

You want to ask me a question?

Yes.

We'll just get started?

Yes. OK, so we're still speaking with Ingrid Kisliuk in Newton, Massachusetts. This is the 30th of March, 1992. And now we're discussing your sister, Herta Scheer-Krygier. Is that correct?

Mm-hmm.

What can you tell us about your sister? Do you know her date of birth and where she was born?

Yes. As I said, she must have been born in 1921. And she was born in Germany. And I believe it was Munich because my parents lived there at the time. I know that my brother was born in Frauenstein, which is in Bavaria as well. But that was three years previous to my sister's birth.

So after that, they lived in Munich. And I understand they had a very successful business in Munich. They had a clothing store, large clothing store in men's furnishing. And they even experienced the putsch, the Hitler putsch in Munich then. And that's when they returned to Vienna because my grandmother lived in Vienna.

Some of my father's family-- some of my father's family-- he had two sisters who lived in Munich. Two at the time. And they went to France and they fared much better than my family who returned to Vienna because my grandparents lived in Vienna. But especially one of my aunts, who lived in Strasbourg with her husband. Survived in Strasbourg, was hidden. And we found her after the war.

The other sister lived in Nice. And as long as nice was not occupied by the Germans and was occupied by the Italians, many of the Jews survived because the Italians protected them. But she was married to someone of Portuguese nationality. Jewish as well, but Portuguese. And those were neutral countries.

When you were for one for a time, they protected these people that were from those countries. So for a while, they were protected in Nice. And as I say, the Italians were there. But as soon as the Italians moved out and the Germans moved in, the Jewish population was decimated. They were deported. And so was she.

But my aunt who lived in Strasbourg-- and, of course, that was occupied by the Germans. But they moved into the mountains and they hid in the mountains. And that's the way they survived.

Well, can we get back to your sister?

Yes, my sister.

What was she like? What did she like to do? And did you do any special activities with her or?

Well, she was-- she liked the outdoors. She did a lot of hiking. She liked to sing. She would have been-- she would have liked to be a school teacher had she been able to continue. Because her grades were excellent. She had very good grades in school. And she would have loved to become a school teacher.

Did she have any topics that she liked specifically, do you know?

I just know that she liked little children. But my parents always said she wanted to become a school teacher. So I guess she would have become an elementary school teacher. That's what she--. And there was a lot of prestige of that in that profession at the time. Not like nowadays. To be in the teaching profession is a very-- how would I say? --a very self-sacrificing sort of goal. So anyway.

And then, since she couldn't do that and since we had to flee, she took up sewing. And she was very good in dress making. And that's what she did since she couldn't do anything else. She was very good with her hands. And she was a very, very sweet person. And very attached to her parents. And especially to my father-- very, very much attached. And protective of them.

It's funny because most of us were sort of protective of our parents even though our parents weren't that old. I mean, but we still felt we were protective of them. And she was very generous when she gave of herself. A very generous person and had many friends and was very loved by everybody. And with me, she was she was especially very close to me.

Because being so much younger, my mother kind of very often had her take care of me and talk to me, for instance, when I had trouble in school. When my teacher wouldn't understand my particular problems because I did have this handicap of knowing the language right away.

And she would be the one to come to school. And she'd get very upset when the teacher wouldn't understand. I remember her being very emotional about that. But my mother would give her this job. Besides, she spoke French, whereas my mother didn't.

So and as I said, when I was in the theater, she would be my chaperone. She would come with me and she would take care of me. And we would stay-- when we went to Antwerp, we would stay in families' home. Families would open their homes to us and we would stay with them. And she would take care of me and take me to rehearsals, et cetera and so on.

So it was a terrible, terrible blow. And often, even after she was married at age 19, she would have me over and I would stay with her. And especially after her husband left, I would stay with her.

When was her husband?

He left in '42. But I guess she was caught in '42 as well, but that must have been in the spring.

But he was taken away, right?

But he went. I mean, he wasn't rounded up like the rest of them were. Just like my cousin, he received the summons. And it was hand-delivered by someone from this Jewish agency. And he just presented himself to this place where they were all going to get together. And from there, they were shipped off. And they went on their own until--

Well, do you think he might have been thinking that he was protecting his family or something?

I think he knew-- well, yes, of course. That was part of it. That was the trickery. And he thought that if he didn't go something worse will happen to him. Then he would be thrown in jail or be-- because he was supposed to go. And so he didn't go and hide like he should have done and like my cousin should have done. He just went. He just went, as did my cousin, so.

And it wasn't until later that people started to hide and not go.

Right.

And always be careful that nobody was following you. Because you might be followed by someone who would find out where you lived and then be denounced. So because a lot of people were denounced.

Oh, definitely. Is there anything else about your sister? Now, we do have the other events that you've already discussed in the other interview. Is there anything else you'd like to add about her? About her as a person, or anything that happened to her that of?

She was she was in the youth group, a Zionist youth group.

Oh, which one?

It was called Gordonia. Gordonia. And that was when she was a young teenager in Austria. And there was talk about going to Israel. My mother sort of thought that they should go, but my father didn't want to. But that was way before, you know. And my brother belonged to that same youth group too, but not so much for ideological reasons. It's just because it was a social place. It was where you met girls and that sort of thing. And I know that they had moshavas in the summertime. They would pretend that they were in a moshav.

And we would go-- my mother and I would meet them there sometimes. We would go and visit. And it was in another place where I was kind of a star because I could sing. I was very small, and I could sing and dance. And they would spoil me that way. But that was the youth group. And that's where I learned how to dance the hora at age five I guess, or so. Yeah. And because they danced the hora and they sang. And they sang Hebrew and they sang in German Zionist songs. And I never forgot those, and the hora and that sort of thing.

And there are pictures-- there pictures of her. I have a little album-- I couldn't put my hands on them --of her in the moshav. But it wasn't a moshav. It was called moshava. So they pretended that this summer-- you know, for three weeks or so they pretended to be in a moshav. And they were going to work the way people would work in Israel. They worked the soil and have-- it was like, well, maybe like a kibbutz. But they called it moshava. So that's another thing she was--

That's great. That's important.

Yeah.

OK.

So as you see, even though it wasn't-- my family wasn't very, very pious, they still had a very strong Jewish identity. And they were believers. It's not that they were atheists. It was just too difficult to observe the laws. And besides, I don't really think that they really believed in them. Otherwise, they would have, like many people did. They would have struggled to observe all the laws.

OK, well, thank you. Can we move on and talk a little bit about your aunt?

Yeah.

Would you like to tell her name and?

Yes. Well, her name was Josephine Dermer and they called her Pepi. And she was widowed. And she lived with my grandfather because she was widowed.

Do you know approximately when she was widowed?

Before I was born. So I think--

In the '20s?

She may have been married two years or so, or maybe four years. And her boy was two when her husband died, I believe of a heart attack. And she apparently had been very, very beautiful when she was young and turned down many proposal of marriages. Nobody was good enough for her. And then, apparently, did not marry someone that was deserving of her because she had waited too long. She was probably 30 when she got married. At that time, that was a terrible old maid. To get married at 30, I mean, forget it.

But anyway, she married. And she married this man. And she was widowed and left without any resources. And so she lived with my grandfather. And my grandfather lived with her. I mean, they lived in the same apartment.

In Vienna.

In Vienna.

And what did your grandparents do?

Well, my grandfather was in business. He traded in furs. And my grandmother, who had died before I was born, was a housewife, was a homemaker. She had had five children and was busy in the home. And so my aunt lived with my grandfather, or vice versa. I'm not quite sure how it was. But it was fine, because she was a widow and that was apparently the thing to do.

And so when we moved from our first apartment into our second apartment in Vienna after having sold all our furniture, she moved in with us because my grandfather had died. And she moved with us. And my mother kind of took her under her wing. And she provided the funds for her to escape at the same time as we did. In other words, she paid the smuggler who smuggled us over the border, et cetera and so on.

And then in Brussels, she and her son lived on another street but not terribly far. But we would see them very often. She would come by. And then when my cousin left, she was, of course, devastated by this. And she kind of blamed my parents for not having talked him out of it or for not having hidden him somewhere or something like that.

So then there was this kind of chill between them. Which was unfortunate because nobody knew what to do. And he wanted to go, you know? And she couldn't talk him out of it. And there were no other resources because so many people went. I remember young boys coming by to say goodbye to my parents because they were leaving. They had known them, and they just said goodbye. And they left.

So then during that roundup, that raid, where in that neighborhood they went from house to house, she was caught. And the--

Wait, what month and the year was this?

That must have been late fall, you know? Late fall, 1942. That was in November 1942, something like that. And I know that the landlady of her building told us that when she went down the stairs, when the Gestapo brought her down, she tried giving her watch and her ring, the golden watch and her ring, by shaking hands with her. But they noticed it and they took it. And that's one thing that we found out. Because that's where she lived. So that was my aunt.

What can you remember about her as a person?

Um, let's see.

Had she ever worked in Vienna?

I don't think so. Because, you know, women didn't do that.

Even though she was widowed and?

No, no. They were-- you know, men were supposed to be the providers. Oh, wait a minute. Wait a minute. That's interesting. Yes! My father was a representative at one point for some company. Oh, they were selling Singer sewing machines. And during the summer he would try to go to various small towns in Austria and contact people and try to sell sewing machines.

And the summer that I was at the camp of my Jewish school, my mother and my aunt went along with my father to sell

sewing machines. And apparently, they were good talkers. And they would talk them into buying Singer sewing machines. So and they were very anxious to do that. They thrived doing that. They just loved working. And especially earning some money, that was really-- they would have loved to do that.

But there wasn't-- there just wasn't enough opportunity for them. Since they didn't have a chance to really become professionals because, well, women just didn't become professionals at that time. But they did. She did. She went along. And I remember when I came out of my camp, my summer camp, they took me and my cousins along on their various journeys. And they left in the morning and we were left at this inn to fend for ourselves very often.

My cousin was five years older. But we stayed in the gardens. And it was very strange that they should have done that, but they did. I was only six or seven at the time. So we stayed in the garden and then they would come back late afternoon. And they did that for two weeks, I remember. So that's the-- they did work. They may have done more of that.

Oh! Now, wait a minute. My mother-- yes, of course. When my father had his business, his very large, big store in Munich, she worked in the store. Yes, she did. She worked in the store.

Right. Well, anything else about your aunt's personality that-- was she funny or bubbly or not? [LAUGHS] Serious?

Well, I think she was rather serious. She, too, liked to sing. They all sang. The sister sang, except for the very oldest, Regine. Her voice wasn't very good. But all the others sang. And I don't remember her being bubbly. She tried, but since she was a widow, she was morose at times. And she was very attached to her son. I mean, that son, you know? And he really needed the father. He was wild and uncontrollable. They lived on the first floor and he would never walk out the door. He would always jump out the window.

Wow.

And I know that he-- and he would always climb on trees and then fall off the trees. And he once fell on his nose and broke his nose. I remember that. But she had trouble controlling him. He was very wild. No, he was a nice boy, but was wild.

Do you want to move straight on and talk about him a little bit?

Yeah, I think so. The two of us didn't get along very well because, as I say, he was five years older. And he was wild and he'd bully me. And so we didn't get along very well. And I was very often left in his company. And I didn't like that one bit. And I remember one evening, the adults went out. And my grandfather was supposed to babysit. My grandfather always went to sleep.

And we lived on this very busy street. And we had this very, very big lampshade made out of straw with silk on top. [LAUGHS] And we lived on the third, fourth floor. Because the first floor is the rez-de-chaussée. And the second floor is the first floor, you know, in Europe.

Anyway, so we lived on the European third floor but the American fourth floor, and looking over this very busy street. And he said, you know, you could really use this lampshade as a parachute and jump out the window. And luckily I wasn't very courageous and I insisted that he show me first how to jump off with this parachute out the window.

Do you know what year this was?

It was probably right before the Anschluss. Right before. Maybe 1937. So I was seven and he was 12.

Do you know he went to school or anything?

He went to school.

In a Jewish school or?

No, I don't think so. I don't think so. The school that I went to had just opened up. It was, you know-- and this is why. I think my first grade was the first first grade in that school. Maybe one previous year. But it was very new. He went to the regular school.

And so instead of that, he would he get up on these high, high wardrobes that we used to have. You know, the furniture was very big and solid. And there were these big, big wardrobes. And he'd get up on the top of the wardrobe and jump onto some couch with the lampshade over his head. He'd do that. But as I said, he was used to jumping out the window. But when he jumped out the window, it was from the first floor. But not from the fourth.

That was the last time my grandfather babysat for us. My mother wouldn't trust him anymore after that. So that's one thing. And then later on-- and he would tease me, you know? There was this thing between boys and girls. Because at the time, there were still girl schools and boy schools. And boys would always tease girls. So we didn't mingle very much that way. But with him being five years older, he was, of course, so much older at the time.

What about when you got to Brussels? Do you know what he did at that point?

Yes. He tried to work in leather shops. He tried to do with belts and making pocket books and things like that. And he worked in that when he was 15 and 16. He went to school too. But then he abandoned that because there just wasn't-- he just had to earn some money. He just had to earn some money. So that's what he did.

But I assume all of his work was illegal.

It wasn't illegal, yes.

So it was all under the table.

It was all under the table.

Yeah.

It was all illegal, all illegal. Yes, of course. Because then you had to get a work permit. And eventually, I guess, my father did get a work permit. But that had to be worked through. Actually, the Belgians were very decent compared to many of the other European countries. And I always thought that they had been decent. I never really, inquired very, very deeply.

And at the meeting of the hidden children last May in '91, May '91, I found that very decent they had been, really. And a lot of people hid. And I found that many, many, many details about their very good behavior, really, in comparison to many other countries, Western European countries. Holland-- the Belgians behaved better than the Dutch.

And they certainly behaved better than the French. Although, there was never this conspiracy. There was never a Vichy in Brussels. Although, there were collaborators. And we had that Rexist, which was that the Belgian Nazi group. But most people were really quite decent. And the underground was very strong. And there wasn't this-- I don't think there was in the underground in Belgium, this rivalry between the communists and the non-communists that you had in France. You had that in the underground in France.

So my cousin, you know, he was a young boy and don't always get along that well with your little cousin. And, as I said, he would bully me. Because he had, as I said, he was under-disciplined.

But you mentioned in the other interview that you remember he had a bar mitzvah.

Yeah, he did.

Was that in Belgium?

No.

That was--

Still in Vienna.

That was still in Vienna. That must have been right before, right before the Anschluss. Because he was 12.

Right.

I guess boys must be 13.

13, yeah.

Well, no. If it was his Hebrew birthday, his Hebrew birthday could have been at a different point.

Yeah.

That's likely.

Yeah, that's right. He must have been 13.

Well, he could have been--

I mean, whatever. He could be.

He could be 12 in--

I see, yeah. No, I remember that. And I remember a large synagogue, a very large synagogue. And I remember it was his bar mitzvah. It's very vague, but I know that it was his bar mitzvah.

Well, OK. Is there anything else at all that you'd like to add?

Let's see, my aunt-- I don't think so. I think-- you know, you can't really-- as you speak like this, it's very difficult to really describe your feelings at the time. I find that's why it's better to put it in writing. Because with the words that you choose and the way you construct your sentences give a much better image, sort of psychological image of your state of mind which doesn't come out when you speak. I mean, it does, but not to that--

I think it depends on the individual, I would say.

Perhaps, perhaps.

well, meanwhile, I want to thank you so much. You have taken your whole morning here.

That's quite all right.

And thank you very much.

My pleasure. Thank you.