

The date is Sunday March 29, 1992. We're speaking with Dr. Liane Reif-Lehrer about her father, Dr. Gerson Reif. What can you tell us about your father? What do you know? Do you know anything about his childhood, about his family?

I don't really know anything about his family. The only things that I can say about my father is that, first of all, apparently he was a pretty good daddy. Apparently, he really wanted very much to have a daughter. And so he was apparently very happy when I was born as a girl. And I think he was probably a fairly serious person.

But I think he was probably less way out than either of his children in the sense that I think he was serious about his professional pursuits but he also apparently enjoyed going to the opera and so on. And I guess he and my mother bought sort of popular music records of the day, and so I have a feeling that he was not a sort of ultra-intellectual type, but very serious about his work.

Do you know where he went to school or anything?

He went to school in Vienna. That's all I really know. And then he actually was in the war during World War I and he was wounded. He was in the Austrian Army and he was wounded at the Russian front. And actually I'll take you on a 3-minute tour to show you a certificate that he got for that. And that happened during his medical training, apparently, and then he went back and--

You said he was born in Poland.

Yes.

Grew up in Poland.

Yes, and apparently he was the only one of the children who did anything professional.

Do you know anything about any of the other children?

Well, I know about the two who were in New York. And my Aunt Lena came here I think in the 1920s and got married. And she and her husband owned a hardware store. And the other, the Uncle Max brother owned what was called a luncheonette in New York, which was a place with a fountain and you could get sandwiches or a sundae or something like that. So I think he probably was different within his own family, different from all the others.

My brother felt that he had-- My brother liked him because he was serious and he would bring him books to read and things like that. But I think he also took my brother ice skating, for example, which my brother apparently hated. So I think he had a variety of things that he liked to do.

And he did go dancing with my mother. As a matter of fact, I grew up with this funny thing. I thought that all people in Vienna ever did was to go ballroom dancing in white gowns and tails for the men. And actually I love to do that. My husband and I do a lot of ballroom dancing in evening gowns and tails. I don't know whether there's a connection there.

But I think he was quite a serious person. I think he really liked his work. I think he was a good dentist. I think he was serious and interested in his patients.

Did he always run the practice out of his home, or did he ever work for someone else?

As far as I know, he always ran the practice out of our house. And there was something else I was going to say but it just eluded me.

I'm sorry.

No, it wasn't because you interrupted, it was just because I'm so forgetful. Well, I don't remember what I was going to

say, but I don't really know very much else about my father. You know I think he was probably a gentle, kindly sort of person. I think he was rather good looking. I mean he looks good looking when he was young. I have a picture of him around the cadaver on a dissecting table and he was rather good looking then. But then later on he got kind of stocky and I don't know, to my mind that didn't really look too great on him.

Do you have any memory of any outings or anything that you ever took with him?

No. I don't have any particular memories of my own. I know that in the summers we used to go to the country and he would come on weekends. And I know my brother to this day still talks about those things in a sort of somewhat mocking way about how many suitcases and porters my mother needed to go on those trips. I guess that's really about all I can say.

I know it always seems weird to me how circumstances shape people's lives. And about the fact that my father was in the Austrian Army, and if he had been sensible enough to come to the United States earlier, he would have been probably in the American Army because he would have been in that age group where he still would have gotten drafted. And you're sort of a pawn of the country that you're born in, in a funny kind of way.

On the other hand, if they had remained in Austria they probably would have been deported very early because they were Polish born.

Yes. Right, right. So I guess that's about all I know. I think he was a rather serious person, although I don't think he's as serious a person as my brother has turned out to be maybe. So I guess that's about all I can say unless I think of something later.

Is it all right with you if we're able to use what we have about your father to represent his story as of being a victim of the Holocaust to a large extent?

Oh, definitely. Yeah, I think not to a large extent. I think entirely.

OK, so that we represent the suicide as a direct result.

Oh, absolutely. Yes. Definitely.

OK. All right, well thank you very much. This has been very useful and I appreciate your time.