Yes, English was – and I had an easy time with English because I had French grammar already at home. And English grammar seemed very easy comparatively.

Q: Did your parents speak English at that time?

A: Yes.

Q: They did too. Ok. So let's get back to 1938 and what about March 38 when the Anschluss took place. Do you have any memories of that, of Hitler coming –

A: Yes, I was in some kind of a private lesson and the teacher. And I remember they were marching through the streets and the teacher said to me you better go home. It doesn't look good. So I went through the marching and the yelling and howling, I walked home. And my mother was already very upset.

Q: Upset that you were out on the street you mean or upset –

A: About the whole thing.

Q: The whole thing. And what were your feelings? I mean you were 16 and a half then. What –

A: This was earlier. I was about maybe 16. I wasn't totally impressed with the situation. Parents took care of me and I figured they'll take care of me.

Q: When you went out on the street and you saw people in uniforms and swastika and symbols like that, was that upsetting to a teenager?

A: I was a teenager. I wasn't quite, I think I was 15, 16. I was born in 21, this was in 38. So yeah I was older.

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Q: You were 16, right. But you don't remember being particularly frightened at that first exposure, that's what I meant.

A: No, no cause I didn't like it. It was uncomfortable.

Q: Did neighbors say anything to you from that point on?

A: Not that I know of. We had some Jewish neighbors. My mother was friendly with them, one family especially and they were upset.

Q: The next change happened you said when, in May or June of 38.

A: Yes, I went, me and my younger brother took the train to Prague.

Q: Why not your parents?

A: Well I think my father was trying to clean up and liquidate what he could. I'm not sure why. We, they just sent us and we went. You know in Europe you did what your parents told you at that time.

Q: Was that upsetting to you? Were you frightened?

A: No, I was really feeling adventurous.

Q: Would you describe yourself at that time as being adventurous and independent?

A: Yes, I was excited. I was going to a country. I don't think I'd been in Prague before. I had been in **Marientstadt** to visit a cousin once. But you know you didn't travel back and forth like you do today.

Q: What was the difference in age between you and your brother?

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A: Four and a half years I think.

Q: What was his state of mind when he had to leave your parents?

A: I couldn't tell you. He was just a kid you know.

Q: You leave your parents and you go to Czechoslovakia.

A: And I know they're going to follow us, sooner or later but we weren't too excited. We knew we were going to friendly places so it didn't really –

Q: Where did you stay in Prague, when you got there?

A: With my cousin who was already had graduated school, had a boyfriend and she lived in a **gasonier** in the middle of Prague which was very exciting.

Q: Her name?

A: Eva **Faderman**.

Q: What did you do when you got there? Did you go to school or –

A: No, no. I just, I don't know what I did. Went sightseeing a little bit, not too much. I remember my one uncle was a bachelor took me once and showed me the bridge across the river, the statues and he said it's such a shame that things are so upset because by then Czechoslovakia knew what was coming and they were all busy with their own worries and he said we could have – I think he took me to the opera one night. And I saw the Bartered Bride.

Q: How did your brother manage during those first –

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A: He was farmed out to some other relatives ____ we saw him and he didn't really like it. He, I talked to him the other day and he said you know I never saw you. And I was farmed out and that was it. We did what we were told you know.

Q: What kind of communication did you have with your parents who were still back in Vienna?

A: I don't think we had any until they came a couple months later. My father was smart enough to pack a list with all our valuable goods like they had a Biedermeier room Vienna with a piano and everything. He shipped it to, to the port in Italy. I'm trying to think of the name right now. Anyway, it will come to me. And he said we didn't know exactly where we were going but he figured it wouldn't hurt. Couldn't take the money and he couldn't take the things so he shipped them to Genoa.

Q: What do you attribute the fact that your father knew what may happen in the future?

A: I don't know. But he was pretty sure that as an ex veteran of World War I and he was also of a socialistic neighbor. They were going to make him a fund leader but he rejected it. He was more of a socialist so he was leaning towards the more it's not less but democratic way. And he was, he didn't want to leave but he figured we better. You know. My mother really was uncomfortable, I remember from the day Hitler marched in. She didn't want to stay. She wanted to go.

Q: Did they confide in you? Did they talk to you about their concerns?

A: Not in my youth ever. Not about anything.

Q: And did you try to bring it up or you weren't aware? I know you were young. Just curious whether you mentioned anything to them about your concerns.

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A: I told them if something happened but nothing really happened. I told him, the girl I went to school with whose father was in the government that nothing's going to happen but I don't think they listened to me.

Q: You're in Prague and your brother is staying somewhere else.

A: My parents came soon and they stayed with my mother's brother in Pilsen which is I think 50 miles away from Prague. We saw them. I think we went there weekends with my cousin and I and visited her parents and my parents in Pilsen. They had a big house with a garden and that was very nice.

Q: Do you remember hearing about the famous meeting in Munich with Chamberlain.

A: Nothing, no. Later on we did. I mean we heard about what is his name.

Q: Chamberlain.

A: Yeah, Chamberlain and Goering and -- then giving away half the world and we thought he was very upset. I mean the grownups were very upset by then.

Q: But you as a teenager, were you aware of that happening or not.

A: I was aware but I don't know that it made such a deep impression like it would today if something like that happened. Today, like the thing right now in Paris. I would be more, much more upset than I was then.

Q: Yeah. So then you stayed for how long in Prague?

A: We stayed -- the Americans, the parents of my pen pal sent us some pictures which were very nice, some papers which was very nice because they didn't know us. We could have been bank robbers or murderers, they had no idea. But they thought if we were in need they would help and

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they were terrific. And then they found out that we were already in Prague. The affidavit they sent wasn't strong enough because they were not relatives. So the, the man Mr. Bamberger senior went to his doctor who was Jewish and they sent a more substantial affidavit.

Q: So this American family was a Jewish family?

A: No, they were gentiles, I told you.

Q: Tell me their names, the gentile family.

A: The Bambergers, I think her name was Linda. The parents of my pen pal. And they later took -- well anyway then the affidavit they gave us was strong enough and by then things in Prague already had deteriorated because they knew Hitler was next to go to Czechoslovakia. My cousin who was in the Czech army was called in and the atmosphere was tense. I remember very well. Go to the American consulate and that we were told the American ambassador was not very friendly to us, the Jewish emigrants in Prague. And my uncle knew them through some social contacts. But anyway we did get the affidavit and then we knew we couldn't go back through Austria by train so we were going to fly to Genoa which was a big adventure.

Q: What were your thoughts about that at the time, leaving –

A: It wasn't any more such an adventure, it was more we were worried because we didn't know what was, what we were expected to do in America. My father was worried about making a living and my mother too. And the thing got very – it was, it was not a good feeling any more. I met some friends, one day from Vienna by accident on the main square in Prague and nobody had any money to even buy a cup of coffee. We were already refugees, although my mother bought me a coat from Paris for every___. It was silly but that's what it was. Whatever money they could use which they couldn't take along, they'd spend on clothes or whatever. To arrive in America in good shape.

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Q: I know you were a teenager. Did you have anything special with you that you brought with you from home, from Vienna that you kept with you?

A: From, not a sentimental thing. It was after, when we were in Prague, my parents lived in the same building in Prague with my uncle did and the famous newspaper man in Czechoslovakia and I was asked to bring some of his jewelry to America so they gave me this jewelry which was valuable . I had one pinned on my bra, one pinned to my petticoat, one pinned on my blouse and one pinned on my sweater. And that's how we emigrated.

Q: But you didn't have anything personal to you that you brought with you?

A: Well I knew that my parents packed things that -- pieces, but nothing, no I wasn't sentimental. I don't think I'm sentimental today.

Q: I mean even books or something like that from childhood. You didn't bring with you.

A: I brought a lot, I brought my first grade papers which I donated to this.

Q: So you took that with you when you left Vienna.

A: And some papers from school. And papers from the swim club. I had something, the emblem from my bathing suit I gave to the Holocaust but I want to get back. It's just something that was very dear to me.

Q: Wonderful.

A: My phone is getting very weak. I'm going to go to another phone. Maybe this will can't go up ____ than it is now.

Q: Ok. I'll wait.

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A: I'm a little slow.

Q: That's ok. Is that better?

A: Yeah, it's better.

Q: Ok, good. We were talking about your leaving to come to the United States. You're in Prague and then your parents are making plans to go to Genoa.

A: Yeah, so we had to fly which was a big adventure in 1938. We flew from Prague to Zurich and so my **Hacoa** friends met me which was very nice.

Q: And you said Hacoa, is that the sports group? How did that happen that they knew this. To do this.

A: I must have written to them that I'm coming. I don't really remember. But I remember that they met me and it was nice to see a friendly face. We were exciting because it was quite a to-do.

Q: Hitler had not marched and the Germans had not gotten into Prague. Well they came around March 39, but when did you leave? February?

A: We left January. I think Hitler marched in the following week so it was really already very iffy.

Q: Yeah, that was, your timing was great.

A: Had we gotten caught in Prague there was no way we could have gotten out.

Q: So you got out just before Hitler marched in?

A: Right, a week before which was very lucky.

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Q: Did your father have difficulty getting airplane ticket

A: It was funny. They never talked about money. In Vienna that was bad taste so I had no idea. I didn't know what kind of financial situation we had in Vienna, although I realize now that we lived very well. Until he didn't work for the bank any more. Then we got a little less. But we had a maid and we had a cook. Sometimes, not always, altogether but we lived very nicely.

Q: Yes. Were you in an apartment or a house?

A: An apartment with a terrace in the back, a courtyard. It was very nice.

Q: You're on the plane. You're landing in Switzerland you said and your friends greet you.

A: Yeah and the next day we took a train to Genoa.

Q: And I assume you did not speak Italian at that point?

A: I think my father spoke a few words.

Q: And again your state of mind as a teenager. Here you are moving from country to country.

A: I think I was excited. I remember we went to look at the ships in the evening. We were sailing the next day and there was a huge – how it's dark you know in the water. And I was a little bit taken back how big it was and was it safe and this kind of thing. And my mother was very mellow. She hated leaving Europe. She wanted to go the next day to the next town. I don't remember it to have a high tea before she embarked. Father was so mad because we had very little money.

Q: At that point, yeah.

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A: But I think we went because she insisted that was her last day in Europe.

Q: I understand you had mentioned about some villa, having to clean a villa. What story is that?
Can you tell me about that?

A: Well yeah that was not so terrible, but it was a shock. We went for a walk the four of us – my mother, my father, my younger brother and I and we were caught by some Nazis.

Q: Now where was this?

A: This was in the 19th district which there are all villas.

Q: No, what city are we talking about?

A: Vienna.

Q: Pardon.

A: In Vienna.

Q: Oh this is back in Vienna.

A: That was in Vienna. And they let my father go because he was, had been an officer and my brother was a little boy so they sent him with my father, but they took my mother and me and said we had to clean this villa. I had no idea how and what. I think we had a vacuum cleaner. But after ten minutes they said you know something. You can go again, but we were really shocked. That was a big shock to me. It was one of those things I didn't expect in my life at that point. You know. But it was really not as bad as it could have gotten but –

Q: Of course. And again did you talk it over with your mother, this experience.

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A: No we were just glad to get out. I don't think we talked about it.

Q: Afterwards.

A: She said well it's good we are, we didn't have to do much. It's good they let us go. We were shaken. We went home shaken. That much I remember but I don't think she discussed anything.

Q: Any other incidents that were upsetting besides that one?

A: Well it was upsetting to see the Nazis running around and marching and I remember Hitler came to the **Heldenplatz** which was a big square behind the palace in Vienna. People were screaming and hollering but I don't know if I was there or if I heard it on the radio.

Q: Did you ever hear his speeches on the radio?

A: No, no we avoided anything that had to do with the Nazis.

Q: And what was your feelings when you saw swastikas on banners and things like that?

A: Well it wasn't pleasant but I don't think it really shook me you know. The people were more, more impressed. I was more impressed with the people than with the swastikas.

Q: More impressed with which people.

A: Well the Nazis that were running around in uniforms and screaming and stuff like that.

Q: But do you remember being particular frightened when you would see them?

A: I can't say that. I wasn't close enough. My parents didn't let me go and then watch it really. They just kept us more separate and stay out of trouble you know.

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Q: Back in Vienna, so is this something you talked over with your Jewish friends?

A: Not so much, yeah the ones who could leave and could not leave, we discussed what's going to happen and how this friend had, went to Czechoslovakia with their mothers and I hated to see her go. But not really.

Q: What kind of things did you talk about when all this was going on?

A: I wish I could tell you.

Q: Just typical teen age

A: I would say no but we were speaking about having to leave and what's happening to us and we were going and stuff like that. But not very frightened or not very serious. At that point we thought our parents could take care of us and that was a very good feeling.

Q: I'm sure it must have been. Now you're in Genoa and you said it was the night before your boat was sailing. And you went down to look at it in the evening.

A: I was scared. It looked too big and too frightening. Dark

Q: What was the name of the boat and what line was it?

A: It was the Italian line **Conte de Savoia**. And it turned out to be a very elegant boat. And we could go business class which was also quite elegant. But we had a very rough crossing. My mother had gotten sick in Prague from all the excitement and she went to the hospital. She had a gall bladder attack. So we visited here and there she was in a room with 40 women. That was frightening. To me it was tough. And –

Q: This was a hospital in, where was the –

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A: Prague.

Q: In Prague. And then she became better, she recuperated.

A: Yeah they let her go and we were leaving.

Q: She was able to make it?

A: Barely.

Q: You said she was not well on the trip going over to the United States.

A: She was very sick but we all got sick except my father. It was a very rough crossing and they had to stop the boat in the middle because the engines, they were afraid the engines were going to break or something. It was such a storm. So we all got sea sick pretty much. My parents had a room with bath, and I went in there to take a bath _____ and I got sick. My brother and I shared a small cabin. And he was on top of me. We all were sick, except my father was not. And talked to the Americans that were on the boat and that was very interesting because they were nice Jewish people from the south of America. They were all in business. One offered my father \$50 or something. He wouldn't take it. But they were well to do and they said we should come to the south. It's good to be in the south in America as a Jew. I don't remember who they were. They were obviously well off.

Q: What were your thoughts about leaving Europe, leaving the continent you grew up on?

A: Was an adventure. Once we got going and things were settled with the papers and the -- you know getting the visa and arranging things which my father did without my help. It was an adventure. And I knew I was visiting a friend to whom I had written to for three years and as it happened they picked us up from the boat. It was very nice because we had nobody to greet us in America.

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Q: Where did you dock?

A: In New York.

Q: In New York and they picked you up. What did America mean to you at that point?

A: It didn't mean anything to me except a country. I had no idea. I saw the first colored man on the dock. And that impressed me. It was strange. I remember that. Also very impressed with Mr. Bamberger who was really, how shall I say, he was a businessman. He was a builder but he built tiny little houses at the time which he sold. Anyway he had it in his hand the (static) able to send an affidavit et cetera and but he came in a Cadillac.

Q: In a Cadillac.

A: I was very impressed. And they took us to Reading which was fantastic because we really had nowhere to go.

Q: To Reading, you said?

A: Reading, Pennsylvania.

Q: That's where they lived?

A: That's where they lived and they took us into their home. It was lovely.

Q: And you stayed there for how long, in their home?

A: Two days. Then there was a Jewish, something Jewish. They contacted us and we were sent to Jewish people took us in for a week or so and then we rented an apartment in a brownstone in the middle of Reading.

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Q: Just again you went, this is, you arrived in the United States in February of 193 –

A: The fifth or the second, I'm not sure.

Q: Of 1939?

A: Yes.

Q: How was it that you went to the Bronx?

A: I didn't go to the Bronx.

Q: Tell me again what you did. You –

A: Oh we were taken in by a Jewish family for a week. Then we rented a brownstone house.

Q: Oh brownstone. I thought you said Bronx. Ok, brownstone. In Reading.

A: Reading.

Q: Ok and you started school?

A: No. I got a job as a dressmaker, in the best store, shop in Reading. I learned how to sew and make hems and they were all old ladies working in that department. I was the only young person. And it was through the Jewish whatever it was in Reading and my father tried to make a living. We had \$300 that we brought. That was –

Q: That's all your parents had?

A: Yeah. I think there weren't even 300. We couldn't bring any money out so I think the \$300

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came from my uncle in Prague, maybe that. But there was this society. It was called, I don't remember what that was called in Reading, a charitable thing for Jews. We got in the newspaper on the front page a couple times. Fugitives.

Q: They wrote about you and your family? You mean on the front page?

A: They pictured my mother was on the piano, and we were sitting around the piano.

Q: Were a lot of the other people in the town welcoming to you?

A: Yes. They were more curious than welcoming you know. The first people to hit as a family I think. And some were very nice and the young people were very interested in mostly how it (static) how we lived and the bad things that would happen ____ and stuff like that.

Q: What was the name of your pen pal friend?

A: Jane Bamberger.

Q: Jane. And now your brother, he went to school, right?

A: Went to school right away. He was and he was taken in by the Jewish part of the town and the rabbi said he should be bar mitzvahed. And they did compare, he was, my brother was very bright. But the bar mitzvah came and compared him to Joseph out of Egypt. And then he did very well in school. He graduated high school I think the first in his class and he had a scholarship to Albright college and went to Columbia on a scholarship. He made a doctorate in chemistry later on.

Q: How did he have a bar mitzvah? You said your family didn't really give you all a Jewish education.

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A: We got, we went. In the temple there was a service and that was it. And we didn't know, but maybe my mother made, baked a cake. She was a good baker.

Q: Was he able to learn Hebrew in Reading?

A: Yes he stayed with it too. He stayed in Hebrew school. He made friends. It was hard for him to – I remember my mother sent him to school in a pair of lederhosen. The kids all laughed at him and he came home very upset. It was not that easy, but you know when you are so young. In my case, at least, I could slough it off.

Q: You were able to make good friends you said.

A: Some friends, yeah.

Q: How long did you work in the store?

A: I can't tell you. Quite a while because I think I was the main bread earner at the time.

Q: Were you and did your mother work at all?

A: Well my mother then decided to cook for the few refugee men who were living alone in Reading. But that turned out to be a bad investment because she was a good Czech cook and they ate too much, didn't make any money. So she stopped again.

Q: Then you continued to work in the –

A: Yeah and then for, then my father met an optometrist and since he had some chemical knowledge he had a business of selling he called it clear a fogger. Things for the glasses so they wouldn't fog up. And he went from place to place to sell this stuff to the optometrists with their name on it as an advertisement. But he made a living somehow. And from then on we just kept going.

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Q: How long did you stay, you just how long did you stay in Reading?

A: I stayed for quite a while and ran my own dressmaking business in our house. Until 1945. I had enough money and I went to visit my best friend in California.

Q: Let's talk about, so the war was going on obviously as of September 39 and you are here in the United States.

A: We had relatives who were stuck and my aunt came from Vienna who had a hard time with it and with Hitler and she was really upset still. She came to Reading and then her husband came. And then my uncle who had gone, my Viennese uncle had gone to China and he came with his wife but he got a divorce and my third uncle who was a physician, my father's brother was interned by the Russians. You want to hear this or is this not.

Q: Yeah. His name.

A: His name was Dr. Richard Winter and he stayed in **Fishament**. That was his place of office and the local guy said don't worry. We will protect you when Hitler comes. But then Hitler then finally came, they came running and said I'm sorry we've lost our -- we can't, we can't protect you any longer. You better leave. And by that time he was already very late. He went to Riga in Latvia. And there he had the choice to go with the Germans or go with the Russians. So he went with the Russians. And the Russians interned whatever came along, Swiss citizenship, anybody. And he was sent to Siberia with a whole group of refugees. And he survived. And he was very tough. And he came back and was ok. But that's a story in itself.

Q: It certainly is. Did he eventually come to the United States?

A: He came to visit us. He was, he wanted to come but then he would have had to leave. He was already probably in his 60s or so. He would have had to go back to medical school here and in

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Europe, near Vienna where he lived, they made this big fuss about his return. They wanted him to come back so he went back where he had started.

Q: How much did you know of what was happening during, in Europe during the war when you were living here? Did you follow the news?

A: Yes, we did because we had all kinds of relatives who were stuck in Europe.

Q: Was that a big part of your life?

A: Not really not really, but we were concerned and we knew about it. I mean we certainly wanted to help whoever needed it and we did. Even during the war my mother sent food ____ and stuff to England where some of them had landed because they had nothing to eat. And clothes and whatever they needed we tried to send packages a lot. And we tried to help the ones who needed to come out. Some of course didn't. My grandfather, my father's father perished in Theresienstadt. He was quite old when we left so that was tough. And then we were involved. First of all America was in the, already in the war so it was part of our lives. I met my husband in Reading, my first husband. He was, even before the war was started there was a draft so he was in the service six years. He came back and we got married.

Q: When did you get married, what year?

A: In 46 I think.

Q: Oh after the war was over?

A: So that was my story.

Q: So then you got married. You stayed in Reading?

A: So I stayed in Reading.

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Q: When did you become a citizen?

A: Five years after. I don't know the exact date.

Q: And how did that make you feel?

A: Good, good. I wanted to be an American. I felt American. I was –

Q: That was going to be my next question. When did you start to feel –

A: Pretty soon because I had American friends and I lived in, not in New York where the Austrians all stayed. I was with Americans. And I wanted to be an American.

Q: Then you got, the war was over and when did you and your family hear about the terrible things that happened at the camps and everything?

A: Already before. We knew before how bad it was. I don't remember how but things trickled out. This happened and that happened and we didn't hear for instance, my uncle in Russia. We had no idea where he was until the Red Cross contacted us that he was alive. He was going to be repatriated. We'd hear all the time. My father was very concerned in the whole thing. And by that time I guess I was grown up enough to be told what was going on.

Q: That was going to be my next question about how the relationship changed and if they were more open with you as you matured.

A: You know I supported them for a while. My \$12 or whatever I made but then I went to New York after I worked in Reading. I went before we got married. I went to New York and got a fabulous job in a dress factory, \$35 a week. It was a lot of money.

Q: So you lived in New York.

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A: I lived in New York and I met some of my old friends in New York that triggered it, you know and that was – I enjoyed New York too. Of course I spent too much money I guess.

Q: How long did you stay there?

A: How long? I can't tell you. A couple years.

Q: A couple years and then you --

A: Came back to Reading, back and forth.

Q: Then you got married.

A: I got married.

Q: You stayed with your husband in Reading?

A: We stayed in Reading until I think his father passed away and the business was divided up among too many children. And we decided we'd take our part and go to New York.

Q: Then you moved back to New York.

A: Yeah, I lived in Great Neck and we had a designer furniture store. It was very nice.

Q: Did you have any children?

A: Yeah, two. In 48 I had my first one and in 51 the other one.

Q: What happened with the Biedermeier furniture?

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A: Well my mother kept it for a while. And we rented a house and they bought an old mansion that was, cost \$12,000 at the time.

Q: This is in the United States?

A: That's in Reading.

Q: So the furniture got to Reading?

A: Yeah we got our stuff and the china and broke all the good china because we didn't have any day china. It's all right we all chipped in and we were doing well.

Q: So you had the furniture store and –

A: And I moved out of course. I had my own home. And I had my first child in Reading, the second one –

Q: In Great Neck?

A: The first one in Great Neck, the second one in, no the first one in Reading. I'm sorry.

Q: That's ok and the second one in Great Neck? And then you stayed in Great Neck how long?

A: Yeah.

Q: How long did you stay in Great Neck?

A: I can hardly hear you.

Q: How long did you stay in Great Neck?

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A: Long.

Q: And then your next move was what?

A: We stayed in Great Neck, I'm trying to remember. Oh we moved back to Vienna.

Q: You went to Vienna?

A: Yeah. We inherited some real estate from my uncle and my grandfather on my father's side so we decided. My husband wanted to retire. He was quite a bit older than I was. So we went to Reading, to Vienna and furnished an apartment and had a fabulous time. It was very strange but true, I became the president of American women and it was very interesting and I took them to museums and translated from German to English. And –

Q: How old were your children?

A: They already were out of the house.

Q: Ok.

A: In college. And what happened then. So then we bought in Great Neck. I'm sorry, I'm getting mixed up. We bought in Palm Beach. We bought a little apartment and spent our time between Vienna and Palm Beach. And then my husband passed away but it was quite a bit later. He had leukemia and passed away and very soon after I met my second -- I knew my second husband. He lived in the same complex. And his wife had died. Got married soon after and he passed away too so I am here in Palm Beach and I have his New York apartment too.

Q: Can we talk a little bit about your thoughts before we finish. Do you feel very American still or do you feel Austrian? How would you describe yourself?

A: American, totally American. I enjoy Europe but I am a visitor. I'm you know traveler there.

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Q: What are your thoughts about Germany?

A: Well at first I was very reluctant about the whole German and the Germans but you know I got used to it too because I do go quite a bit and I think I finished going. I'm 93 years old. But there's a joke about how anti-Semitic are the Germans and said not in the season.

Q: Not what?

A: Not in high season. I got used to it. There are some very nice people and some very nice friends. I have a neighbor here who is Austrian, you know German Austrian and I'm friendly with her. But most of my friends are really totally American.

Q: Do you think what you went through as a young teenager influenced who you are today? I mean here you had to leave your home in Vienna and then stay in Prague and then come here. Did that influence you, do you think at all?

A: Well I'm sure it did because I got flexible to live wherever I was, enjoyed it. I loved traveling. I went to Europe a lot and I enjoy it. I still enjoyed it. I went last summer to a spa where I have been going for ten years. But I am an American person and I have American children and grandchildren.

Q: Your childhood was not interrupted then that you feel –

A: No we were very lucky that we left with our parents as a family. That made a big difference.

Q: Do you feel more Jewish because of what you went through or do you think –

A: It's funny. I have almost all Jewish friends. I have more Jewish. In some ways, not religious but Jewish.

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Q: How did you raise your children? Did you give them any religious background or –

A: Both were bar mitzvahed but the day after their bar mitzvah they refused to go to Hebrew school. So there you are and they're not religious at all. They are much more non-Jewish than I am. Which is sad but that's what it is.

Q: Do you remember your thoughts during the Eichmann trial? When Eichmann was put on trial?

A: I don't remember him particularly.

Q: Your thoughts when he was on trial? That's what I meant.

A: No regret. He was caught and hanged. You're getting very faint again.

Q: I'm sorry. Has the world learned any lessons from the Holocaust?

A: No. Same thing goes on today. Look at what goes on, it's horrible. I don't think it'll ever learn. I mean I went to Israel and I pitied them because I think they are not there forever either. It's very sad.

Q: I was going to ask you what your thoughts were about Israel.

A: Well I wished they would continue because they are vibrant and really fantastic country. They're in danger all the time too.

Q: Is there anything you wanted to add to what you said, any thoughts that you had. Have you been to the Holocaust Museum here in Washington?

A: Yes, I was with my second husband who contributed. And we got a special permit to go without having you know for the, we just went and they took us in and they saw us. It impressed

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me enormously. The worst thing was that gallery with the pictures. That was so awful in my mind and then the shoes and that was awful too. And then of course those things where they list how, it must have been just so horrific and I'll never forget it.

Q: What were the names of your two husbands?

A: I can barely hear you.

Q: What were the names of your two husbands?

A: My first husband was David Rosenthal.

Q: And your second husband?

A: Was Alexander Mario Selinger. His obituary was in the New York Times.

Q: Anything else you wanted to add before we close?

A: Well I just hope that things get better for the Jews in the world, that's all I can hope for.

Q: Do you have any grandchildren?

A: I have two grandchildren. One lives in Hawaii. The other one lives in California.

Q: Any message to them before we close.

A: I don't know what to say. They are not very close any more. The one, the girl is close but the boy is just I think a lost soul somewhere in California. Ok making a living. He loves his father. His parents are divorced so that's hard.

Q: Thank you very much for doing the interview.

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A: I hope it helps somebody in the future.

Q: I'm sure it will. So let me just conclude by saying this concludes the, I'm just going to say a few words to end the interview and they are this concludes the interview with Marianne Selinger.

(end)