

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview of Madeleine Sigel. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz and is taking place on May 22, 2015 in Bethesda, Maryland. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Madeleine Sigel.

And what name were you born with?

Madeline Bartfeld, B-A-R-T-F-E-L-D.

And where were you born?

I was born in Vienna, Austria.

When?

On February 16, 1924.

Let's talk a little bit about your family, your parents, their names.

My parents were [? Milita ?] and Albert Bartfeld.

And your mother's maiden name?

Was Bonyhady. B-O-N-Y-H-A-D-Y.

Interesting name. And were there--

I am an only child. No siblings.

OK. And were they also born in Vienna?

Yes.

How far back does your-- that you know of that your family goes?

My parents were born in 1895 in Vienna. So I don't know when my grandparents on either side came. I don't know actually when my grandmother--

How many generations were in Vienna?

When they came to Vienna? I know that my grandfather on my father's side was in the army, and he was with the emperor's guard.

Guard?

Guard in Vienna. And actually when I was there, it was pointed out to me by my cousin where he was stationed at the Vienna Burg, at the Hofburg. So anyway--

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

Not really, no. I'm an only child on my mother's side. And on my father's side, I had four cousins. That's about it. And one of the cousins lived in the States all her life. And the other three lived in Vienna. And my cousin's Charles Bartfeld

was interviewed by the Holocaust Museum, so they have their record.

What kind of work did your father do?

Well, that's a long story. My grand-- my grandfather and his sons had a dairy business, wholesale dairy business is in Vienna. And my father then decided at some point to go out on his own, and he opened a delicatessen store, like Balducci's in Washington. It was very fancy and imported all kinds of goods from the States and things. And then after a while, he branched out. He was always interested in theater and stuff.

And he branched out. And of course, I have no idea how this all developed because I was a kid. But anyway, he took over the largest or the best known, I should say, vaudeville theater called the Ronacher, R-O-N-A-C-H-E-R, which was a very well known place. And so I grew up being able to go there all the time and see the acts and all that.

And then after a while, he also got a cabaret cafe called the Cafe de Paris. And by then he had left the Ronacher. And by the time the Anschluss came, he had the Cafe de Paris, which was a very well-known cabaret where a lot of people, comedians and dancers appeared. And many of them were-- I don't know actually if there are many of them-- former citizens of so-called Germany.

And so anyway, I'm mentioning that because this was the cause for his being informed by one of his loyal employees that he was going to be picked up in a couple of days to go to a concentration camp. And so he left before they came. But then I'm jumping ahead.

Yeah, we'll get to that time. We'll get to that time.

So I don't want to--

But that's important, what you just said. Did your mother work?

My mother-- when he opened the store, she helped out in the store. And then when he-- in the business, I should say. When he then took over the-- went off to the theater side, she sort of ran the store on a part time basis, I would say.

So they kept the store when he went into the theater world.

Oh, they kept the store the whole time. Because they supplied the food for the buffet in the theater and for the cabaret afterwards. So the store was there until it was taken over by the Nazis.

What language did you speak at home?

German.

Spoke German.

Yes.

How religious was your family?

Not very.

Did you celebrate any holidays?

We celebrated holidays.

Which ones?

Huh?

Which holidays?

You know, the big holidays, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Passover. You know. That's about it, probably.

Would you get together with extended family?

Passover. Yeah. I was with-- my grandfather was still alive.

Do you have any special memories of those holidays?

Oh, Yeah. Well, we were the youngest, so my mother drilled me in the Ma Nishtana when I was four years old, and I always had to recite the Ma Nishtana. Even after my cousin was born, but see, he was four years younger. So I don't recall him ever reciting it. So that was sort of my job on the seder.

Did they belong to a synagogue?

They belonged to a synagogue. Not my parents. Maybe one year they did, but the my grandfather and uncle, they belonged to a synagogue.

Were they quite observant?

They were more observant than we were. I don't know whether they kept a kosher house or not. I don't think so, but I don't know.

Did your family observe Shabbat, Friday night Shabbat?

No.

No, you did not. Did you have a Christmas tree?

Only once.

How did that happen?

I don't know. I guess I carried I wanted a tree, so they put a tree up. I don't know.

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

Well, yeah. I would say that was it. Yes.

Were you in a house or an apartment?

Apartment.

Apartment.

Nobody lived in a house in Vienna. Vienna is apartments. It's a big city with apartments.

And I'm sorry, did you say Jews and non-Jews in your build--

Huh?

Jews and non-Jews in the building?

Yeah, I guess so. Listen, remember I was a kid. OK?

Yeah, yeah.

All right? I left-- when we left, I was 14.

Yeah. But when you were younger, you played with non-Jewish children and Jewish children?

No, not really. I don't think so. I don't know. I mean, we didn't-- certainly when I was in elementary school, there were a lot of non-Jewish children.

OK, so you went to a public school.

Public school. Public elementary school, private school thereafter. My elementary school was four grades.

Oh, and what kind of private school? Was it a Jewish school?

No, no. It was a very advanced what then was called-- because it was called-- it was for women. And it was-- the only difference between that school and the Gymnasium was that we did not have to learn Latin and Greek. But we had to learn-- have chemistry, and physics, and history, and all the same bit. And then of course, which I always stress is religion was a subject. I don't know if anybody ever told that. Religion was a subject in school.

And at the end of the-- one day a week, at the last hour, the kids used to divide and go to their different classrooms, the Jews and the Catholics and Protestants, different places. And it was, you were graded with your report card in religion. And--

What percentage were Jewish?

In the upper school where I went, there were, I would say, 80%.

Were Jewish?

I would say so. I don't know. I mean, I never thought--

So it was predominantly Jewish.

I guess so. But that didn't matter. I mean, it was Jewish, but it was was-- that didn't come up, except when you had your religion.

Yeah, yeah.

I mean, it was not something that was discussed or anything.

Were your parents Zionists?

No.

No.

No.

OK.

Nobody that I knew was Zionist.

Not Zionist, then. OK.

But again, you have to take into consideration that I was a kid.

Yes, yes, yes.

OK?

Yeah. Would you describe yourself as an independent child?

Yes, very much so.

You did things on your own?

Yeah.

Went out on your own?

Yeah, of course. We didn't have anybody walking with us. I walked to school and home, and I went afterwards to things and went home. Nobody had company that I can remember. You know, we met our friends and we went out.

Yeah.

And back and forth. It was different times.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. What about sports? Were you interested in sports when you were a young teenager?

Yeah, soccer, football. My father was into soccer, or football as we called it. And he would take me. He would go to matches on Sunday, and I would go with him.

Did you play? Did you play soccer?

Only what we did in school a little. Not too much. Girls didn't really play soccer, God forbid.

What about swimming or anything like that?

Oh, yeah, sure. I was taught to swim when I was four. Everything when I was four. And then we were ice skating when I was four. And they-- they flooded tennis courts so you could go and skate. And so there were a lot of skating rinks around.

That's interesting.

Yeah.

Did you play tennis as a young teenager?

Well, yeah. My mother felt that I should learn to play tennis on one of our many vacations. And she went to a store and bought a racket, which was entirely too heavy for me. And then we had a tutor or whatever you call it.

Coach.

At a hotel. And he was very impatient, because I couldn't hold the racket. And so this was more or less a disaster but it ruined my arm for life.

Where did your family vacation?

Well, they had a home in a suburb out of Vienna in a little town called Baden, a spa town. And actually it was more like a family compound. It had two or three buildings. And my uncle and family went there also in the summer. And I think they rented out one building. I don't really quite remember.

But anyway, and there was a-- well, it was called a beach bath, but it was a big building, and it had large, very large pools. And they have imported sand the whole length of the pool.

OK.

Anyway, my first-- the first six years of my life, we went every summer to Baden to be with the family in the house. And then my mother had enough. And so we traveled every summer, my mother and I. And my father rarely took vacation with us because he was busy with the businesses. He would come out weekends or something.

So anyway, I had a very interesting life, I must say, being an only child. While we had help very often since they were busy all week, I spent weekends, Sundays with them, and most frequently wherever they went. So I went, you know, wherever they went.

Did your family have a car?

No, they had a-- well, that's later on they had a car, but that was used only for business, more or less.

Did you-- when you were old enough to remember, did you experience any anti-Semitism before '38. We're talking about pre-'38.

No, no.

No Anti-Semitic--

I had not felt nothing. How adults felt I cannot tell you. As a child, I had--

Up to '38, there were no restrictions.

No, no, of course not.

A normal childhood till the age of 14.

Yes, yes. And there were no-- of course not. Remember, we lived in Vienna like everybody else.

So did you feel very Austrian?

Yes, very much so. And very Viennese.

Very Viennese. And what about, did you feel very Jewish?

Yeah, to a certain extent. But I never felt that it was any different from anybody else as a kid.

And so it was a happy childhood?

A very happy childhood with a lot of things going on. My main interest in my years, I would say starting maybe at 12 or

maybe at 10, I don't remember when, was really getting autographs from people, from actors and through my father and all that. And that was really--

Any famous autographs that you--

Oh, yes. They're all at the University of Maryland Library.

Such as?

I have a huge collection.

Such as?

And I'll give you the write-up on it. And I had-- there were a lot like this poster you have behind you, Comedian Harmonists, they were very well known, appeared in the theater, and I have their autographs to my father. Many of them were autographs to my father, not to me. But many of them are to me.

And then we spend a lot of time, a few friends and I, at the stage door of the largest theater, the Burg Theater, which was the classical theater we [? visit often ?] and to get autographs from the actors. And there was a particular one that we all adored, a young man who was very good-looking. And all his photographs and autographs are at the University of Maryland.

Wonderful.

And so, well, the school was a private school. So we had classes all morning. And then in the afternoon, I went to another school, I think one year. Just I guess now you would call it day care in the afternoon. I had a governess for one year, I remember in the afternoon. But we didn't get along.

I was a very tomboy type child. I really didn't like people to tell me what to do all the time. That got me into trouble in school at times.

Such as?

Oh, no, just talking. Yeah, I was talking. And so anyway, we went-- the school, the schools in Austria and other places had a break, and we went skiing for a week. I mean, so when we was in, I guess, 7th grade was when we started to go on the ski trip. Which was very exciting. And then--

Where would you go to go skiing?

Oh, well, when we went with school, we went into parts of Austria. And then there was an area close to Vienna, about an hour or two hours away, two hours. It was a big mountain. That was a big ski resort, and a resort, really, and it still is, called the Semmering. And we went skiing there, and it was wonderful.

Well, that's good to hear. Now, when did you first start hearing about a man named Hitler?

Oh, my. Heard very early. I remember being in--

When you were 9 years old?

No, I was 10.

I meant when he came into power in '33.

Huh?

He came in when you were nine.

'33?

Yeah.

I don't think I heard about that.

Yeah.

But in '34, we were in Yugoslavia, my mother and I. And that was when the chancellor, Austrian chancellor, was assassinated in 1934 in the summer. And that's sort of the first time that I remember that I may have heard of things that were in Germany that weren't good for the Jews. But I really don't recall. I mean, this is something--

You were young.

--that sinks in. And then of course, I was 10. Then so then as you get older, you become more aware and you hear more of what's going on.

Did you listen to his speeches on the radio?

No, but that's another story. And so the-- while you are asking me, the last time we were skiing with a group was about two, three weeks, maybe, before Hitler-- before the Anschluss. And so we were skiing on the Semmering. And then when we came down, we had to-- in the room. So by then we were 13. Yes. And in the dining room, and Hitler was giving a speech. And we were supposed to be very quiet while he was-- and listen.

And so the table I was at, we were fooling around. We didn't really want-- whatever kids do. And they told us to be quiet, so OK. So the next day was the last day skiing. And they were giving us tests. And the woman who was the ski instructor was a real Hitler type, Hitler-Madchen-- blonde, blue-eyed, rather good-looking as I recall.

Anyway, as I came down the hill to be tested and I came close to her, she stuck her ski pole out and I fell. That was the result of fooling around. And as it turned out when we went on the train and went home, on the train I had a very bad pain in my leg. And it turned out then when I came home, I went to bed but they took-- then they took me to the emergency room, and I had torn my meniscus in the knee.

So they put a cast on, and that's what you did at that time, I guess. And that was-- by that time it was the week before Hitler came. And on the-- he entered on the 13th, the troops. Or he entered on the 13th, which was a Sunday. And in between, they called for elections. So they put slogans, slogans on the streets. Elections for the Austrian chancellor and all that.

So before-- this I always remember how kids do the crazy things. So the Sunday before there was a custom that people were sort of parading Sunday morning on the Ring, which was a fancy area. And it was called the Corso. So my friend Madeleine, I had a friend called Madeleine, had broken her leg on the same trip.

And so her left leg was in a cast, and my right leg was in a cast, and we both had canes. So we decided we would parade on the Corso. The two Madeleines in the casts on the Corso. People looked. You know, we thought was it all a big joke. So that was the Sunday before Hitler came in. So he came on the 13th. On the 16th--

When he came, where were you and what did you see?

I didn't see a damn thing. They didn't have news reels or television.

You did not go out to see him?



Are you crazy? Why would I go to see?

What did you--

The only people went out claimed they were taking over, who were screaming like crazy welcome and all this and stuff. And--

Did you feel particularly frightened when he came, knowing that he was there?

No. I mean, you almost have to view this from a kid's point of view.

Right.

Yeah, obviously this was disturbing and stuff, but you really didn't have any idea on the 13th. Now, let me go on to the 16th. I spent a lot of time at my grandmother's, because my parents were occupied. And then my father would be sleeping during the day because he was up at night with his business. And so I was at my grandmother's when all this happened, and my parents were wherever, I guess, in the apartment.

And on the 16th, I think we had no school that week. Yeah, I think we had no school that week. I was going to go to the business where my parents-- not the nightclub, the business. And as I reached the bridge across the canal, the Donau-- the Danube canal, one of the employees met me from my father, from the business.

And he says, your parents want you not to come. They want you to go home, go back to your grandmother and just stay there. Well, what was happening in the business was that they had come, Nazis had come in already. This was the 16th. And I guess they took over the business. Honestly, I can't really give you details, because obviously I didn't know a damn thing.

Right.

And I think that same evening, that same day-- yeah, or maybe the next day. I don't know. They came to the apartment and had them search through the apartment.

But you weren't--

I was not there.

You were still at your gran--

I was at my grandmother's.

Is this your maternal or paternal grandparent?

Maternal. I had a paternal grandfather and a maternal grandmother. The other ones were deceased.

Were gone.

So I was not there. So I only hear--

You heard about it.

I heard about it time and again when my parents would relate what went on. And apparently they marched off with some stuff, and--

Were your parents there at the time?

Oh, yeah. They had to be there. I don't know. Yeah, I guess they were there. I don't know if they took them there or what. I have no idea how this was. But it was very upsetting, obviously.

Of course.

And I think what stopped the whole thing was when they learned that my father was a lieutenant in the First World War. And so that seemed to stop whatever they were doing. So anyway, this is-- and then I think school started again, but we only had-- we had some new teachers. Some of them had-- apparently were Jewish. Not that we knew it ahead of time. But they weren't there when we came back to school.

The new teachers were Jewish teachers?

No.

No, the Jewish teachers had left.

Had left. Some of them. Some of them? All of them? I don't remember.

OK, Yeah.

And--

Did that upset you?

I don't remember, really.

OK.

Yeah, I guess. Now the person who left-- I know who left-- was the English teacher. We had an English teacher, Frau Professor, who was a dragon. She was really something. But I've been very grateful to her ever since, because when we left I spoke English.

Fabulous, yeah.

Yeah. We had to learn things by rote. First we had to learn things phonetically for the first six months with a handkerchief and a mirror, and we had to turn our tongue the right way and all this. I mean, it was unbelievable. And then after-- so we had her for four years. Yeah, four years. And we had to learn-- as the years progressed, not right away-- books by heart. Like *The Jungle Book*, every day two pages that you had to recite. Well, that was the way you practiced speaking. Because who would you speak to?

And it certainly turned out to be a mis-- it was a miserable way to learn, but when I left I spoke English. I was fluent.

Yes, good.

I mean, I didn't have many adult words. I don't know. I had never had any problem communicating. So anyway, that's an aside.

So you said you went back to school and there was new teachers.

We went back to school, and we had to quit school when school was over.

Because it was summer.

That was the eighth grade, and that was it. They closed the school.

They closed the school? Oh, you mean for the summer?

No, no. I think the school was closed because I think the owner was Jewish, but she was not in the country. She was a well-known educator, and I have books for her. People still use her method.

What is her name?

Schwarzwald. Eugenie Schwarzwald. That's "Black Forest" translated.

Yes. So then what did you do? It was summertime now?

It was summertime, so what did we do?

Did you still vacation at all?

When Hitler was there? Who went on vacation?

So you stayed in--

We were in Vienna for the first time in my life. I was in Vienna in the summer, and I found it very uncomfortable. It was very hot.

What about if you saw the soldiers?

No, you didn't see many. Again, we didn't get together. We, again, a couple of us went to the stage door, and they gave us autographs, and we gathered in a park or something, a group of kids.

But was it frightening to see soldiers?

Yeah, it was frightening.

Or flags with the swastika?

Oh, yeah. Of course.

What did that mean to you as a teenager?

What do you mean? It was taken over. There was no Austria. It was Germany.

Did you feel frightened?

Huh?

Do you remember feeling frightened?

At times, yes. Probably.

But your folks still gave you freedom to travel in the neighborhood?

Oh, yeah. We were walking around as usual.

Even so.

Of course they told us not to do this and not to do that. Not my parents. Parents told us, don't go there or don't go here. I don't know that we paid attention.

Were there any anti-Jewish signs?

Of course. There were stuff painted on stores and things. And I did go-- I think my father was in the store sometimes. They put what they called a Kommissar into the store, but he was unpleasant but not too unpleasant, apparently. I mean, I really cannot go into that. I really don't know.

I mean, it was-- you discussed where would you end up and where did your friends go and some had left. And there was a big thing about always exchanging addresses among our group of kids. We then had turned-- we had turned 14 a month--

And some of your friends had already left by the time you were 14?

Some had left. They just disappeared. But the closer ones, we didn't leave without exchanging addresses. And the idea was that wherever you went you didn't know where you would be, but you would write to general delivery, so that you could pick up your mail.

Yes, yes.

And there was a close-knit group of about eight or nine that we had all gone to school together all these years. So we were all in touch.

What countries did they go to?

All over the world. And--

So now it's the fall?

No, it's not. Well, then there was the summer. And you learned where and what countries gave you visas. I mean, we weren't oblivious. I mean, we were discussing all these things all the time. And then some apartments were taken over. It was a very-- it was somewhat of a difficult time as I recall. I mean, you didn't feel easy or anything.

So let me go back, if you want to hear the whole story. In 1937, my mother and I were in Venice at the Lido and spending the summer. This was, I think, the second time already we were there. And we were in a very nice hotel, a small hotel. Now they would call them boutique hotels. I don't know what they call them now.

And there was a young man there who was very nice, and he sort of became friendly with my mother and me and we would talk. And I guess he must've spoken German. I often wonder, now how did I communicate with somebody? Anyway, I guess he did.

And he was there because he worked for the police in Venice. But in the summer, it was too hot in Venice, so he would take a room in the hotel at the Lido, where the air was fresher, and be out there. And so at dinner we would talk and all That and we exchanged addresses, and we were very-- became friendly.

So after Hitler came at some point-- I don't recall when this was occurring, oh, when we went to Vienna and he went, we would occasionally write to each other. And so I think what happened-- now, again, you have to remember that I was a kid, and not privileged to all this whatever.

Anyway, I think what happened was, he wrote my parents that if we ever had to leave at some point, there would be a compartment in a certain sleeping car that leaves every night at 10:00 for Venice, and we could go to that compartment

and we would be taken care of.

So when my father was told that he was going to be picked up the next day or whenever, two day-- next day. Two days. We went to-- [INAUDIBLE]

No, it's fine.

What?

Just leave it.

We went to the station, and he went to that compartment and he went-- showed his ticket. He had a ticket and his passport and stuff, and he boarded the train and he left-- this was in September-- and arrived in Venice.

This is September '38.

Yeah. And my mother and I were still there. And the Kommissar was still in the Store and at some point, there was talk about how you had to get a quota number for the-- to get-- even if you get an affidavit, you have to have a quota number from the US to be able to Enter and somebody told me that. And my father was not there. And my mother was, to put it mildly, under the weather. I mean, her nerves were shot.

Among other things, I didn't mention this earlier, when they put slogans on the sidewalks during the election, then when the Nazis entered, they got the women to scrub the sidewalks. And my mother was one of them. And she was, I mean, very devastated. And only somebody came by and said, "What, you took Frau Bartfeld? That's not right." They took her out from the line and she went back. So she didn't do very well. Anyway--

Did you see her scrubbing?

No. I mean, I was told that, or heard it when they told other people. I mean, nobody told me things directly. And anyway, to go back to that now, so she was not in great shape. She is managing whatever she had to but not much. So anyway, I went to the embassy, to the US embassy, and got the forms that you had to fill out to get a quota number, which I did very well.

You did this on your own? You went on your own?

On my own, yes. And since I had forged my father's signature when I was in the school a great deal, for excuse slips or something, I had no problem signing his name and stuff. I filled all this out in his name.

You're 14-years-old.

14-years-old. And we got a quota number. And that was-- however, the quota number didn't help us much, because my uncle who lived in the States, my father's brother, didn't send any affidavits. The family had a-- there was a rift in the family, and he didn't send any affidavits, and he didn't send any affidavits for his father, even. So that was a lot of it, but we did have a quota number.

So anyway, my father was in Venice. And we were here. And then we-- there were things left in the apartment, which we had. We packed big things in crates. And my uncle had a visa for Palestine. Which was always called a capitalist visa. I don't know what it meant, but what it did mean is that they could take a lift or container, what now is called a container. And they were able to take all their stuff.

And the crates that we packed of the stuff that was left, my mother that, we sent over to his house. And those things went when they left for Israel or Palestine. These crates went with them, our crates. So we-- I don't know somebody that took the apartment, it was very fancy furniture and stuff. My parents both liked antiques and stuff, so I don't know what happened to that.

Anyway, my mother and I left. And in December--

December '38.

My father left in September. We left in December '38, the same way he did, in the compartment that [? Santi ?] had arranged, which was ready every night, and we got to Venice. We handed our stuff to the conductor, and we never saw anybody again until we arrived in Venice.

In Venice. What about Kristallnacht?

Huh?

What about Crystal Night, Kristallnacht?

Ah, Kristallnacht, we were at my grandmother's. I was at my grandmother's and so. And my mother was there, too. We still had the apartment somewhere else. I don't know. I don't remember. And so where we lived they didn't really-- it was part of the 1st District, and there weren't any Jewish stores as such. So there wasn't anything happening.

My father's store was in the 2nd district, which you crossed on-- I mean, it just so happened the way, you crossed on the Danube canal on the bridge, and that's-- oh, yeah. What happened was, we were going to go for some reason to the second-- to the store, or to my grandfather. I don't know.

We were on the bridge the night-- starting on the bridge the night-- the evening before Crystal Night. And we saw these guys in boots running with-- they had stuff on their-- they had like brooms, I think, running towards there. And my mother said, let's turn around and go back. Which is about what we did.

And then it turned out these were the hooligans and everything who were running into the district, breaking everything up in the temple and stuff. And--

What was it like to see the damage the next day?

I didn't see the damage. I didn't go near the place. Who knew what was going to happen? We stayed where we were for-- I don't know-- a couple of days or something.

OK.

I mean, I didn't see anything. I mean, I am trying to think what I-- I guess after a week or two I may have gone over there or not. I really stayed away as much as possible.

What was your--

My uncle, as I now recall, they had to move out of their apartment, and they moved into another place. This was earlier, not then. But I'm mentioning it because they always-- the new place, I think, was backing onto a temple, and that was on fire. Cause they were talking about it. I mean, I have no experience of this, only hearsay.

What was your home address? What was your--

I lived on their 1st District.

Do you remember the name of the street or?

In the Gonzagagasse. Anyway, and-- so anyway, we ended up in--

Venice.

Venice. By that time, my father was already in Switzerland. Because you only had a certain permission to stay in a place was only--

A number of days.

Yeah, and the Italians at first didn't do Much but then they said people had to get out after a certain time. So [? Santi ?] was able to get him a visa into Switzerland. And he met us when we were in Venice. And we were in Venice two weeks. It was miserable. It was cold and rainy.

And we had always been there in the summer and it was gorgeous, blue sky. But because the summer was long and the winter was short at that time, at least the place we were in, they only had stone floors, because they didn't need--

So it was cold and miserable I remember. And anyway, I was very upset of course, because I was away from my friends. When you're a teenager, you've got to have your friends, never mind anybody else. And so--

So you were upset about leaving Vienna.

Yeah, I was-- yes and no. Yes, I was upset about leaving my environment, but not--

Right, but you knew what was happening.

But here I was with my mother.

Right.

So what was I saying? I did find letters right away. This is what we did. So I think I confided in one person that I was leaving. Because you really didn't tell people. And so there was a letter at the general delivery. All right, so that already made it that much better. And so anyway, we were there about two weeks, and then we joined my father in Switzerland.

What city? Where in Switzerland? Zürich. In Zürich. And he by then was living at some woman who was renting rooms. There were Jewish organizations, and they gave you addresses. I think that's how he found the place. So we moved in there, and we were in a one room.

And except I was-- they had two beds in the room, and I was sleeping on the couch in the living room of this woman's home. It was OK. I mean, you know.

Yeah.

The best part of it was, as far as I was concerned, This other Madeleine, her mother was Swiss. So she had left Vienna much earlier, and she was in Zürich. And so this was wonderful, of course, I had a friend. But also she had an aunt and uncle. Her mother was in St. Moritz. She was a bridge lady. She ran bridge in a hotel. Bridge was a big thing at this time.

So she was living with her aunt and uncle, and they were very nice. And we had dinner there, I think, once a week and stuff. And my father, the ever-outgoing man, he had connections with the theater people in Zürich, because they had exchanged employees. They were called artists. They had exchanged.

So anyway, so it wasn't too bad. So he went to the coffee house. They went to a coffee house every afternoon, where they met other refugees. But they also met Swiss Jews, people. And so we were there a couple, two, three months. I don't know how long it took. But it was--

The rumor was always what country can you go to? This was the big thing that everybody always discussed. So one of

the things came up that you could buy a visa to Cuba. And you could get the visa in Geneva at the consulate. And you had to have a certain amount of money. You had to show that you had that kind of money-- I forgot what it was-- in the bank, so that you're not charged with the government.

So one of the Swiss people that my father met, one of the businessmen, said to him, "you know, I will put this amount in the bank in your name, and open up and give you a bank book. And you show them that you have this kind of money and buy the visa. And then when you come back, I'll close the account and you will have the visa."

So this was done. My father went to Geneva and got the three visas for Cuba. We were going off to Cuba. So then came the question, how are you going to go there? Well, I really don't know how this worked, but I think he was able to talk one of the Jewish organizations to pay for tickets on a boat to go to Cuba.

And the boat was leaving from France. So we got on the train and went to Paris. Now, I think we were in Paris for a week or two weeks. I don't remember. But again, my parents felt-- particularly my father again-- that the child, that was me, may never be in Paris again, and she has to see everything there is to see.

So he schlepped me to the museums and to all the sightseeing, all the sights that you have to see. Which at the time I didn't really appreciate, but you know. Oh, and then I had to go to the Galeries Lafayette, because you have to have a dress from Paris. Because you can't go aboard ship without a dress from Paris. So I got me a cotton dress or something. I was it, as far as they were concerned.

And so anyway, so we went to La Rochelle and boarded the boat. It was an English boat. It was a cargo ship that took passengers. So there were 70 people aboard. They were German and French and Polish. And that's about it. A mixture. I don't know how they got to it, but they got to it. So we were 70 aboard.

And the other group aboard was returning fighters from the Franco-- Spanish Civil War, Cubans who were going back to Cuba. Except they had been in war such a long time, there were no manners left. It was steerage, and it was disgusting. Thoroughly disgusting where we were. Of course obviously we had the cheapest possible thing.

But there were also some passengers who had taken passage to go to Cuba, who were first class, second class, whatever they had. Upstairs. So I managed to go through the door upstairs, which was very good. Because I was what, 14 and an innocent teenager. But there were a couple of young men who were very pleased.

What month was this?

May.

May.

May.

May '39.

May '39.

You were already 15.

I was already 15. Yes. And so we set out for Cuba. And we came to Bermuda, and I heard some officers talking to each other. And I heard them say that we won't be able to land in Cuba and stuff. And I said, oh, that's weird. So I told this to my father and his buddies. They were standing there.

And the reaction was, what does your child know? Who knows what she heard? OK. All right. The only good part of-- makes a big impression. There was a young man by the name of Paul Jones. And we used to dance together. They had dancing. And so he was going to Cuba. He was an Englishman. He going not to Cuba, to Bermuda. This was we stopped



in Bermuda.

And so he left, and we said goodbye. It was all very innocent. Nothing. And then he came back in the late afternoon with a big bunch of oleander, which was blooming in Cuba, to give it to me. Now, can you imagine? I mean, what do I-- a 15-year-old? I was absolutely--

Smitten.

Yes, smitten and overcome. And I've got tears in my eyes now. And so anyway, we set out for Cuba. We arrive. We arrived in the-- yeah, I think in the evening. Because in the morning-- my father had a cousin who was in Cuba already. She was from Germany. And so we had exchanged letters or whatever. Obviously we haven't called.

And there was this big ship. Not parked. What do you call it? Tied up next to us, this big ship. And so we learned that it was the-- what's it called?

The St. Louis?

St. Louis, and it's here from Germany with all these refugees. There were about 500 or something on there. I remember my cousin standing on the pier and waving and my father waving to her in the distance, very far distance. But he recognized her and stuff.

So anyway I don't remember how long we were there, whether it was a day or two or what. But the captain-- we were very fortunate because this was a British ship, and the captain said, "you know, I will take you down the coast, the West Coast of South America, because that's where I have-- my cargo goes, and I have to land at various places. And we'll see if they let you go, if somebody will give you a visa."

So OK, we went. I think we, too, sent telegrams to Roosevelt or something. You know, people trying to--

Were there are a lot of Jewish passengers on your boat?

Yeah.

Were most of them Jews?

The 70 of us were Jews.

Were Jewish.

Were Jewish refugees.

Oh, OK.

The others were-- I think I'm not even sure that there were any more left. I think the other passengers, the paying passengers were all got off in Bermuda, I think.

So the rest--

It was just us left to go to Cuba, as far as I-- maybe there was some other rich ones, but I don't know, who were in the upper class. I don't remember. Anyway, we set out. And we got to the-- to Cristobal, which is the Atlantic side of the canal. And that ship docked. And a rabbi came aboard. He was the chaplain in the American army, a Jewish chaplain. And he came aboard. He had heard about us.

And everybody said, ah, what are we going to do? And all that. And my Yiddish wasn't very good. It was nonexistent, really. Whatever I picked up, I picked up in the States. But he said something like "Zorg zikh nisht." which means,

"don't worry." And it's the German word "sorgen." It's the same. So I remember his saying "Zorg zikh nisht." I'll see what I can do.

So we went through the canal, which of course, was very interesting. And then we went down the coast to South America. We stopped in Colombia and then at Peru it was really in my mind because all these Indians came aboard wanting to sell things, and my father of course bought a bracelet and all that.

Whatever money he had, he was going to still make like he had a lot. And then we went further down on the coast of Peru. Callao was the port that is really right near Lima. And I still have this vision of the church, of the cathedral in Lima. You could see that from the boat. It was very impressive, this big-- and I've since seen pictures and realized that's what it was.

So then when we hit the northern part of Chile, Pisco, I don't know if Pisco is still the southern part of Peru or it was Chile. Anyway, the captain said, this is the end. I cannot take you any longer, because I have to go around the Cape and leave my cargo, but there there's a sister ship coming up from the same company, and we are going to transfer you from the sister ship to the sister ship and take you back, and you'll go through the canal, and you will have to go back to Europe if nobody picks you up.

So anyway, they transferred us on the bosun chair across. Where you get on the wires, you get transferred because you couldn't touch land. Our luggage could touch land. They put that on the boat, but we were on the chairs. So anyway, so we got on the [? Orbita. ?] The original shape was the Orduna, And then we went on the [? Orbita. ?] And we came back, and we hit Balboa, which is the Pacific side of the canal.

And the rabbi came aboard, and he said, "I was able to arrange for you to get off in the quarantine station here in Balboa. You do not have to go back to Europe. OK." So we got off.

All 70 of you?

All 70. We got off at the quarantine station, and apparently HIAS paid-- he arranged-- it was \$250 a day for a family or something. And the quarantine stations, at the time I understand, they had quarantine stations in various ports in the world for the drunken sailors. And so there are buildings in there. And it was a compound, a big compound with a fence around it and different buildings.

And we were all in, I think, in the same building. The families or the couples in the one building. There were a lot of young-- not a lot. There were a few young men among the 70.

Single men.

Single men, and they were in another building.

What about children? Where there a lot?

There were very few children. There were a couple of little children.

Nobody your age or anything?

Nobody my age. But there were a couple of little children. One was-- as it turned out, it was really very weird. The person-- the couple with a very young child, like a two-year-old, turned out to be a distant cousin of my father's, who was-- and the woman who was in Cuba was his aunt, this cousin's aunt. So he was going to Cuba to her.

And then it turns out that another man, single man, my mother and he exchanged-- it also turned out that he was a distant member of the family. I mean, really weird.

The father's side of the family, the guy, they had lived in Germany. They were German. Because the cousin that was in

Cuba lived in Germany also, and had gone to Cuba. The one in my mother's side, I think, was from Vienna, but they never met. I don't know. Anyway, so we were in the quarantine station, not permitted to leave, to go outside. And this went on for-- we were there for almost a year and 1/2, 15 months.

In the quarantine station?

In the quarantine station. After two or three months, we were permitted to go outside, and we went to Panama, the city of Panama. There was no-- the Canal Zone, this was still the American part. I mean, recently, comparatively recently it was returned to Panama. But at that time, there was this Canal Zone, and we were in the American part.