

--the types of jobs that you have here?

Until we got married, I always worked here.

As a baby nurse?

Mm-hmm. Baby nurse. Later on, I stayed with some people, their children were no babies anymore. They were bigger children, and I stayed with them because they were awfully nice to me. And it was actually my home. It was my home. I'm still very close with these people I stayed for a few years with.

Uh-huh.

I feel now it was wrong to do it, because I never went into business life et cetera. No, I never had the opportunity I could have had. Probably it was the easy way out.

Well, it was a possibility at that time.

Sure. Sure. I accuse myself of that now. But--

English was at that point no problem anymore, was it, when you came here?

Oh, in Israel we didn't speak English.

You spoke only Hebrew.

Some Hebrew and German. But-- but English, I learned English. I took two courses in Israel before I left. This was actually all my knowledge I had. I started English in school in Germany, but very, very short time. We had French, and maybe I had half a year. I stopped school so young that there was probably nothing left of that.

And my English was pretty poor when I came here, but I could make out. I mean, the people-- I came to-- there was a newborn baby. There was no necessity. But she said, you just go out. She spoke only English to me, though she was from Germany. And as if she wouldn't understand a word of German.

And that was very good. And she told me, you go down with the baby at the drive. You sit down with most-- stay with American ladies. They will teach you. They will correct you. And it helped tremendously. I would say after a year I spoke quite well.

I mean, my accent is still here, but-- but I was able to make out very easily with English. I went to lectures. She was fantastic, this woman. Told me go there and go there, and listen to the radio. Don't turn on the radio in German-- only English, only the news, only this and that. And it was easy.

Well, I would say I had, in this respect, very easy adjustment here what language concerns.

What do you think was the greatest adjustment that you had to make here?

Hmm. You have to feel really at home. It was-- New York's such a big city, and there are lots-- it took-- what language concerned, I said it was an easy adjustment, but otherwise to make friends, which was much easier in Israel. Much, much easier.

Why do you think that was so?

No idea. Probably because we were-- first of all, we were much more open minded than American-- the German Jew or the American Jew is. I think the people here are much more selfish than over there.

Even nowadays, where people have all nice apartments, if it's not six rooms, at least we have three or four rooms. And I hear still, how can we have visitors? We only have-- we always have room here. We always make room, and that's me.

Because whenever I went in Israel places, these people had just as little room as we had at home. But you made room for everybody. We had in Haifa-- my parents, we had a three room apartment, small rooms. But we were very happy. But we had two terraces, which have to be built in Haifa.

If there was not enough room on the floor, in the bedroom, or whatever we call it, both were bedrooms and living rooms sometimes, they slept-- some people slept on the terrace. And you had enough to eat. If you had very little, you stretched it.

You made it.

You stretched it. And this I found here, at the beginning, especially hard to accept that-- not to me. To me, everybody was very nice. But thinking of people, they are selfishness. And this I almost couldn't accept. And therefore I would have liked to go back.

To Israel.

Yes. Yeah, because, honestly, this being together constantly was a journey. I don't know whether the German Jew at that time was not accepted by others, but they stuck together, which I thought was wrong.

Mm-hmm.

You had the experience of Israel.

Yes.

Which was--

Yes, much-- we are-- I mean, just talking about the building where we lived, and it was a small house. Maybe there were 12, 14 apartments. And there were people from all countries, you know. And we were friendly with all of them.

Do you feel yourself today more a part of the American mainstream or more part of the German-Jewish community in New York?

No. Now, I'm probably more of the German-Jewish, at my age now. Yeah. Because I-- I didn't get into the other-- other stream. But I would have liked to, but now I'm married to a man from also German-Jewish background. And I'm hoping my son will have it different. He will. He will, no question about it.

In what sense do you hope your son will have it different?

Because I think it's absolutely ridiculous to live in a land and stick together with your own people only. Yeah. Sure, he has a background, and he said-- very often, he says to me, I'm very glad I have that background, because culturally I have now the European and also the American. He is the only one of his whole group of people who goes to classical concerts, which come from us-- the only child who we took him very early in life to a museum and gave him this of, let's say, what was our German-Jewish background.

And he said this is an advantage. But still, he-- his group of people, his friends, they are from different-- different cultures. Yeah.

I was going to ask you that. In the early years, what did you do with any free time that you had?

Here?

Here.

Oh, in the beginning, I went very often to lectures and to widen my little horizon. Because I really-- I missed out in school so much, and here-- and here you have the opportunity to learn. And I was very often at the Y on 92nd Street, and you know, when I wasn't tied down yet.

And I wasn't bored here. I was not bored. I was at times lonely, but you had things to do.

Did your parents find that difficult in Israel, coming from-- did they participate in the cultural events in Wittlich? You know, whatever culture--

In German?

Yeah.

In Germany, you mean?

Yes.

They did? They did?

Yeah.

Did they find that difficult when they went to Israel? Were they able to participate to the same degree?

No. No, they were not.

Did they find that hard?

Yes, right. Especially language-wise. Yeah. I mean, if they went to a theater and they didn't understand half of it. That's right. My Hebrew was not good either, unfortunately. But I was able to, you know.

Yeah.

But my brother, he was fantastic. He's still-- I would say it's still his best language.

Oh. Well, he was educated in Israel.

Yes, yes.

Right.

Yes.

So different. I asked your husband this, too. Have you ever been back to Germany?

We were back. Four years back, we were in Europe. My husband probably told you that. And he decided immediately not to enter Germany. Absolutely no. And I wasn't 100% sure.

I had a friend who lives directly over the border in Strasbourg, which is an hour from the town where I was born in Germany. And they go every year once to Germany when she has the Yahrzeit for her father.

And she wrote me that time. I wrote her we come to Europe. That was the first time I saw her since 1935, because they left earlier. We were children. We still correspond. Every two or three months, I get a letter from her.

In fact, they're coming soon to the United States to visit. So I said I make sure we will see them. We were in Switzerland. We were in France. And we were in Switzerland, Italy, and my husband wanted very, very much to go to Austria, which the idea just killed me. I don't know why.

And he wanted to go to Innsbruck where he spent vacation when he was a child. And whether you believe it or not, Innsbruck made me physically sick. And there was one thing-- he laughs still now when we talk about it. It was the clothing of the young people. I don't know whether this is Austrian or Bavarian dresses, you know, dirndlkleider.

Yeah.

And the knitted jacket, which in Germany, in my class the children wore it for that celebration. They called it Berchtesgadene [? Jackchen. ?] And when we entered Innsbruck, the first thing I saw that. And then the hotel was just as unpleasant as I had it in my memory that Germany was.

And in the evening, he called me down. He was downstairs. I still was dressing upstairs. Come down. They are dancing down here.

And on the stage, there is-- they were-- to me, they were nothing like the Nazis. You know, these were-- actually, this is an Austrian tradition. It probably has nothing to do with Nazis at all, right? But to me, this was the memories, the clothing of these people, the dancing.

And I nearly threw up. I say, I'm sorry. I cannot stay down here. And he said, das hat Ã¼berhaupt nichts-- this has nothing to do with Nazi Germany. But to me--

But to you.

To me, it was. And I said, let's get out of here. We had anyhow only planned to stay one night and a day. And he had to show me what--

What he remembered.

He was a child. He had memories. He had to see what-- I forgot what it was, but he enjoyed seeing it again. And I went along naturally. But then he said to Germany, no. And then my girlfriend said, listen. I postponed this for until you come. And we will go over just for one day.

And I have two relatives there, buried. And I said, OK, I'm coming along. My feelings were very, very mixed. But I felt, what can happen one day? Maybe I tell them turn immediately over, go home. And then it happened that my girlfriend had a very, very serious operation just a few weeks before we came, and she was unable to travel.

And I had already written to this-- these people who took us out of Germany that time.

This young Gentile man.

Young Gentile man, his wife. He worked for my father. And she worked in our house. So-- so I called them from there, from Strasbourg. And she said, I'm really very hurt if you don't come. And I really felt here there's one person I would like to say thank you to. And I went by myself.

Fred went home by plane. We-- anyhow, we had-- we came different planes because it was our son's wish, we should not go on one plane with a kid there.

So I went over to Germany, and I was two days there. And I was, let's say, two days too much.

Did you go to--

The people were very nice. No question about it. They tried very hard to be. They couldn't have been any nicer.

Did you go to your home?

I couldn't. I was standing in front of this house. And this woman said to me, willst du reingehen? I know the people. They know that you are here. I couldn't. I couldn't.

I just was standing there looking, and my heart started beating. And then we went to our cemetery, which was partly all right and probably thrown down the stones, but they say it was bad weather.

And then I went to the synagogue, which was still in a ruin. They built it up now for a cultural center.

Mm-hmm.

Just the other--

It was in a ruin from Kristallnacht or from--

Yes, Kristallnacht. We were not there anymore, but it still was in ruins. I went by houses all by myself. I said to this woman, let me go by myself.

Yeah.

I want to go through the city the way I remember. First of all, it's not anymore as you remembered it. It's a town, a big, big-- it's not a big city, but it's more city-like than the time when I was there. I went through the streets as I had remembered them.

I mean, I found everything I wanted to see. And there I remembered all these people who I knew, and they were strange faces, and nobody knew me. I didn't even want to see them.

Yeah.

Right? And I came--

Did you-- did you come in contact? Did you have any contact with them at all?

One-- one girl came to see me, one woman. A woman? She was one of the girls in my school. She talked with me.

How did you feel about--

Nothing left anymore. Just nothing. You know, it just left me very cold, and probably her, too. I know she heard that I was there, and she came. And it was probably nice, and--

Was the conversation about what happened ever opened up? Or--

I went with this woman in one store. And he said to me-- this woman said to her, this is former Trude [? Wolf. ?] Remember her? And he said, oh, yeah, sure. So his wife happened to be one of my classmates. And he called her immediately. He came down, and she was very pleasant.

And then I had a very interesting conversation with a man who seemed to be very, very polite. And he asked about some Jewish people who came out alive. And he did not want to speak about the things which happened there. He only said,

you know, we were all in the Hitlerjugend, as you know. It was so much fun. You must understand this.

It was something like an apology.

Yeah.

You must understand this was nothing to do with Jewish people. So it was so nice to march, and to sing, and have campfires, and they're very appealing to young people. But we didn't know what it led to, that it led us into a war where we lost thousands and thousands of our people.

There's no mention of Jews, you know? And I said, and how about the people we lost? Six million. She said, yeah, unfortunately. But he came back again about the war. Hitler brought us, Germany, into that war. And I was so disgusted with that.

He said, why don't-- why don't you come in in the evening? I said, no, I'm leaving tomorrow morning. And that was all I could swallow.

Yeah. How do you feel about the concept of Wiedergutmachung?

My parents accepted it. I have-- I have no part of it because I didn't get anything. I was much too young. I would say it helped my mother. She, on the other hand, always called it also blood money, and-- but she accepted it because especially she did not get it when she was in Israel still.

Very, very small amount. And until it came so far she came to the United States, it helped her. And I have the feeling they owed us something, but I would have had mixed feelings, too, about it.

My husband did not want to have any part of it. And when we got married, I said, don't be stupid. Take it. I will say I was not 100% true to my own feelings, you know, because how can money make good if you lose your parents as you did, right?

But on the other hand, they took everything away they had.

I was just going to say, in your mother's case.

It was her only income here. Yeah.

How did your mother feel about coming here after Israel?

Mother came here after our son was born. I went over to Israel to see my mother and took the baby along. And that made her come. Before she said absolutely. Now she has nothing to do in the United States. She has her friends here.

And it was a big decision on both parts, on my own part of my husband's part and my mother, too, because I didn't know how she can adjust here. She refused that time to live with us. She wants to be on her own. She always was a very strong woman.

And she said she wants that, even with one room only. But she wants to be on her own. We wanted to get a larger apartment and have her live with us. My husband would have gotten with her on very well. I mean, no question about it. She was a very easy-going person.

But she-- no, no. She wanted to be on her own. Maybe on the long run it was better. But it was not easy for her.

No.

She missed her friends so much. And--

How old was when she came here?

Mother died in 1936. She was 81. She was about 69 when she came here. And at this age it's not easy.

No, it's not easy.

She had all her friends, the whole street. She knew everybody. It was a small street where we lived, and she had so many good, good friends. You know, when I was there visiting, I said, dear god, how everybody came, all her friends came to see me. You know, it was fantastic.

And here it took quite a while, but she adjusted. As she had adjusted in Israel, she adjusted fantastically here.

What do you think helped her adjust here the most?

That we were here. That we were here. You know, she was alone there at that time in Israel. My brother didn't live there anymore either, so she-- I felt, I was more worried constantly what is going on over there. Is she well? Is she not well? And I felt it's much better if she's here, that I could look after her. She lived in the building next to ours.

That was-- that made it the-- have you ever told this story to your son?

Oh, yes. He knows. Oh, yes. I mean, I might have not gone into every detail, But yes, he knows more or less my feelings about it.

Is he interested in the story, both your husband's and yours?

Yes, yeah. Oh, yes. Yeah, yeah.

In looking back on the whole set of circumstances, what do you think affected you most of that Nazi period?

A hard question. I think, very hard. The insecurity and fear. I would say that, as I said.

In what way-- I don't know that one is ever able to come to this, but in what way do you think that had a lasting effect?

It was probably so deep, so-- so-- yeah. Especially, the fear for my father. This was something I just couldn't forget. The little, little, very little very little events, you know, that they come back to you if you see a film. I remember we saw a film once.

I was not even in New York. It's something that was made in Czechoslovakia.

Oh, "Shop on Main Street"?

- "Shop on Main Street." You know, there was one time when the old man-- the barber wrapped his things, put them away-- I don't know whether you remember that-- hoping that someday he will be able to unpack it again. It reminds me so much of my father, too.

Yeah.

And I remember we were in that film, was on vacation somewhere. It was not in New York. And people took us. We don't have a car. And on the way back, I started to cry.

And we had such a good time talking. And they'd look, what happened? What? I couldn't say why I cried. My husband knew why I was crying so, but certain things bring back thoughts, the memories. It can be something other people wouldn't even know.

How do you-- speaking of fear and insecurity, how do you feel about people who are in very exposed positions and successful, like Kissinger or any Jews who-- Javits?

I don't have the feeling that most American people have. You see, I was more-- more or less a lefter in Israel. And my galut thinking is gone. We are people like everybody else.

And we make-- we have good Jews and bad Jews. And I'm not afraid because somebody is a Jew and gets a high position. If he is decent, so let's say I think Kissinger is a decent man. I don't agree with everything he said and did.

Yeah.

But I was not afraid that his being a Jew would bring bad luck to us or to Israel. I mean, he was opposed in Israel.

Yeah.

By many people because he is a Jew. Maybe it's better that somebody else is there who is non-Jewish, but I never had this feeling that he as a Jew could bring harm. Do you think so?

No. No.

Good.

But that's--

Yeah, no. No, this is--