

My name is Julie Kopel, and I am interviewing Susan Feingold. The date is May 15, 2015, and the interview is being conducted for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. We are in New York City. Hi, Susan. Thank you so much for meeting today and agreeing to tell us your story.

It's a pleasure.

It's very nice to meet you. Can you please tell me what was your name at birth?

When what?

What was your name at birth? [?Sosanna?] Frank.

Frank.

Can you spell that please?

Like Anne Frank. But F, r, a, n, k.

OK, and where were you born?

In a large town called Krefeld in the Rhineland in Germany.

And would you mind spelling that for me please?

Krefeld? Sure. K, r, e, f, e, l, d.

Great, and what was the date of your birth?

December 17, 1924.

OK, and Susan, can you tell me a little bit about your family? Where were they from? What were your parents roles in the household? Did you have siblings? Anything you want to share about your family.

Well, my father was born in a small town called Wittlich on the Moselle, and my mother was born in Krefeld in the house that we lived in, except the house was pulled down, and a new one was built when I was three years old. And my father, we had a ladies' garment store, and a very large one. And so my father ran that, and my mother was a singer.

So in my young years, I went to concerts when she was singing, and she was a wonderful singer. Mainly Mozart, Beethoven. And so I grew up in a very large house with 48 rooms. If you could imagine that, yes. And in the house lived my parents, my grandparents, my mother's parents, my brother and I, and a number of maids. So where were we? Where should we go?

So your brother is younger or older than you?

Three years older.

Three years older, OK.

And he's not alive.

And what was the nature of religious life within your family? My father was fairly orthodox. My mother was not at all. She was an atheist, really, my mother. But we grew up with Jewish tradition. I went to Hebrew school and so did my brother and that's about it for that one.

OK, so you went to secular school and Hebrew school?

Yeah. No, I mean, Hebrew school was sort of after school. They were not-- it was a couple of hours a week.

OK, so your regular school was a secular school with Germans as well.

I went into an elementary school. That's what happened in Germany. The first four years you go to an elementary school, then you can go to high school if you wanted to. So at 10, I went to high school, and when I was not quite 13, I was kicked out. Hitler was in full swing. And they threw me out of school one morning, the 9th of November-- yeah, Kristallnacht.

Let's back up a little bit. Do you remember if your family had any sort of political affiliations?

Well, my mother was quite radical to the left. And my father-- I don't really know. My father was not very active politically.

And did you keep a kosher home?

Did I what?

Keep a kosher home?

Sort of a pretend kosher home. [LAUGHS]

And what about Shabbat? Did you participate in Shabbat rituals and synagogue?

Yes, I went to synagogue.

And did you go only with your father since your mother was more of an atheist?

Yeah, but my mother, she was a singer so she sang solos in the choir, and she did all the solos in the holidays, yes.

OK, and you had mentioned that your grandparents also lived in your house. Were there other members of your extended family who lived--

There was an aunt. A sister of my mother's. And with 48 rooms, there was quite a lot of space. Yes, so my grandparents, they had one floor. And my aunt, who had several rooms.

And were there any other members living in the same town of your extended family?

No.

No, so everyone in your family was living there?

Fairly close some of them. Yes, not far.

OK, and can you tell me a little bit about your childhood before the war?

My childhood, yes. When I was very little, my mother did a lot of singing. She gave a lot of concerts so she travelled. So there were a number of maids in my early years, but all lovely. Very, very good. And my brother and I were very close. We fought like mad together, but we loved each other. And my parents were, I would say, model parents. I had a lovely childhood in that sense, yes. And my father, he was a businessman.

We had a very large store which he took over from my mother's father. Yeah, and my father was a very quiet man, very accommodating. My mother was extremely temperamental but wonderful. She was wonderful, and so I grew up in a household with a very calm, calm male presence, and my brother was very temperamental. I was more like my father. Not quite as--

Right, and he was more like your mother.

Yeah, yeah, and he was more like my mother, yes. But we were very close. Very close.

Do you want to get some water?

Coffee, I want.

Sure, we could stop if you want.

Are you sure?

Yes, it's OK.

Would you like some coffee?

No, I'm OK. Thank you, but I'm going to just-- let me take microphone off.