

INTERVIEW WITH TRUDE GRUNBAUM LUDWIG

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Could you please start by telling us your name when you were first born?

My name when I was first born was Gertrud Grunbaum and I was born in Vienna on March 26, 1917.

And your parents?

My parents was - my father's name was Otto Grunbaum and my mothers name was Melanie geboren Wuhrer [14]

Also born in Vienna?

My mother was born in Yugoslavia and my father was born in Vienna. Not true? Now Romania, then it was Yugoslavia.

Well it was still the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Right.

Yes.

What did your father do when you lived in Vienna?

My father had a fur store. He was a furrier and dresses.

And your mother?

My mother was just at home.

Housewife.

Housewife, yes.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

I had a younger brother who was born on August 18, 1918.

Also Vienna?

Also Vienna.

And his name?

Was Otto, Otto Karl Grunbaum.

Which religion did your family?

My father was Jewish, my mother was Catholic and we were protestants.

You were Protestants. Do you mean you were raised as Protestants?

As protestants, yeah, we were raised as Protestants.

Any particular church? The Evangelical or Lutheran or..

Lutheran

Any particular reason for this combination?

I don't really know. I think my father didn't want to become a Catholic and my mother did not become Jewish so the middle was Protestant - I expect you had a lot of people like this in Vienna.

In Vienna

Yeah

And they liked each other enough to marry one another even though they were Catholic and Jewish?

Yes

Okay so you both were born baptized as Protestants then?

Yes

Was it a religious family

No Everybody another religion. We were not very religious.

What languages were spoken in the home?

German

Just German?

Yes

How about schooling? What kind of schools did you attend?

Elementary school and Gymnasium

Public?

Public schools, yes.

Public schools in Vienna?

In Vienna.

How about your parents' politics? For example, you were born towards the end of World War I. Your brother was born in the last year of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Must have been period of tremendous turmoil and change. Was your father a Republican or was he still Kaisertreu as they used to say.

I really don't know. We didn't talk very much about politics at home.

Did he serve in the army?

Yes. He served in the army in World War I.

So one way or another he had to serve the empire?

Oh yeah

You can't tell whether or not he was glad or sad that the old empire had come to an end?

I think they were more or less sad.

Sad, yeah

How about the politics in the 1920s and 1930s during the republic.

Do you recall any political parties that your father..?

No my father was in no political party.

Apolitical

Yeah and we didn't talk much about politics at home because at this time you didn't talk politics to your children - at least in our home we didn't.

Could you recall when the Nazis were first mentioned if at all?

Oh yes I remember that very well because it was when they killed Dolffus This was I think 1934.

Dolffus being the Chancellor of Austria?

Chancellor of Austria at the time and the Nazis killed him.

That made a big impression on you?

Yes it made a very big impression and then when I started working in the theater we had some people from Germany. Of course Jewish people because the others wouldn't come and they were told a lot of terrible stories and we were very much impressed at least I was very much impressed. Most of our friends did not believe it could happen in Austria.

So you knew of Jews who had left Germany to come to Austria

Yes.

They told you stories of...?

Some of them were in camps but at this time it was not extermination camps yet I think but they told us stories and I was very impressed and I know a lot of people - it could never happen in Austria.

Do you remember any stories in particular when you were listening to these refugees in Austria?

Yes we had a young actor whose father was a very famous actor as a matter of fact in Germany and he told us that he was in a camp and

that they treated him very badly but I mean they did not talk too much about it.

And they settled in Austria?

They settled in Austria or tried to settle in Austria.

Did your family feel safe in Austria even after 1934?

Yes actually yes.

Was there any experience with antisemitism in Vienna itself?

Oh yes.

By Austrians?

Oh yes, a lot, a lot of antisemitism.

Do you recall any incidents either in the theater or in public or in school?

I went to school with a daughter of Seyss-Inquart. She was sitting next to me and she was

Do you recall her first name?

Oh yes Inge, Inge Seyss-Inquart and she would brush her sleeves when she touched us. There were a lot of Jewish girls in the class. Half of the class was Jewish.

So she had to wipe her blouse of what - Jewish breath or Jewish germs?

Jewish germs yes I guess so.

So they knew you were Jewish or part Jewish in this class?

Oh yes with the name of Grunbaum there was no doubt.

There was no doubt. How about your father did he have any experiences with antisemitism? You mentioned that he was an army war veteran?

Well when he was in the army he never told anything about it to us, no.

How about as a furrier?

Well he never talked about it. He certainly had some experience because there was a lot of antisemitism in Austria at the time.

Do you recall what neighborhood you lived in Vienna? Was it a mixed neighborhood or...?

Mixed - but in the neighborhood I really cannot say that I had antisemitism, we felt it in school.

You had friends who were Protestant, Catholic and Jewish?

Yes but mainly Jewish.

Mainly Jewish friends - of your own age - both genders or just girls?

At this time just girls.

How about your brother did he have any - do you recall any experiences?

Not before Hitler came not that he talked about.

You mentioned that you were in the theater. Did you have dreams as you grew up of becoming an actress?

Oh sure - we went to the Vienna Conservatory when we were children already, my brother and I, both of us and we took up - this was called Kinderconservatory - conservatory for children. I was seven and my brother was six when we entered and you know we had all kinds of music lessons - piano, singing, gymnastic

So you were musicians?

No I was not a musician. I go for dancing. My brother was studying piano and violin.

So at age seven already you were dancing and acting?

Oh yeah

And your brother was beginning studies in music?

Yeah he studied piano and he gave his first concert when he was fourteen.

Do you recall what he played?

Yes I recall he played with - there was a very famous opera singer - her name was Elizabeth Schumann and when she gave a concert she always had in between a young musician so she could rest. My brother played with her the first time when he was fourteen and then every concert she gave he played.

In Vienna?

In Vienna, yeah.

And what was your brother's great dream as he grew up? This is your younger brother..

He wanted to be a pianist and a conductor.

in Austria - In Vienna? Salzburg?

Well at this time, yeah, in Vienna, Sure.

That was the preference?

Oh sure Vienna was always for music.

There was no talk of leaving Austria - of going..

No not when we were children.

Now do things become better or worse after the Dolfuss incident?

It became worse. First of all there was a lot of unemployment. It was very hard to find a job and the antisemitism was pretty bad.

Even before Hitler came.

Yeah

Did you follow the career of Inge Seyss-Inquart?

No

Did you know who her father was at that time?

Well yeah, we know something that he was a Nazi but you know how old was I, fifteen or so. We were not so interested in this.

You were more interested in art?

Yes much more.

Do you recall any classmates who were Nazis?

Oh yes we had quite a few. I couldn't tell you the name now because this is too long ago but we had quite a few.

They cause any problems in the class - did they try to...?

Well they separated.

They just tried to stay away. Did they attack any students?

No.

How about the teachers. Did you find them to be sympathetic or loyal to the republic?

Well we had a lot of Jewish teachers in this school and a few who were not Jewish and were more or less antisemitic. We had a few of them too but it was not too bad.

You could live with that?

We could live with it, yeah.

Do you remember where you were when the Nazis finally took over Austria?

I was in Italy.

You were in Italy. How did you get to Italy? How could a nice little Austrian girl go to Italy?

Go to Italy? It started out that I was looking for an engagement in the theater and I had a contract to teach in Bodenbach which is in the Sudetenland and ...

Czechoslovakia then?

Sudetenland, yeah but they were already thinking - German. And you had to submit all your papers, of course. And I had a stage name. My stage name was Hermann, Trude Hermann. Of course I had to submit my real name and with Grunbaum right away they wouldn't give me the contract.

This is in Sudetenland?

Yes and the same happened to me in Linz. I had a contract there too and they wouldn't take me when they found out that I was not an aryan..

This was before Hitler's time?

This was in 1937.

That's interesting because your Jewish name - even though you were a protestant ...

Yes this didn't cut any ice with them.

Linz and then the Sudetenland. Do you remember any of the towns in the Sudetenland?

Tetschen-Bodenbach [Podmokly] it was called. Tetschen-Bodenbach. And then my agent , you know you had to have an agent, he suggested that I go to Italy because he said I will not get any contract in a German speaking country.

What did your parents think of your career in the theater and then going to Italy of all places?

Well, I was twenty then and could do whatever..

So you had relatively liberal parents?

Yes, and I went to Italy and I was in Milano when the anschluss came and my mother wrote me immediately please don't come back because our contract in Italy was already not expired but had one more month I think to go and she said try to stay in Italy?

And you recall when you went to Italy?

Yes in September 1937.

And you had what a one year, six months..?

No we had a three months contract and then we were another three months so we were in Italy in March when the anschluss happened - in Milano.

And you obviously did not experience employment discrimination?

Not in Italy, no.

Your mother said, "Don't come back."

"Don't come back, be glad you are in Italy."

Were you glad?

Yes, very much.

So you remained in Milan?

I remained in Milano. We had to go to vote. The German embassy came to the theater, took all our passports away because we were thirty girls from Vienna.

You had Austrian passports?

Austrian passports, yeah, and they told us we had to go to the consulate and when we were there they said we had to go to vote on the torpedo boat "Wolf" which was in Genoa. We would be brought

there from the German Embassy.

So the German consulate in Genoa..

No it was a German boat and on this you voted because a boat is territory, right?

Okay so a German boat in Genoa was going to be your voting booth?

Yes.

And they gave you of course free transportation?

Free transportation. And I didn't want to go but there was a very intelligent, I don't know what he was, attache or something, who called me in his office and said go and vote because you won't stop Hitler but he could stop you.

This is a German attache at the consulate in Milan?

In Milan, yeah.

So he advised you to vote in the plebiscite approving...

He said vote what you want but go to vote.

And you voted?

I voted, yes.

Do you want to tell us how you voted?

Oh you had to say yes because you had to give the thing, the slip you voted on, you had to give in an envelope and were not allowed to close the envelope. You had to leave it open and then you handed it to some of the soldiers who were standing there and he took your passport, looked at your passport - so - what chance did you have to say no?

Right and besides they would have known who you were and it would have defeated the purpose.

Immediately, yeah.

And were they surprised in any way that you were voting?

Yes.

They could tell you had a Jewish name.

Yes. One soldier said to me I think you are on the wrong boat. We don't go to Palestine.

Sense of humor. This is a Nazi, possibly?

Possibly not. Because otherwise he would probably not let me vote.

And the real reason why you voted?

Because this gentleman told me it would be better for me if I do it. I alone could not stop Hitler but he could stop me and he would have.

And of course your real sentiment was..

Not very friendly, no.

What were the rest of your family doing? They were still in Vienna?

My father was in Switzerland on business and he stayed there and did not come back. My mother and my brother were in Vienna. My brother tried to get out of the country which wasn't easy because you needed an exit visa in order to get out but he had applied for an international music - piano - competition in Brussel and with this he got the exit visa and he went to Brussels. They didn't let him play because for them he was a German. And he tried to go to France and he couldn't get a visa to France either so I wrote him a letter from Italy telling him that I was very sick and he should immediately come and visit me and he went to the Italian consulate and they gave him a visa to enter Italy and so he got a transit visa from France and got off the train.

Did he discover that you were sick or did he discover that you made up the story?

Oh he knew I made up the story. He knew I wasn't sick. But he had

the transit visa in France and he got off the train and went to Paris and my father was in Paris at this time and so he got always I think a three weeks or six weeks visa, I don't remember, and always to apply again and again.

So basically you faked an illness in order to justify this transit visa through France ..

And the Italians gave him the visa.

Which then allowed him to go France?

To get the transit visa from France.

And your mother meanwhile..?

My mother was in Prague in the meantime.

She left Vienna?

She left Vienna for good, yes.

What had happened to your brother's musical career if you back up just a little bit?

Well he started in Paris with Claude Arrau

If we could go further back. He had begun at age fourteen in Vienna and then in 1938 the Nazis come. At that point where was his career?

He was still a student in the Conservatory conducting classes and he gave concerts in Czechoslovakia and gave a concert in Karlsbat [Karlovy Vary]. He gave several concerts in Vienna and then he went to France and he studied. There he never worked. He studied there with Claude Arrau. He tried to go to the United States but he didn't have a sponsor so my mother wrote a letter to a very famous violinist who my brother knew, Fritz Kreisler and Fritz Kreisler went with him to the consulate and got him a student visa for America and he came here as a student.

Do you recall when?

Yes in '39.

In '39. Before the war?

I think in August '39.

And you were still in Italy?

I was in Italy. I didn't have a sponsor.

Still in Milan?

No. In Rome, Milan, - we traveled. In Italy you traveled.

So you had work?

I had work. I always had work.

How about your passport? After the Germans took over Austria, you voted. Were you still with an Austrian passport or did you...?

No, the Austrian passport was good till the end of '38. I had an Austrian passport as long as possible.

When you had to renew your passport?

I renewed my passport. I wrote to one of my aunts in Vienna. Please send me an aryanmacher [262] Do you know what that is?

Proof of aryan.

This is very hard when you have a Jewish father. So she sent me all the documents of my mother and my maternal grandparents and my mother's certificate of matrimony. This was the funniest thing that I got a German passport without a J. I'll never know because in this said that my father was the son of Ivor Grunbaum and Zara[270] geboren Cohen. This is really not real.

So it was falsified?

No, no I got it

Through anybody's help? Was it a mistake or was it just that you

had a nice guy?

A nice guy

A nice guy, but he certainly wasn't Jewish. This was the German consulate?

It was the German consulate.

In Milan.

In Milan, no, in Rome. He gave it to me and once you had a German passport, you were okay. The Italians didn't ask any questions.

So you had a non-Jewish passport even though your name is still Jewish?

Yeah

Were there any changes when the war breaks out?. Your brother is in the United States?

My mother was in France and my father, too. My father was in Paris and my mother was in Lyons with her second husband.

Oh, so your parents had divorced. Were they divorced before the anschluss?

Before, much before that.

Before you even went to Italy?

Yes, I was seventeen when my parents divorced so that must have been '34.

The year Dolffus...

The Dolffus year, yes.

But it had nothing to do with Dolffus?

No it had nothing to do with Dolffus?

Nothing to do with being Jewish or Protestant or Catholic?

No, in fact her second husband was Jewish too.

So your mother was pro- Jewish.

Was pro-Jewish, yeah.

Did your father remarry?

No but my mother came with her second husband. They went from Prague ... He was Czechoslovakian nationality, lived always in Vienna.

Yelenek [293] is the

Yelenek, yeah. He and his brother were born in Russia, by coincidence because their father worked there for several years and when they applied for a visa to the United States - they came on the Russian quota which was wide open - and got immediately a visa because they thought they were coming on the Czechoslovakian quota which was waiting list for years. But they didn't know that in American law your nationality where you were born and not what passport you have so these two were born in Odessa and my mother was married to a Russian. They got immediately the visa and they came via Casablanca because they could not go through France anymore and could not go to Spain. Spain wouldn't let them in so they had to go Casablanca and from Casablanca to Portugal and from Portugal they went to Cuba and from Cuba they went to the United States.

Do you recall when this was?

This must have been '40, no '41, no '40.

Had the Germans gone into Paris yet? ..in the Vichy?

No, I think before that.

But after the beginning of the war?

No they were in Paris already, the Germans when my mother left. My brother was ...

In the United States

In '39, he came in '39

So it would have been after June of 1940

I think so, yes. I don't quite recall.

Was it winter?

I don't recall that.

Well, maybe we'll remember later. But anyway by 1941 they were here.

They were here, yeah. I think they came 1940, the end of 1940. It was certainly not '41 because I think they came in the fall of 1940.

That would make sense. After the Germans had occupied France but still the freedom of Vichy because in Vichy you could go to Casablanca.

Yes. It certainly was 1940 because '41 was already Pearl Harbor and they were here already in Pearl Harbor.

Meanwhile you're still in Italy.

I was still in Italy.

And Italy is in the war in 1940.

It was in the war. That's why I don't recall. We could not correspond too well then. The mail took very long. I mean it was still possible because America was not in the war. But a letter took months.

As a German passport holder you were an ally of Fascist Italy in 1940.

Yes, but the Fascists didn't bother you.

Did you get even better treatment?

No. We always got good treatment.

How about the anti-Jewish laws that Mussolini introduced. Did they have any affect on you?

No

Were there any examples of anti-semitism?

No I'd never seen anti-semitism in Italy. No, never.

Were you working - in Rome mainly?

I was working - no, we traveled around because in Italy you don't work in a theater. You work in a company and the company travels around?

And who were you working with? Were they mixed, Italians, foreigners?

All Italian.

So you were the only Austrian?

Oh, we were a couple of girls.

Were there others who were Jewish besides you?

Oh yeah.

Italians as well as Austrians?

Well, Italians I cannot tell. We never talked about religion. That was never brought up, never.

It was all acting, art.

Italians never ask you any questions. We had to go to the police every six months to renew the working permit. They never ask any questions.

Do you recall some of the places where you toured? Did you perform say for troops?

We did perform for hospitals, for veterans' hospitals.

Italian veteran hospitals

Italian, yeah. Not for the Germans, never.

You didn't perform for Germans. After all the German troops...

No, we never performed for German troops, no.

By this time you have very little contacts with your parents, your father?

Well, as soon as the war started in Austria they had no contact with anyone outside because you could not write to America. I didn't know where my father was in France because he left Paris - he came to Nizza [Nice] and then he was in hiding for the rest of the war.

But you knew your family was - your mother and your brother - were safe?

I know that they were in America.

So your father was the only member of your family that you worried about?

Yes I was because France was occupied by the Germans.

How did you feel about Italy being on the same side as Hitler?

Well we always had the feeling that the Italians didn't like it too much - being on the side - but they had very little choice because the German troops were already in Brenner and Mussolini was not too happy either I think.

Do you remember any specific instances of Italian actor or actresses voicing their opinions against Germany or against Mussolini?

No. You did not voice against Mussolini too openly but we never talked about politics really. We were glad we could stay there and we worked - politics was never a big thing with us.

Politics came to you now. Suddenly in 1943 Italy surrendered and the Germans occupy all of Italy. Do you remember any changes in your life then?

Yes. Of course, first of all the theaters were closed. When the Americans landed I think in Sicily it was and in Naples the Germans destroyed all their papers in the consulate so they did not know who was in Italy of German descendants or aryan or Jewish or nothing. They knew nothing. They only could go to the police stations, to the Questura, and there they found out where German people were living. But the Italians would not give the information about religion, never did. To them everybody was an aryan.

The Germans knew that you were where?

In Rome and we were called in the German consulate and had the choice to return to the Reich or work as interpreters. Of course we worked as interpreters because nobody wanted to return to the Reich.

So you worked as an interpreter for the Germans?

For three, four months and there were a lot of German girls who spoke Italian and after the war I remember the UNRRA came and we could get some food packages from the UNRRA and all the interpreters I met there were Jews who had worked for the Germans just like we, Mimi and I and several others.

Did you change your name at any time?

No because for the German Grunbaum is not a Jewish name. We had an officer who was called Grunbaum and he certainly was not a Jew. For the Austrians this was a Jewish name.

That's an interesting difference.

Oh yes, Rosenbach in Austria was Jewish.

And one of the leading Nazis was a Rosenbach.

So Grunbaum was a German Jewish name in Austria.

In Austria it was Jewish.

In Germany it was a non-Jewish name.

Both. There were Jews who were called Grunbaum but not necessarily.

And did you look Jewish or aryan?

I don't know. Apparently aryan enough because nobody ever asked me anything.

What color eyes did you have?

I have blue eyes.

You still do, blue eyes and your hair was....?

Red at the time. But anyway the Italians didn't give out any information. They saved a lot of people, I must say.

Do you know of people who were saved.

Oh yes, at least all of them who worked with me there. I know of a lot of people who were in Italy and everybody will tell you the same. The Italians did not give out information to the Germans.

Now in Rome as you know in late 1943 there were some deportations. The Germans attempted to deport Italian Jews to Auschwitz. Did you witness any of these incidents?

No, but I know where it happened in Largo Argentina but I didn't see it myself, thank goodness.

Did you know of anybody who was sent away?

I didn't know anybody, no.

How about incidents of armed resistance. For example in March 1944 there was a major partisan attack on the SS and then there was the retaliation.

The retaliation. Three hundred in the catacombs. I remember that because I lived very near where this attack took place.

Did you ever have occasion to see or meet Colonel Kappler, the commandant.

No, I never saw him but I know who he was. Who didn't know?

Was it a name that inspired trust and love or..?

No, hate. He was terrible. Every day, this was in '44 just before the war ended, they had some American and English prisoners and they would parade them and the Americans would go with the V sign and the Italians applauded.

The Italians applauded the American prisoners that were paraded by the Germans in Rome. Were you ever in danger?

Well, I don't think so. I was not really in danger.

And you didn't have to hide?

Yes, in the last few weeks, I did hide because I was afraid that they would take me with them when the Germans left Rome.

So you were an interpreter for three or four months and then what did you do after? You kind of drew away?

No, I was pregnant at the time and could quit work in May, 1944 and then I had a very nice boss I must say and he called me up and said go in hiding because they are coming to get you. Because they wanted gentile persons, everybody, to go with them up north and of course I didn't want to go.

That was the original choice as I recall. Either return to the Reich or work as an interpreter?

But there they wanted us to go, all interpreters, to go north with the troops and I didn't want to do that.

And why was this sudden renewed interest in going north. Was anything happening near Rome?

Oh yeah, the Americans.

The Americans entered. You probably remembered the date that they entered?

Yes, June 4, 1944.

So you hid just before June 4, 1944.

Yes, about ten days before.

And then what happened after the Americans came? Did you have work?

Oh yeah, at first I returned to the theater and then I worked as an interpreter for the Americans until '48.

By then you must have known quite a few languages. You started out being German speaking..

Yes, I spoke Italian and English. I learned English in school.

You learned English when you were in Vienna before going to Italy?

In school, yeah.

So you would be interpreting between the Americans and the Italians or between the Americans and German prisoner?

No, between Americans and Italians.

And they paid you?

They paid me, sure. And then we went to Argentina, my husband and I.

So you had married in Italy.

Yes.

Had a child?

This one. [Daughter was present at interview]

Born as an Italian citizen.

No, as an Austrian citizen.

Male, female?

Female, name Irene.

Your husband was also Austrian?

No my husband was German.

Jewish, non-Jewish?

Non-Jewish.

He was in Italy at the time?

He was in Italy at the time. Was a prisoner and we left for Argentina in 1948 because we didn't have a visa for the states. There was a long waiting period.

He was a prisoner of the Americans but he had been there a German military?

Military, yes.

Any word from your brother, meanwhile?. Your brother was in the United States.

My brother was in the United States and of course I didn't hear from him during the war because you could not write but as soon as the war was over, no, not as soon, because you couldn't write for quite some time. But one day he came to visit me. In '45 he came in September. He was then stationed in the third army in Shongau, Germany.

He visited you in Italy.

In Italy, in Rome.

And you hadn't seen him since when?

Since 1937, eight years. A lot of time.

Can you recollect what he was doing between 1939 and 1945 when you finally saw him?

Yes, he was in New York. He studied with Schnabel, Arthur Schnabel, the pianist. He gave concerts. He taught. He worked with a Russian singer, studied with her, accompanied her. And then he was drafted in the army. Well he was not drafted, he was a student here so they gave him a choice.

What was the choice?

The choice was to join the army or have to leave the country.

And return where?

That is the question.

What kind of citizenship did he have at that point?. He obviously was not an American citizen.

No, he was German, I guess.

German, so were they threatening to return him to Germany?.

Well, they would not return him anywhere. He just has to leave the country and try to find another country which would take him. But he has a choice to join the army which he did. First he was in North Carolina, I think was his boot camp and several others.

Did he serve in Europe before he saw you?

Yeah, because he came in '44 to Europe and he came to visit me in '45. And just a month before he died, he was killed, an accident, we don't know.

He was killed a month after you last saw him?

Yes

Do you recall him telling any stories, any dramatic experiences as a soldier?. Did he describe the fighting? Did he describe what he saw in Germany, perhaps concentration camps?

Yes he told me he saw concentration camps. He said everyone they interviewed never heard of Nazis. Nobody was ever a Nazi.

He served in the US army. Was he attached to a particular unit?

Yes, intelligence. And he was an interpreter.

So in some ways you had similar jobs. And his experience was that no German...?

Ever was Nazi.

Did he believe? What were his feelings towards the Germans?

No. Well was not enthusiastic about the Germans. He didn't feel any hatred, I think. That was not in his character. All he wanted was to go back to America, resume his career as a musician. He didn't think he could be a pianist anymore because three years of not practicing the piano daily makes your fingers stiff but he wanted to go into conducting because he had the qualification to be a conductor. But music was his life. He was supposed to go home on November 19, 1945. On the eighteenth of November he told one of his friends that he was going to see Richard Strauss in Garmisch-Partnkirchen and he left early in the morning and was never seen alive again.

Do you know what happened to him?

We only know what the army told us, that he had an accident. That's what they said at the time. But not right away. He was listed as missing because nobody knew where he was and it was November and it started snowing and they could not search anymore for him and after the snow melted, my sister-in-law got a letter that he was found in Mittenwald with a fractured skull. And that is all we know. And at first he was buried in Metz and then I think the French wanted this cemetery to be eliminated so my sister-in-law got a letter where she wanted him buried and she said in New York and that's where he is, in Farmingdale, the military cemetery.

Do you have any opinions as to how and why he might have died and why the military was so secretive?

I don't know. I only know that my brother told me when he was in Rome that the Germans always thought when he interviewed somebody that he was also the one who passes judgment which was not the case. He was only the interpreter. And he said the Germans if you have a uniform think you're a general. You have so much to say, which he didn't. But I always thought it had something to do with the Germans, that it was not an accident. He was not a mountain climber. He liked to take a walk in the woods but not in the mountains. He never did that before, why should he have done it the day before he had to leave?

And then you eventually came to the United States?

I came to the United States much later because my mother was our sponsor, but the Austrian quota was impossible, very, very small. I could go on the German quota with my husband, because he was born in Germany. So we're in Argentina and we finally got the visa in 1950. We were supposed to leave on September 13. On September 12 came the McCarren [674] Act and we already had the luggage aboard and we were called to come to the consulate, which we did and the consulate asked to see our passport. We gave him the passport and he put in "canceled."

Why?

Because my husband was born in a totalitarian country. And at this time there was the McCarren Act that nobody in a country which had at one time a totalitarian regime could go to the United States. So we had to stay in Argentina. I remembered that Truman vetoed this and so I went to the consulate once a week. The poor consulate when he saw me already, "No, no visa yet." And we got our visa on May of 1951 and left and we came to the United States on May 28, 1951.

Looking back on your experiences and thinking of your career in the theater and acting..

It was not much of a career

If you had to select the most dramatic moment of your life at least during the time of the war what would you..

The most dramatic I think was when we were in Rhodes

and I still had my Austrian passport. While I was in Rhodes I met two Viennese men who told me their story that they came over the border into Italy because they had an American visa and wanted to go to the States but the Germans wouldn't give them an exit visa so they went somewhere over the border and came to Italy without the visa and registered in a hotel. But the clerk brought the passport to the police and they saw they had no visa and they were not allowed to traverse Italy anymore and you cannot go to America from Venice. So they went on the first boat to Egypt and thought they could go from there and then they told me the story that Egypt wouldn't let them go ashore and they came back to Italy and they wouldn't let them go ashore and they traveled back and forth.

You're in Rhodes and these people are traveling back and forth without the visa?

They're also in Rhodes and once the Governor of Rhodes was on the boat and he was a Jew himself and he let them stay for awhile in Rhodes. He gave them permission to get off the boat and they were trying to get a visa to Egypt which they finally got. They told me the story and when we came back to Italy in Bari [710] and we wanted to go ashore because (actually we traveled to Venice but we stood a day in Bari and I was with this English ballet and all the girls got their passport back except me so I said, "Where's my passport?" So I went in and this Italian said I'm sorry you cannot get to shore because you are Jewish and Jews cannot enter Italy anymore.

This is an Italian official.

An Italian official.

In which year. Do you remember the year?

'39. No excuse me, '38. After the Anschluss. I still had the Austrian passport hadn't expired. I said I'm not Jewish and my passport is still okay till the end of the year. And he said but if you were not Jewish you would have already changed it like all the others did. And so I remember that I voted and this was stamped into the passport. And first I did not remember it. I was so nervous I saw myself going back and forth on this boat like the people told me. Oh, G-d, what am I going to do? And then I remembered. I voted and I have that in the passport. And as soon as he saw that he said oh I'm sorry and he gave me the visa.

So I remembered the man at the consulate. He was right.

So your decision to vote for the Nazis saved you. This would have been after Mussolini enacted the anti-Jewish laws. This was why they gave you a hard time. But these are the Italians that are giving you trouble.

Yes, well I'm Italian. But it didn't last very long. As soon as they saw this stamp, I could go in and in Rome they never gave me trouble.

And then you got the German passport without a J.

I got it without a J. That I think was my most dramatic moment because I really saw myself on the boat going back and forth to Rhodes.

And no amount of acting could have saved you, just quick thinking.

Yes

If your brother were here and had to answer the same question what do you think his answer would be based on his experiences.

I don't know. He had a lot of dramatic experiences in Germany when he was a soldier because he told me that one day there was a terrible bombardment. He said I was hungry, I was going into the kitchen and everybody said don't be crazy. You're not going out when the bombs are firing and he said, "Yes, I'm going out." And he went out of the barracks where they were staying and into the next one where the kitchen is and the barracks where they were staying was bombed and he was the only survivor.

By American aircraft.

No, by the Germans.

Germany still had an air force.

Yes they still had an air force.

How about before he left Vienna. You say that he left after the Anschluss. Do you remember him having any bad experiences with the

Nazis in Vienna?

Yes. In the conservatory he was then nineteen years old so he was thirteen years a student in the conservatory. This professor Nielius [759] who was a teacher for the conducting classes. And he was always a star pupil and he always talked about him. As soon as the Nazis came in he wouldn't let him into the building anymore.

So he was expelled from the Vienna conservatory?

Oh yes.

No more concerts.

No more. Nothing.

Did he have his own piano.

Oh yes.

So when your family left Vienna?

They left everything.

You owned your own home?

No, they rented.

And when you went to Italy in 1937 did you have any idea that you would never return?

No, of course not.

Did you have anything from your childhood?

No, nothing. Just my clothes, some clothes, not even everything. But I sometimes had the feeling that I would never come back because I was convinced that Hitler would come to Austria and many people did not believe me.

What made you think that?

I don't know.

Just a wild hunch.

I don't think it was such a wild hunch. I think it was in the stars that he would come but people didn't want to believe it. The Austrian Jews did not want to believe that it couldn't happen in Vienna. I don't know why they don't believe it. There was a lot of anti-semitism there and Austria was very poor at the time. They had a lot of unemployed people. Austria was very poor and they thought that an Anschluss to Germany would - because everybody heard that since Hitler is the Germans have more work and everything is going better --

So there was economic hope in Germany. Was he popular? Did people admire Hitler?

None of my friends admired him but certainly a lot of people did.

And you recall the reasons that why they admired him. What was there about him that they liked?

They thought that when Hitler will come they will all work, everything will be better. This did not last very long because I don't think he treated the Austrians too well. He was an Austrian, but he didn't like Austria.

Now you, being in Italy must have been interesting vantage point in that Italy had been the ally of Austria.

Yes, for a long time Dolffus' widow as a matter of fact was in Italy at the time and Schuschnigg was in Italy.

You remember what the Italian reaction was to the Anschluss?

The Italians didn't like it at all. They had very little choice because Hitler's army was on the Brenner pass already at that time. As a matter of fact Hitler came to Italy, I think, in '38 right after the Anschluss. I remember because I was living in a hotel with another Viennese who was also Jewish and we were called to the police and held there the whole day. They were very friendly to us but they were afraid that people would do something to Hitler. But I remember that Mussolini did not come to greet him. Just the king greeted him and Mussolini never came because he didn't care too

much for Hitler but he had very little choice.

On the other hand the king cared even less.

The king cared even less but the king was not a very strong personality, it seemed.

Do you have any other recollections that you would like to tell us. Anything that we've forgotten?

Right offhand I don't remember anything. Maybe later on I will think of something then I will let you know.

Well, thank you.