

31 January, '93.

And where were you born?

Bremerhaven, in the north of Germany.

How would you describe Bremerhaven?

I can't remember anything. I was a baby, I think, of two years when my parents left. And they moved to Hanover, a wonderful city more in the north of Germany, yes.

And I began there my schooling, I think for about three years. And then my parents separated. And my mother and I, we went to the Rhineland to my mother's sister. And there I grew up and had a wonderful schooling time there.

And in between, as I said before, I went with my mother to Burma. And after we returned, 1916, during the First World War, I worked in Germany as a volunteer in the city Neuwied, on the Rhine near Koblenz. And I worked at the city hall.

And I had a wonderful occupation there. I had the distribution of the food ration cards under me. And at the end of the war, when the American occupation came, they called me always as interpreter. And that was also very funny for me, because very often American soldiers married German girls. And they called me to assist and translate the official wording of the ceremony, and so on. So that usually when I came home, my aunt teased me, and she said, if he beats her up, it's your own fault.

[LAUGHTER]

That's quite a story. You mentioned that you grew up in the Rhineland.

Yes.

Where in the Rhineland?

Neuwied on the Rhine.

Uh huh.

Neuwied am Rhein, near Koblenz, about half an hour away from Koblenz.

And you went to school there?

I went to school there, yeah, [GERMAN - name of school]]. And I had a wonderful schooling. I had an excellent teacher for English.

And of course, English was the second language in our family, owing to that, as I said before, all the brothers of my grandfather were in England, in London. And so constantly we were in connection with London. They came over with their children, and we went over, and so on, and so on.

You mentioned that all your uncles were in England. How long had they been in England at this time?

They were sent over as very young boys. I have a booklet here. And in that, I see that the youngest was only 17 years old when he was sent over. And he became, afterwards, the main partner in the firm.

The firm still exists today. There's a branch here in Canada. In South Africa is a very big branch, in Johannesburg, and in Sydney.

What kind of business was this?

Export and import. Besides, they bought up factories. They have still a factory in south of France in the Jura. In smoking, they manufacture smoking pipes. Yes, it's a very large firm. It's already the fourth generation now.

I see.

Yes.

And did you visit London as a young girl?

On my way to Rangoon, to Burma, my uncle took me first to London because he had to do still business there with his agents. So that was the first time that I was in London. And that was the visit I was looking forward since years.

Because I grew up and heard, always, when you are grown up, we will send you to England to learn proper English. We will send you a year to France to learn proper French, you see? So of course I was eager to come to London. Yes, and I had a wonderful time there for three weeks.

When you went to the [GERMAN], did you study for a particular--

No, that was a general education there. But attached to the [GERMAN], was a Lehrerinnen Seminar. If you wanted to study to become a teacher, after finishing the school for 9 or 10 years, you could study three years to be a teacher.

I see.

Some of my girlfriends did it. But I wasn't interested too much in that. I wanted to go out of the city.

And I went, afterwards, to Frankfurt and visited for two years a business school there because I wanted to be in a girls' boarding house where many girls were. I was the only child. I lost a little brother very, very small little brother. And so I always was more or less the only child in the family.

So I had opportunity with friends who were already there. And I had a lovely time in Frankfurt. Until, when I was finished there, I went to Burma directly.

Now why is it that you went to Burma?

My mother had an uncle living there and a brother. And this uncle lost, by the birth of the second child, his only daughter. And owing to that, the telegrams came over to Germany, who is free who could come over and look after the two babies.

So it fell onto my mother. And I decided not to go with her directly because I wanted to finish the last six months of my school. And knowing that my uncle would come next year, her brother, for vacation time, so I told my mother I come with him.

And that is what I did, yes. And he was a wonderful companion to me. He spoiled me all over.

So it was a wonderful trip?

Yes, that was when I went through the Suez Canal.

I see.

See?

This was now before the First World War?

That was in 1911, in August 1911, yes. Yes, and we had to leave Burma end of '15, yes, end of November '15.

And because we were English prisoners of war, my mother and I, we had to travel 2 and 1/2 months until we came back to Germany. They wouldn't allow us to go back via the Suez Canal. We had to make the trip all around South Africa.

They brought us to Madras, to Calcutta first. Then passing Madagascar, we came to Cape Town, from there, up to St. Helena, where they frightened us deathly. They said, here you can stay on.

And because the St. Helena made a terrible impression on us, there were all rusty old ships lying in the harbor, and so on. But only for a few hours we stopped there. Then we went on to the Canaries, and from there to Gibraltar, and from there to London.

But in London, they couldn't bring us directly to London because a few days ago the Germans sunk a British submarine. And so we had to stay out of London. And we came from a tropical country, were not prepared for the severe winter in the channel--

Yes.

--British channel-- so I still see us with the blankets around us. And I constantly said, now I know what it means to be a poor immigrant.

[LAUGHS]

Were you able? You crossed the channel from London to Germany during--

The British were very hard to us. Finally they let us come into the harbor. What was it? To some dock-- it was in the evening. And we were examined, if we had no money or anything on our body.

And there were several old gentlemen with us, and some from the different consulates. And the men were all taken off the boat to a concentration camp. And we were transferred to a wonderful Dutch boat.

And the Dutch people were lovely to us. We had warmed cabins and good food and real beds to sleep in. So we were brought over to Holland. And by train, we traveled to the German frontier.

But the British had taken all our luggage and our passports. So we had to wait at the frontier a few days for the luggage. But our passports, we never got.

And owing to that, my mother and I, we had great trouble in Germany because it was the war, you see. In Neuwied, where we were known, they said, well, we don't know if you are not spies now, or something like that. You first have to see that you get your papers.

So we managed it this way. Two cousins of my mother were doctors. And they were in the medical service as officers. So they vouched for us.

In the German army? Yeah.

Yes, they were in the German army. And so finally, we got some papers and we could live quietly. Because my mother was terribly afraid to be without any paper, any recognition, you see.

But that was settled then. And then my aunt said to me in Neuwied, she said, listen. All the girls are working voluntarily now for the country. You should do the same. In the household is no work for you. I have the maids here.

So I got the job at the city hall. And it was a wonderful job. I had the ration card distribution under me.

And when the war ended and the American soldiers came as occupation army, they asked me to be an--

Translator?

--translator there.

Let me ask you. During all this, you sort of had divided loyalties. The war was going on. Did you feel yourself a German national?

Absolutely! And how, I will tell you. The minute we got out of the train in [NON-ENGLISH], that was the German frontier. I saw the first German soldiers and officers in their gray uniform.

I rushed to one of the officers. And I'd never forget this. And I put the question, will we win? And he answered, [GERMAN], Fraulein, on their knees they will be lying in front of us. And so the Germans lost the war. And the Kaiser had to flee to Holland.

At the end of the war, how do you think the Germans felt about losing the war then?

Well, they were sorry. You see? They were all sorry. Yes. It was their country and their army. And the population didn't want the war. It was the Kaiser, you see?

Years before, they always say the Kaiser is rattling again--

His sword?

--his sword.

During this time, while you were growing up, how would you describe the relation between the Jews in Germany and the Christians, in Neuwied, or in Frankfurt, wherever you were?

I mean, in Frankfurt, that was a Jewish school, more or less. The director was Jewish. It was a private school. In Frankfurt, I didn't feel anything.

In Neuwied, I fade sometimes a little bit. Because my maiden name was David, and it sounds, in German, harder, David. Ada David, I was.

And whenever a new teacher came, and she asked the names of all the children, and I had to get up and say my name Ada David, I just had the feeling somebody is looking at me because I am a Jewish girl. Perhaps it was my own imagination. I don't know. Nobody said anything against us, nobody, never.

Although my aunt always told me, you know, already at Bismarck's time, it was very reluctant but fine anti-Semitism here. That she always told me, yes. And I knew there was always a difference, you see.

Did you have many non-Jewish friends?

No, no, no, we kept together. In my class, we were about five Jewish girls. And we were the friends.

I mean, we talked to the others. And now and then, they also visited us. But I can't say that we were close together as I was with my Jewish girlfriends.

Right.

With them, I was very, very close.

As you were growing up in Neuwied, how did you get a Jewish education?

Well, there was a very good congregation. They had an excellent teacher there. I mean, like the rabbi and the cantor in the synagogue, he did everything. And he was the teacher of the Jewish public school. There was an excellent Jewish public school to which you had to go first two years before you could go to a higher school. Yes.

Were you from a very observant home?

No, no, no. I mean, my grandparents were very religious. But the household of my aunt was just modern. So I mean, I feel, as a good Jew, that I'm not too [INAUDIBLE].

That's me.

Because as I always say, religion is an own business of each person.

Business of the heart, too.

Yes.

You know?

Yes, yes, yes, as long as you feel as a Jew, it's all right. Yes.

After you came home from Burma, and you had this job distributing ration cards, and then you became a translator, was this between the First World War and the Second World War, that was?

Oh, yes.

Do you remember the inflation?

Very well, very well I remember. Because I earned some money there at the city hall. And I always loved to buy books.

So my aunt said one day, listen, I wouldn't put the money all into books. Keep it in case you marry, and then you are pleased if you have some money free with which you can buy something you don't get as a present, a piano or something like this.

You know, at that time, all young girls or children learned music, piano. And in our house, my mother had her piano from her own home and my aunt. So there were two pianos.

Of course, I had to learn piano. My mother was an excellent player while I was not gifted at all. Yes. It happens this way sometimes.

Oh, yes,

How did the inflation affect you?

Well, when I really married, the money was just a stamp worth,, you see? Nothing.

When you married, this was in Frankfurt?

Yes, my wedding was in Frankfurt.

And did you continue to live there?

Yes, yes, my husband-- they opened a branch there of his parents' business. They were wholesale grain merchants. Yes. They had flour. And they imported, in Frankfurt, was the business for the foreign grain, what they imported, maize from South Africa and South America. Yes.

And was his business affected badly by the inflation?

Well, during the inflation, I didn't marry yet. After, directly after the inflation, you see?

Well, it was a very solid firm. And they must have felt it, I think. Because we became engaged directly after that.

So I don't know too much. I only know that my mother-in-law always said that one good idea she had during the time, she told the boys, go and buy now furniture in case you are getting married one day, it's standing there. But she said, I forgot to buy for each of my five daughters a house.

She said the money was there plenty for it. And I made the big mistake, she said. I forgot this. I never thought of it. So they felt it and didn't feel it.

What was morale like in Frankfurt between the wars? After Germany had lost the war, and after the inflation, how would you describe the morale?

Well, I don't think, well, people always spoke about the inflation. I mean, everybody lost money, and so on. But all together, Frankfurt was a wonderful place to live. There it was a very cultured place, you know?

And there were Jewish people who were in high positions and they did a lot for the city, and so on. So I mean, the life there was really a very good life, as I always say. And if Hitler wouldn't have come, it was good enough for us to live there. That's always my word, you see.

Did you and your husband participate in the cultural life?

Well, we enjoyed everything. I mean, we went to lectures, and so on, and to the theater, and to the opera, and so on. Yes, my husband liked to sit there in the evening and read again and again parts from Schiller or Goethe or so. He was very interested in all that. Yes.

You mentioned that you went to a business school. Did you help in the business?

No, I couldn't. [LAUGHS] The business was large without me. And there were four partners, you see?

His father and his uncle founded the firm. And later on, the uncle died, and his sons came into the firm when they grew up. So my husband was with his father and the two cousins. So that wouldn't have been good if a woman would come in.

That's really the reason I asked. Was it possible for a woman of your position to help them?

No, no, I only could help, now and then, my husband with my English. I mean, when there was a difficulty with some merchandise. And so he came home and brought me papers along and said, could you read it?

Translate it?

That I did.

At the time, in the early 1930s, were people fearful of a communist threat?

Well, people spoke about it very much, you know? And I knew the communists, they must not be all right with what they are doing. But I personally of course never feared anything in Frankfurt.

Did the business people or did people in general have confidence in the Weimar government?

Well, they had to have confidence, you see? What could they do otherwise? As it was, we had to take it, you see?

Even when the name Hitler came up, now and then I heard a word about it. But then they always said something is going on. Something is going on. But it was always so in the distance more, until the real reality came.

When did you first think that Hitler was a serious--

Ooh, well--

--threat?

That's already 1930, when he moved to the Rhineland, you see. When he took over the Rhineland, then we knew now it's getting bad.

Now he only marched into the Rhineland in 1936. Right?

Yes, but I think it was-- no, it was earlier. I remember we were at the wedding of my niece in Mannheim. And suddenly somebody said, just news came Hitler went to the Rhineland. And everybody was shocked. Yes, yes.

When you say everybody was shocked, did they think that there--

Because the Rhineland, after the French occupation there when they left, should be free. That was in the contract.

Treaty of Versailles?

Yes, yes, and suddenly Hitler went there. And then, suddenly, we felt that he was against us Jews, you know?

Why did you make that connection, between his occupation of the Rhineland and that he was against the Jews?

Because that shocked everybody. When we heard he took over, or he went into the Rhineland suddenly, then slowly, slowly, we heard that he is not good for Jews.

Did the people of the Rhineland at any time feel themselves not German? Did they feel themselves at all French?

No, nothing, nothing, nothing anymore, no, no. They were absolute German people. Because the French occupation, I mean, Napoleon was there, many, many years ago, 100 years ago, and so. Only a few names were still there in French. Yes.

Were the people of the Rhineland happy when Hitler marched in, in terms of reoccupying--

Absolutely, no, no, no, no, no. Nobody I know, you see, was happy about it. Because at that time, people liked to live quietly, doing their business, and enjoy their life.

And suddenly somebody came and wanted to change everything. And that was rather peculiar for the people, very peculiar it was, when it started in the beginning.

I can understand that. The only reason I asked that was I was wondering in terms of this way, they were part of Germany again. You know? And that's what I was curious to--

I mean, he didn't separate the Rhineland from Germany. In fact, I mean, it wasn't allowed to have soldiers there. And I think that's what he did, you see?

Yeah.

Yes.

When in Frankfurt did you begin to notice any difference in the Gentile attitude toward the Jews?

Well, when Hitler came to into power after '33, you see, he made it so openly, directly, that famous 1 of April, on a Saturday. That was a horrible day for all of us. I never forget how trembling I sat at home.

And I said constantly in the afternoon to my husband, let's go to India. I once was there. And let's go so far away that we don't have anything to do with that.

So my husband said, how can I? There are the two businesses. And how can I? So my husband, until '36, he was not at all thinking of leaving the country, you see?

And one day a steamer came with maize from South America. And as a Jewish firm, he had to get a special permission from Berlin, from the [GERMAN]. And as a Jewish firm, they didn't get it.

So my husband had to travel to Rotterdam and tried to sell it at any price there, you see. Rotterdam is full of filled boats with maize and all kinds of things. So you can imagine they didn't just wait for this load of maize.

And then he met business friends, formerly from Frankfurt. And they said to him, Mr. Speyer, what are you thinking? Are you-- what-- what-- why are you still in Frankfurt? Don't you know what's going on?

Then he was ripe. He came back. And the same evening he said to me, write to your mother. I know she has a cousin in London who is a good lawyer, and he's an Englishman, the son of the uncle who was knighted by Queen Victoria, and if we could go over and talk to him about leaving the country and where to go to.

So a wonderful letter came back from this relative of my mother. And he said he is fully prepared to receive us. But it would be good to come over and not by writing.

So my husband and I decided to go over to London. And I never forget it. Hurriedly we traveled, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

And this relative, he opened our eyes. He said, you don't know in Germany what is going on. You only read in the papers what Hitler allows you to know.

But we here, we see further. He's not only giving you trouble in your business, but takes your business away, or your passport, or your money. He will take your life.

I advise you, as soon as you go back, call all the family members in Frankfurt, the relatives, tell them what I'm telling you here. That I warn them all. And go and see that you are being prepared to leave Germany as quickly as possible. And that was October, or something like that. And we left Germany in February.

1937?

Yes, the next year.

Were you surprised at all, when you were speaking to this cousin, that you were not seeing the same thing in Germany?

Of course we were surprised, you see?



Why do you think the German Jews were not seeing it?

Well, we knew something was going on. But nobody was really there who opened our eyes further. In fact, like Elsie's mother, she always says, oh, that means nothing. After the storm, the sun comes out again.

And she didn't want to know anything of leaving the country, even when we came from London and we told Elsie's parents about it. Then her father who, white he was young here in America to study the business here for two years, he said directly, I like to go back to America. But her mother said, oh, that won't last long. And unfortunately, many, many Jewish people, I must say, they always say, oh, it won't last long.

They were the [INAUDIBLE].

We were warned. And this relative tried to be helpful as much as he could. Yes.

That was the common attitude, [GERMAN], you know, among the--

Yes, yes, people thought, oh, it's a storm. And after the storm and the rain, the sun comes out.

Were there many signs in Frankfurt, like Juden [GERMAN]?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. When we were in the evening in the bed, we heard them singing in the street. They were marching. [SPEAKING GERMAN].

I tell you, I put my bed cover over my head. I never forget this feeling. It was horrible. Horrible, it was.

And in our neighborhood, we lived in the [GERMAN] where the [GERMAN] temple was. And just nearly at the corner of the next street, that was the Bockenheimer Landstrasse. And there they had taken already several houses over. And in front, they stood as guards. And I had to pass there every day when I went to buy something in the city also.

So you can imagine my feeling. And I had to pass there going to the city, coming back. I always turned my head to the other side, not to look at them. It was horrible.

Wait a minute. Did you know anybody who was a member of the party, or a member of the Hitlerjugend?

No, no, thanks God, not. Thanks God, I say, not. But my husband encountered, when he was on business tours, as you said, [GERMAN]. although those smaller cities, he always came home and said some people are so scared of the Christian people. They are terribly scared.

And they always say, well, Mr. Speyer, you are right to leave the country. I wished we could leave the country, too. We are afraid to speak, often in front of our children. We don't know if our [AUDIO OUT].

It really opened our eyes. And he said, when we left, he has a friend. He is at the British embassy working in Berlin. And he will write about us and give our address to him.

And in case something happens, we should let him know directly in London. And this friend will bring us to the frontier. And he will receive at the frontier. But luckily, nothing personal happened.

Only one morning, the bell rang in our door very early. And our maid came in. And she said, there's a gentleman outside. I don't understand what he says.

The cousin had sent his secretary to all the relatives in Frankfurt, in case they wanted to have a help with getting some money out or something. And I think that was very, very nice of him.

Yes, I was going to ask you, at this time, was it in effect yet that you could only take 10 reichsmarks?

When my husband and I went to London, he, as a businessman, could officially take 50 marks with him. For me, 10 marks. You can imagine the 60 marks, if you want to be four days in London, be in a hotel, you can't get very far.

So you know what I did? I asked my husband beforehand. I said, do you know which suit you will wear for the trip? I just asked like this. He said probably the gray one.

And we had in our bedroom, behind our night table, a little safe in which we always had English money. And I took some money out, some paper money. I opened in that coat, inside the lining. And between the cotton, I put the money.

I didn't say a word to my husband, not to make him nervous. He wore that suit. And when we were on the boat in the channel between Holland and London, I whispered, my husband to his ear, you still feel pain in your shoulder?

He looked at me, disturbed, said my shoulder? I haven't any pain. I haven't got rheumatism. Then I told him what he has in his shoulder. He said good God. Lucky you didn't tell me.

But it was very good. We had this money. We didn't use it all. And we left some already with a cousin in London.

Now this is on a trip to London. This is not--

On a trip, on an information trip.

And then what happened when you came back to Germany from London?

Well, directly we gave up our apartment as quickly as we could, you see. And yes, I must interrupt.

One day, Elsie had an aunt. And she associated with another lady in a little, private business in the apartment of the other lady. They were selling men's and ladies underwear.

So my husband needed something. I went there one afternoon to buy something. And I had to wait a few moments because some other customers were there.

And on a little table were magazines lying. And I took the top one to look it. And it was from the German [GERMAN]. And I read in there, and I read already letters people had sent from there, in there, from all corners of the world.

And I was excited. And I asked the lady could I borrow this magazine. We don't know anything about it. I would like that my husband sees it. She says it doesn't belong to me. I said, I promise you, honestly, tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock, you'll have it back in your house.

So she gave it to me. My husband took it to bed with us. And he read.

And suddenly he said, there is a place we can go to, Uruguay in South America. I just read it has a wonderful climate that would be also climate for our two mothers, who are suffering of high blood pressure. That's a wonderful place. I look up tomorrow morning, directly, the address of the consul of Uruguay. And I will go there and talk to him.

So it happened my husband went to that consul. [? Meyerhoff ?] was his name. My husband came back very, very pleased.

He said he was formally working with the Jewish bankers via Ellison. Ellison he is so Jewish-friendly. And he said here you can speak as you like. Here you are on Uruguay ground already with me. Don't be afraid to speak openly with me.

And he showed my husband pictures from Montevideo. And he said take them along to your wife. If you think you would like to go there, phone me up. I'll send a Spanish letter directly to the foreign office in Montevideo.

The whole immigration visa costs you 20 marks. After six weeks, we'll have it. And so we went to Montevideo, very easily, no trouble at all.

And this consul was wonderful. When we left, we asked him when we are settled and we want our mothers to come, he will help them, too. He has been wonderful.

That was wonderful.

He even visited me later on in Montevideo.

He visited. You didn't consider going to England?

I considered directly while I was in London, because I knew London. But the cousin said don't do it. You'd better go overseas. You are young people still.

And it might-- we don't know what Hitler will do. He might bomb us or anything, he said already. You'd better go overseas.

My husband had a wonderful opportunity that time by Italian business plan to come over there and join them. But this cousin said, no. Don't do it. Don't do it. I warn you.

And he was right. Everything he told us, he was absolutely right. I often speak about his words, what he said to us, how he warned us.

He was very far-sighted.

Yes, yes. Far-sighted, he was, yes.

Did you consider coming to America directly?

No, my husband never wanted to go to America. He always said, I'm not running after the dollar. It's not my country.

He wanted to go to South America because according to his former business. And he hoped perhaps he could work again something like that. But it didn't work out like this.

They didn't wait for us. You know? There were big firms in maize, in Buenos Aires. My husband knew the firms and he went over. But it wouldn't work out for us.

But my husband had taken German-- how you call it-- to be an agent for German goods, like he took with the agency for Underwood typewriter and for the [INAUDIBLE] clothes, little sewing machine, and all these. But very shortly then Hitler decided no Jews are allowed, in foreign countries, to sell German goods. So this had to be canceled.

But lucky. My mother had money in England, in heritage of a late uncle. And with that money, we could help us.

In Montevideo?

In Montevideo. Yes, the cousin helped us to get the money over so that, as he said, your old mother must not suffer.

That was nice. How did you feel, on the day that you left Germany?

Pleased, not sorry. Because the minute we left in the evening to the station, and when we came with our luggage to the station, some boys were there and said, oh, now they go to Israel. , Goodbye goodbye, we don't want you here.

Then I said to my husband, it's high time for us. The highest moment is here. And so we were not sobbing, you see?

Our idea was only-- my husband had five sisters and a brother-- how do we get them out, too? Our mothers we would know, because in reality, we nearly packed them already before we left, that they could follow us.

What happened to your husband's business?

Well, they wanted to sell it. But there was nobody, none of the employees had the money. So it was dissolved, absolutely dissolved. Yes.

And were you able, at that point, to take any-- besides the money you had in England-- I don't-- were you able to take any--

Not much, not much, no, no. And my husband was, in that way, very straight. And he didn't want to get into no trouble, no trouble at all.

He said let them take what they want. But I want to go out without fear. So we left Germany without any fear. I mean, not directly, yes.

When you came to Montevideo, what were your first impressions? Well. My husband said, isn't it the Paradise you were waiting for? Beautiful city, that we knew already, you see? The consul showed us the photos, and he spoke so much about it.

Only one mistake we made owing to the consul. He said don't take any furniture. It won't keep over there. There are little worms or something, they come into the wood. And it wasn't like that.

So we were the only ones who came without our furniture. And so we wrote back to everybody who asked us for information, if it is not too much to pay for you, do take each nail and bring it here, and sell it here. And you'll get the local money for it, you see. So we could advise them very well. And that we did, of course.

How did you earn a living in Montevideo?

Well, we had the money from his mother, thank God.

I see.

You see?

How long were you there?

13 years about.

Oh, you were there 13 years.

Yes, yes, 13 years. But you see, when we were on the steamer to Montevideo, I was so thankful.

And we had a young nephew of my husband's with us, a boy of 16. And we took him directly to Montevideo. He wanted to become an engineer, but he couldn't go anymore to the technical in Darmstadt as a Jewish boy.

So when we were in London, we tried if he could come to London. But when we were told there, by the director of the Woburn House, that was the Jewish, how shall I say, the welfare society something like this. And this cousin knew this gentleman, so he gave us a letter of introduction.

And he advised us. He said, wherever you go to take that boy directly with you, put him to school. There will be some

schooling somewhere.

And there was a trade school in Montevideo. So we put him directly to the school, a boy of 16, picks up the language like nothing. Six months later, when his mother came, he was speaking Spanish. He was already driving the school truck, and all that. He was--

Established.

--yes, established.

Did you manage to get the other relatives? You mentioned your husband had, what, five or six brothers?

Well, our two mothers came in October. They followed us. As soon as we rented a house, you see, that time they didn't have apartments over there, all houses. And so we rented the house.

And we had no furniture. So we had to get-- I designed always the furniture, very plain, and very simple I wanted everything. And we found some young Russian Jews who had a business in furniture, and they made all the furniture for us. We were always customers from them.

And then, when we were ready, and the war broke out, the civil war in Spain, then my husband said it's high time. The mothers must get out. We don't know how the combination with boats will be later.

So we wrote to consul [PERSONAL NAME] to help our mothers. And he helped them wonderfully. They had second class tickets. And he got a first class cabin for them.

Everything was fine. And we went to the steamer with which they should come back. And we tipped the stewardess. And we told her two old ladies are coming and please have a good look for them when you come back here again and greet you or something. So it was all right.

And the two mothers traveled with one of the sisters of my husband, the mother of this boy we had with us.

Right, OK.

Those three came. And later on, another sister of my husband and her husband came. But two, they all waited too long.

Although constantly we asked them, give up. Come over before it's too late. So unfortunately, three of those young lovely sisters of my husband went to Auschwitz.

Aw.

I never can get over that. Because it wasn't our fault. In fact, the youngest sister was married in south of Germany in Offenburg. And her husband was the director of the savings bank there.

And when we wrote to him to get ready to come over, my husband said you are speaking-- Offenburg is near the French frontier. You are speaking a good French. Try to learn some Spanish. And you can work here as a bookkeeper, something like that.

His answer was please don't mention anything anymore about immigration. You see? And then they went to Auschwitz. First to France, to Gurs, and then the letters came, help, help, help. We tried. We tried in vain.

Too late.

Too late, too late. I never forget this. Because I was so close to that young sister of my husband's. I can't get over it. I'll always imagine her. I will think, good God. How she must have thought of us.

There was no problem in Montevideo as far as getting the visas to send to all the people in Germany?

No, at that time, it was very hard already. When we came, the first two years, it was nothing. But then it was a small city, a small country. Too many came, you see?

And then the foreign office made us stop. And then it became very, very difficult. I mean, only with money you could do something. Yes.

Were the people in Montevideo-- was there a large German-Jewish community in Montevideo?

When we arrived, there were only a few young German men, single men. And my husband and I, we were the first German-Jewish couple to enter the country. So everything fell on the shoulders of my husband.

For instance very shortly after we arrived. We arrived in March. And in April, he had the *yahrzeit* of his father.

And he wanted to say his *Kaddish*. And we went to the HIAS, because he met already the president of the HIAS. And he asked him, where can I say my *Kaddish*. And he said, I'm from [PLACE NAME] town, and I take you to our congregation, [INAUDIBLE].

And my husband went with him that evening. And when my husband came back, he said everything is so different to our German [INAUDIBLE]. And I must see that I get 10 young men together whenever somebody wants to say *Kaddish*.

So my husband spoke to the young people. And they said, well, Mr. Speyer, call us together on a Sunday morning. Let's talk about it. So this my husband did. And he came smiling home. He founded a little congregation.

Yes. And then he was alert. He said, I hope to have next Friday evening the first service already. There is a young man who can read the Torah.

And you have that little new sewing machine with you. And you love sewing. Go and make him a *tallis*. I said, good God, I never made a *tallis*. I thought how did our rabbi look, and I made it with a little velvet collar, the velvet [INAUDIBLE] and the white sleeves. Everything worked out very well.

And so we started. And it was fantastic. I never heard my husband speaking in public. And he had written down a little speech, you know, which he wanted the first Friday evening.

How excited I was. The tears were constantly running down. I always thought about our mothers. Because I wanted to tell-- I forgot.

When we were on the steamer, I said to my husband, listen, we came so easily out of here. When we are there, let us try to help many, many other people come over. And that was the moment with the temple, with the congregation.

Then we did everything to help the people who arrived. We founded a *Kleiderkammer*. I collected dresses and suits and underwear and all that. And my husband founded the welfare organization. So the people who arrived, that they could be counseled directly, and so on.

And the first evening, I have to say this first, the first Friday evening-- no, the next morning, the first Saturday morning, a strange gentleman was in the service. After the service, he came, introduced himself. He was a gentleman from Buenos Aires, one of the elder immigrants there since years went already, a big firm, and all that. And he introduced himself.

And he said he heard that some Jews from Germany had the courage, who hardly was there, to found a congregation. And as his brother founded a congregation, too, he was interested to meet the people. And we had a good friend for

years then in Buenos Aires.

And he said, my brother has still a Torah in his house. I asked him that, because my husband said I don't know what we can do. We don't have a Torah for the holidays. I tried this. And for the first service, my husband said, where do I get the Torah, from where?

So I bought my meat at a kosher butcher in the market there. I went to him. He was a Hungarian Jewish man. I spoke to him about it.

He said, oh, we Hungarians, we are so poor. We can't help you. But go to the [INAUDIBLE]. They are a rich congregation. They could help you.

So I told my husband. My husband went there. My husband, who spoke a good French, he conversed with the rabbi directly there, who received him, Rabbi Dr. Agassi. And he said, wait a few moments. Our board members will come afterwards for the service.

So he introduced my husband. And the people said to him, we believe you. Can you bring us 300 pesos as a deposit? And tomorrow morning, you can have the Torah.

And my husband said, in 15 minutes, I'm back from the bank. He took a taxi. He came back. He gave them the money.

The next morning we had the Torah. They said, you can keep it until the high holidays. So my husband was very happy, very proud.

And as I always said, my husband was not only the president, he was also the shammas of the congregation. He did everything. Fridays, he went there to put the tables and everything together.

And he bought a little-- now how you call it-- to put the Torah in a little--

Oh, well, an ark, but one that you could carry?

Like a little wardrobe.

Oh, yes.

A tiny thing, you see, to put the Torah in. And then I said to my husband, listen. I hope our two old mothers will travel very safely to this country. Let us give something to the temple.

So we ordered a curtain in red velvet, and for the table, for the--

Bimah?

"Pult," or how you call it?

Pulpit.

Pulpit, for the pulpit, a nice cover, you see? And I was happy. Yes.

Did your husband--

Yes, then suddenly, we got a telephone call from New York one evening. I went to the telephone. We were just sitting down there for eating.

New York, it was New York. It was also a gentleman from Sao Paulo, who also wanted to meet my husband before. He

heard about it on his way to Buenos Aires.

And he called us from New York. And he said, Mr Speyer, I'm here with the Joint Distribution Committee. And they would like you go to a steamer. There are people arriving without proper papers and try to help them.

Then my husband said, I just hit the heart on the right spot. He said tell them that we need money here to help the people who are already here.

And then on the one Sunday, two gentlemen came, arrived there, and phoned us up. And they came from the Joint to speak matters over with my husband. And they said to my husband, we would like you to be our trustee.

My husband said you honor me very much. But I don't want to be alone. I will form a committee. I don't want to have the responsibility all by myself.

And so we found a gentleman and ladies who helped them. And so we founded a children's home, which still exists, and a kitchen. And my husband was just preparing the papers for founding a home for old age people. But this was already during several years, you see?

And then my husband died of a heart attack.

In Montevideo?

Just before opening of the kitchen. And everybody was so kind and nice to me. They called the kitchen [INAUDIBLE], yes. And I'm still in touch with them all, you see? Whoever comes from Montevideo brings me up. I meet the people. And here, I meet several ones who were formerly there, too.

That's wonderful.

And I have everything in writing about the founding, all that. Because when it was the 20th or 15th anniversary, they wrote to me, send us something. So I gave them a resume, and I have it lying there. Yes.

Everything is true, what I am telling you. And I have photos of the children's home and all that, yes. Our name is very well-known there.

Did your husband at all-- I guess he became, as you said, the trustee.

Of the Joint there.

Of the Joint. And what was the size of the German refugee--

We started, as my husband said, like Hitler, our old temple - 14. He started the congregation. And afterwards, there were about 4,000--

Wow.

--after they came. First came Frankfurt, then came Breslau, then Berlin. So by and by, the consulates sent them. And that was the reason why suddenly it was stopped.

When you say first came Frankfurt? You mean the people came predominantly from Frankfurt and then from Breslau?

Yes, yes, yes, yes, the first immigration came from Frankfurt. Yes, because four weeks later, then came a Dr. Leopold who still is living there with his family. And so he was also a great help in the beginning as a doctor.

In fact, it was like this. If somebody missed the Shabbat service in the morning, Dr. Leopold quickly went to their home,



anybody ill, anybody ill. So close we were, we were like one family.

And then came a marriage, after three, four months, people from Berlin wanted to marry. And we had no rabbi and nobody. My husband had to make the-- officiate the ceremony

Ceremony?

It was wonderful. And when I left, these people came and brought me the words he said.

That was very nice.

That was very nice of them, yes. So you see, I mean, everything was-- the beginning was very, very nice in Montevideo for us. We wanted to be helpful, and the people appreciated it.

Did your husband at all mind? I mean, he was an active businessman in Germany. Did it bother him at all not to be as active in business in Montevideo?

My husband was very active. He opened an office for this welfare organization. And he had employees.

So he left every morning to work there. And in the afternoon, they had [NON-ENGLISH]. All the immigrants who wanted something could come.

And one day, something very strange happened. It's so funny, I must tell you. My husband came home and laughed and laughed. And said, you know what happened today? A goy came. I saw directly he's a goy.

You know, they heard about it. And at that time, so many were leaving Germany and going to South America. And he went there, too, to the Jewish welfare organization. My husband saw directly who he was.

So my husband said to him, did you ever meet the Sh'ma Israel He said no, this gentleman I never met. So my husband--

[LAUGHTER]

Isn't that funny?

That's cute. What made you decide to leave Montevideo?

The death of my husband. I have no brothers and no sisters, you see? And going on in all these things, institutions, although they all were wonderful, they took me directly into the board and so, and I was the president of the children's home. So I couldn't take the loss of my husband, sitting with all his friends and not seeing my husband.

So suddenly I said to my mother, I can't take it any longer. I have to leave here. I will go to America. We both know the language, and Elsie and the family is there. We won't be lost there. Let's go over there.

So of course, my old mother, who was nearly 85 years old, she says of course I go with you wherever you want to go. But we had to wait five years until we could go here. Because during the war, no steamers were going to South America from New York. All the steamers were going to Europe for the military, for the armies, you know?

And when the first steamer came by the Moore-McCormack McCormick line, then a Christian German in Montevideo, who always was helpful to us, he was introduced to us by one of the main Jewish gentleman in Buenos Aires, by Mr. Hirsch, who found it there. It was then he introduced us to this Mr. [PERSONAL NAME] And he was so helpful.

To him, we always had free our coffee for the children. So when we started the children's home, he had connections with a firm. We got free all the blankets and all that.

And he traveled over to Buenos Aires to help me to get two tickets for my mother and me to go to New York. Yes.

And you mentioned that you were in Montevideo 13 years. So that was what, 19--

It came after 13 years.

--1949?

I left. And we arrived in 1936. And I left for here 1948, 12 and 1/2 years ago.

We arrived here in June. It was one of the hottest day in '48. Yes, since then I'm here. And I'm American.

When you came here, did you move directly to Washington Heights?

No, at first I stayed in a place. I mean, I had a rented room and all that you see. In fact, in between, my relatives here, they had rented for us an apartment. Because the people were away in summer. And when they came back, we had to leave. And I went to-- what is it here-- to the HIAS--

HIAS.

--I went.