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It wasn't Rosenberg. Rosenberg.

And what's your first name?

Emily. My role is just to be a listener today to try to keep track of the place names and spellings.

Today is the 10th of March, 1992. I'm Sandra Day Nionne and I'm here with Laurie Gilbert doing an interview for the Oral History Project of San Francisco. And Emily Rosenberg is here as our second. Laurie, could you start please by telling us where and when you were born, and what your name was if it was different than what it is now?

I was born in Worms on Rhein-- in Rheinhessen in Germany four years before Hitler came to power-- in 1929. My parents and family were very typical middle class, maybe upper middle class merchants. My family life in that area-- Worms was a small community, I should start from that area actually.

Worms was the oldest Jewish community probably in Europe. The Jewish cemetery is the oldest in Europe, and there are graves going back to the year 1000.

The Jewish community in Worms, I don't know exactly how large it was at the time when I was born-- a few families, maybe 200 families-- was extremely proud of that identity and still is extremely proud. The synagogue when I was five years old in 1934, we had the 900th anniversary of the synagogue. It had burned down several times and was always rebuilt.

But I think my hometown in that sense is rather unique because of the very strong connection of having lived, and been born, and raised in that community. The pride of the synagogue is to this day and the connection to this day is very, very strong.

And I would say that there were really two sides to my early life-- the inside life of that community, the strong bond, and the family. Our life really reverted completely around the family. And the outside life, which on the other hand Worms was extremely anti-Semitic, and I perceived it-- I was terrorized as a small child.

I just read my memories are mainly being afraid. I was afraid to go from home to school. I was little, and I was afraid to go without protection. I either went with my older sister or with some other friends, because the kids used to taunt us on the way from home to school.

Do you remember what they said?

Well, yeah, they would call us a dirty Jew, and they would throw stones after us. And I've had really, to my adult life and even, at this point until very recently, I would have nightmares of running and being afraid of being persecuted. So there was really that feeling of the contrast between inside and outside was what I came away from. I hated Worms, whereas my sister who was several years older had a much stronger connection even with the outside community, because she did go to the regular school for several years.

I went immediately into the Jewish school, which was on the grounds-- this was at the community house in Worms, right next to the synagogue. And it was part of the old ghetto.

Do you think going to the Jewish school increased the anti-Semitism towards you?

I don't think so. The reason the school was established was so that we did not have to go to the other school. My sister had very bad experiences, and I remember growing up with the idea when I was a young child, because my father was very much involved in recruiting teachers for the school and setting the school up, that, oh, the school is really being set up for my benefit, because my daddy doesn't want me to go to the Nazi school.

And it was a very typical small town milieu, because on one hand, everybody pretty much knew everybody. I had that

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pride of being Jakob Sundheimer's little girl and Adolf Kers little granddaughter. But on the other hand, I realize now that we really grew up very innocent because it was a small town.

I've talked to other survivors who were born in Berlin or in the bigger towns, and they had a lot more street smarts. And they were much more able to stand up for themselves. I don't think that in the small towns, we were prepared for that.

I've given a lot of thought to that lately thinking about some of the people who went to England on the children's transports. And when I was that age, I wanted to go very badly. I was very conscious of what was going on around us, and I wanted to leave. I wanted to escape, and not really giving my family, my parents any thought.

At age five?

Well, at age seven or eight. And I would talk to my parents and to my father-- I want to go, I want to go with them. And they said, no, no, you're too little. We can't do that. And had they said, yes, I really wasn't up to handling that. And I know a lot of children had to.

A very good friend of mine left at the age of eight with her younger sister-- eight or nine. And she was from Berlin-- I can't believe that that's the only reason, but I hear her stories and I'm amazed how she was able to handle situations that I would have really been much too much of a little girl to handle that.

Would your sister have gone along?

Well, my sister was almost seven years older, and she would have been in a much older group. And there were arrangements being made for my sister to go to England, not on the children transport, but to work as a house servant. But that never came to pass. But I was very jealous that my parents didn't want to let me go.

And it wasn't until I became a mother myself that I thought, oh, my god, what situation where they in to even let go of their baby, their young child? And also we had a very good friend who did leave at the age of seven. Kurt and I were approximately the same age-- I think he was a little younger than I. And his older brother was the same age as my sister.

And we were always together in a group. The young people at the synagogue, there were certain groups who always were together in the activities. And Kurt, his older brother Herman was able to emigrate to the United States, and Kurt was sent to England. And he never saw his parents again.

And he really never made it as an individual. I saw him several times later in New York-- we had common relatives, so we were fairly close. And the fact that he was taken away from his parents at such an early age, it saved his life, but he was emotionally a cripple. And he died at the age of 52.

And he never married. He never had a family. And he lived with a woman at the time of his death who was 25 years older than he. So he clearly never could manage without a mother.

In your family, it sounds like your parents were orthodox.

No. My parents were not really keeping religion at all. They were fairly assimilated. My father's parents had been very orthodox. My father didn't keep anything, and he always said he didn't even know Hebrew. He must have known some.

On the other hand, my grandfather on my mother's side, my grandparents, they didn't keep kosher, but they were very much involved in all the Jewish rituals, although I never saw lighting of candles on Friday nights or anything like that. But we had our Friday night dinner. And we went to synagogue on Friday nights.

My parents didn't go, but my sister and I went, because that's what the children were doing. And my grandfather was very much involved in the life of the synagogue and the community. He sang in the choir. He had a beautiful voice and used to say that he could have been another Caruso if he had had the training.

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And he was very proud of his voice and always sang solos on the [YIDDISH] It was a very important thing for him. He was very active. He belonged to the hiver kadisha and was generally, as I said, an important member in a small town.

I adored my grandfather. He was a very, very warm and wonderful individual. Later on, my grandparents came to live with us, but not early in life. My parents were very typical of that generation-- very kind of Victorian and afraid to show too much pride in their children, which we later realized was not what we needed, because it didn't really give us that self esteem that we needed.

But that was something that people that were raised with the philosophy that we were raised with, typically German, that was not healthy. It was not a good thing to be raised that way.

What were your parents' names?

My father was Jacob and my mother was Gertrude. My grandfather was Adolf. And so we had a mixture-- my sister is Miriam. And when I was born-- I don't remember whether it was my mother or my father wanted me to be called Eva.

And one of the other objected. They said they didn't want to have to hold the entire Bible between Jacob and Miriam. So that was enough. So that's why I was called Laura.

And what kind of business was your family in?

Yeah, as I said, they were very typical merchants. My father was a grain and feed merchant. He was very much of a self-educated man-- very intelligent and a real workaholic.

He was in business with two of his older brothers-- sorry, one older brother and one younger brother. My grandfather who lived in a small town-- my father was born in a small town near Worms-- it's a little dwarf, really, a village, by the name of Bierstadt.

And it was already my grandfather's business in Bierstadt-- the grain and feed business. But my father and my uncle brought it into the town, into Worms, and really enlarged on it. My father was very much the provider.

And I realized later that even though he was not at all religious, his philosophies, everything, he was very much of a Jew in the way he lived-- his ethical standards of taking care of the family, taking care, being charitable, and helping those less fortunate was really one of our most important commandments.

So he was a very good and fine individual. And his values were very Jewish.

What was the interaction with the Gentile community, either business wise or socially?

Well, for my father, evidently, and for my grandfather-- I'd like to backtrack for a moment-- my grandfather was a wine merchant, which was in the Rhineland very much the business. And he was very highly esteemed in his field. There's a little biography of my grandfather's that I still have where they are quoting one of his Gentile business friends. At the time when we had to leave, one of his friends said, if he could at least leave us his tongue, because he was he was so knowledgeable about tasting the wine and knowing which is good.

And he had his Gentile buddies that he used to meet regularly in the late afternoon to have their liter or whatever wine together. My father had a lot of business associates. And evidently, he had no problems because he really wanted to hold on to that business as long as possible. And he was very much of an optimist. That's what killed so many of our people because of that.

Did the local townspeople trade in his shop?

Well, he didn't have a shop. He was a wholesaler, and he was traveling around all over Germany to buy and sell. And when he sold, it was by the train loads. And he also did a lot of real estate in farms, brokering in farms. So that was

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another part of the outcome, because he knew all the big farmers, and the little farmers, and so on.

So he was very knowledgeable about what was going on in each community all over Germany. So the outside life for the older people seemed to be OK-- for a long time, anyway-- for too long. But as I said, not so the way I perceived it as a child.

I remember going to school one day-- depending on what hours were scheduled, the school tried to schedule the hours for the younger children to come in and their classes to start at the same time as the older children so that they could go together. So my sister and I would leave in the morning to go to school-- it was a short walk, maybe 10 or 15 minutes to walk together.

And there was one particular guy that we always seemed to meet. And actually, they tried to schedule the start of the school hour earlier from the public schools so that we wouldn't meet the children on the way. But there were always a group of real Nazi kids who realized that, and they deliberately left early too so that they would meet us and they could have some fun.

And there was this one guy who was always either trying to hit us, or throw stones, or say anti-Semitic things. And he always tried to spit at us. But he never hit us. He always missed.

And this one day, my sister decided she's going to fight back, and she spit at him, and she hit him. And that was too much for him. He couldn't handle that. So he didn't start to fight her, he started to punch me. He pushed her out of the way, and he was trying to hit me.

And my sister wasn't going to let him do that, so she had a fist fight with him. And it was a very scary situation for me. But she was better than he was. And a passer-by stopped and he said to the guy, aren't you ashamed of yourself having a fight with a girl?

He said, but she's a Jew. So he must have been the only decent Gentile in Worms, because he said, so much the more so. And I've never forgotten that incident because of that. It was very interesting.

Was that the only time you were beaten, actually?

I was never really beaten hard. But there was always that potential. When I was 2 and 1/2, we moved from a house that belonged to the family, that belonged to us, and that was a little bit outside town, into a larger apartment in a three-family home that we rented. And there was a little boy downstairs that was the family of the owners of the house.

He was the grandson of the owner of the house. There was a doctor. He had his medical practice downstairs and they lived there too. And we were the same age, and we used to play together until about 1934 or '35.

And we played very well together, but then when it became time to go to school-- his parents, his mother, and his father then became real Nazis. And the grandmother wasn't so much. And once he started to go to school, he realized that there was this Jewish girl. And after a while, we stopped playing.

But for a while, they would include me in playing, but then would kind of taunt me. That was their fun. He would call and he would say, can I come down and play with him? And I would say, yes. But then his other little buddies came. And they had a sandbox downstairs in the yard and stuff that we always used to play very nicely together.

But then they started just playing by themselves, and excluding me, and just generally making things very uncomfortable for me. And I had no idea how to handle that situation. And I used to be in that kind of closed in environment-- it was the regular backyard, which was closed in by other buildings. And there was this big, heavy wooden door to go out to get to the staircase.

And I used to call up to the third floor and call my mother-- is it time for me to come back up? And she would say, no, because she didn't know what was going on with me. And I wanted her to say, yes, come back up. It's time for dinner or

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whatever, because I was very unhappy in that situation.

They taunted me. They made fun of me and they called me a dirty Jew or whatever. I was never really able to fight back in any way.

Did you tell your parents about that?

I don't remember. I really don't know whether they really realized it. I must have eventually, because then it stopped. But I had a problem with that boy for many, many years.

I remember him-- eventually we left Worms, we moved to Heidelberg-- and that was after November '38-- in March '39 we moved to Heidelberg, because they would not renew our lease anymore. And ultimately, that's really what saved my life because if we had stayed in Worms, we would have ended up in Auschwitz.

But I remember him passing us on the way to the railroad station and giving us that arrogant look-- that really arrogant Nazi look. And I can see to this day. And I always felt if I ever go back to Worms, I would have to confront that man. And I didn't know how I would handle it if I did.

You seem to be very perceptive about a lot of things that were happening even when you were young. Do you remember any discussions in your family in the early days of Nazis in the early-'30s?

There was always the talk about the political situation, and the general, and the situation of the war, and the situation of the Jews. It was always constantly around us. I don't think there was ever anything else.

What was your parents' point of view?

Well, on the one hand, they saw all the things that were happening around them. And my father tried very much to help Russian and Polish people that had emigrated to Germany, because they were the first ones attacked. And he helped them in any way he could as far as I remember to get out. But they always thought that they were going to be safe. And then by the time they needed to leave, it was too late.

Did your family suffer any losses in those years? A business--

Well, after '38, naturally, everything-- I think probably because, and surely because my father was doing well and was considered successful, that he felt he can wait it out. In 1937, my father had a brother who had emigrated to the United States early on as a young man.

The story is that in his late teens, he had to sow his wild oats or whatever. And he got a girl, as the story, a girl into trouble. So the grandparents sent him to America. And so that side of the family eventually were there to save us.

But that uncle was constantly writing to us that we should leave. And he said he would be able to and wanted to give affidavits to either us or my mother's brother and his family. The two families who are related twice-- once to my parents and then again through my mother's brother, who married, actually, an older cousin of mine. But I always considered her my aunt, because my father was the second youngest from seven children.

And so there was a double relationship. So my uncle pleaded with my father to leave. And he said, but if you're not coming, then I'll give the affidavits to the kids. And that's what he did.

So your parents--

They didn't want to leave yet-- no.

Both of them?

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I really don't know how my mother felt at that point. My mother was such a typical wife, she didn't really voice her opinions that much. I'm sure she must have had them, but she just went along with whatever my father thought right. I think you asked me something else.

No, I was asking whether they each had an opinion about leaving Germany.

Yeah, yeah. But as I said before, I wanted to leave very badly. And at one point, there was some talk of a friend in Switzerland, a business friend of my father's in Switzerland, would take me. I must have been 6 or 7. And somehow, it didn't come to pass, but I wanted to go very badly.

So do you think your parents were aware of how much terror you were feeling?

I don't think so. I don't think that they gave it much value, much importance. I was baby in the family, and my feelings were whatever. You're too little, you're too young. That was the way I was treated. We don't really have to pay too much attention to her because she's so little.

Were you aware of any of the stories or descriptions from the refugees, the Poles or other people who were fleeing?

Well, I was very much aware of the Sturmer, the newspaper, and that sort of thing. That was always something that was talked about. And we were constantly aware of the people that were leaving, because our community kept shrinking and shrinking all the time.

Our friends left, our teachers left. We had a hard time replacing teachers again. So it just dwindled and dwindled more and more. And a lot of the fathers were trying to learn a trade-- if they had been merchants, to learn a trade, because they thought that they might do better.

As a matter of fact, my uncle did do that, my mother's brother. He had been in business with his father as a wine merchant. And when he came to the United States, he had a woodworking shop-- a finishing shop. And in fact, that shop is still in existence today in New York.

Any other relatives or friends that you knew of leave?

Well, a lot of our relatives did not. My father's brother, older brother that he had been in business with, his daughter, she went on hashara and then she went to Palestine. And her father, my uncle, went there at one time to see if he would want to go there and live there. And he came back and he said, no.

His younger daughter, my cousin, had, what is it called, not muscular dystrophy-- she was born with muscular dystrophy. I can't think of it.

Cerebral palsy perhaps?

Yeah, cerebral palsy. So my uncle was divorced, and he was taken care of the younger daughter so that I don't know what he thought. He also probably thought that it would blow over. But eventually, they didn't leave and they were deported.

I had another uncle, my father's youngest brother, who was single. He had been the baby in the family. And I think my father and my uncle were pretty strong. I'm trying to think of the word-- assertive men, at least within the family.

And I think the younger brother was very much also treated like the baby in the family. And he lived with us. And he married very late. I think he married in 1939, but I'll get to that later.

But again, there was one family member-- he was my favorite. He lived with us and he would spend more time with my sister and me to play with us-- much more time than my father would. So again, he was one of a family member that I really adored.

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And when we moved to Heidelberg, he had wanted to move with us because he had had a room in our apartment, but at that point in 1939, he couldn't get permission. Well, he married at that time, and his wife couldn't get permission to live in Heidelberg, and he couldn't get permission to live in Worms. So they rented a room in Heidelberg, and they also lived with her parents in Worms.

And they were commuting back and forth. They would spend a week here and spend a week there. And I'll come to that later. In 1938 at the Kristallnacht, my sister was already almost 16. She must have been just before her 16th birthday. And I was nine.

So she was in Frankfurt. She wanted to be a baby nurse. And there was a home for wayward girls, which actually had been started by the famous patient of Freud's. I'm trying to think of her name, it's Papa something.

But her name is mentioned a lot in Freud's books. And she had started this home. And my sister went there to learn to be a nurse, and particularly infants. So she was there at the time.

And my father was out on a business trip. So my mother and I were alone. And I was on my way to school. It must have been maybe 7:15, 7:30 in the morning. And about halfway on the way to school, I met some other Jewish children who were already on the way back and they said to me, the synagogue is burning.

And I was just stunned. I couldn't understand how that could be happening. And there must have been some Gentile children also that were talking about it. And I just turned right around and I ran home to my mother to tell my mother.

And they must have said, you can't go there. And just as I was ready to get into our house, I looked up the street-- and we had relatives about a block away from where we lived who had a villa there-- and I saw this white stuff, looked like snow, in the air.

How come it's snowing there and it's not snowing here? It was that they had opened up the feather beds and slashed them. And I saw all the feathers flowing down. But I didn't realize that yet at the time. And I went upstairs to my mother-- I think I must have been crying, because I just couldn't understand this whole situation.

And then somehow, we must have heard that there was something going on. And my mother and I went to the attic room. I think the owner of the building, the old lady, must have told us that we should go. Every apartment had like a maid's room upstairs. And my mother and I went there.

And I still remember taking a [INAUDIBLE] with me-- you might remember that too. I would take an empty spool of thread with four nails, and you'd kind of do crocheting. And I loved doing that, so I took that with me. And I think we took some bread. Those are the things I can remember.

And we sat there for several hours, my mother and I. And I don't know-- she must have communicated somehow with the woman, the old lady in the house. Because at some point, we left. And my father's business was a block away from our apartment.

And the building belonged to the family. And my uncle live there with his daughter and their housekeeper. And at this point, my father had a single sister also, but she had she was already in the Jewish old age home at that time.

But the downstairs were the offices and upstairs was my uncle's apartment. And then above his apartment was an apartment that belonged to the caretaker of the building. And he was a member of the Nazi party.

So we went into my father's office space. And eventually, a lot of our relatives all ended up there. It was like a safe haven, because we had the protection of the Nazi party guy from upstairs.

Why did you have his protection?

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Well, I guess he would have told the hoodlums if they came or when they came to back off. Don't bother these people. He must have done that, because nothing happened.

They never came upstairs, they never bothered us in the office space. And as far as I know, they never bothered my uncle's apartment either. My uncle had a heart condition, and he was upstairs in bed.

But eventually, my grandparents came and stayed there with us. And my grandmother's sister and her daughter also came. And I think there might have been some other relatives.

And we stayed in the office-- there was no place for us to sleep or anything, but we stayed there for that night for sure, and maybe for another night. I remember trying to sleep on a chair. And someone must have brought us some food. But my grandparents came, and their apartment had been completely destroyed-- totally destroyed. I think part of their bedroom furniture was saved, but everything else was gone-- living room furniture, dishes, and everything was totally destroyed.

My grandfather had been rounded up to be taken to the police station. And he was over 75, and he had a limp. And they let him go. They sent him home again. I think he cried bitterly at that time.

I think from then on, I saw him cry many times. I had never seen a man cry before. My Uncle Albert who was upstairs, I think that man must have somehow protected him. My other uncle, my other younger uncle, he was he was taken to Dachau.

And my father had been on a train on a business trip. And my father looked like a typical German. And a German said to him on the train, if I had a Jew in front of me now, I would strangle him. My father just kind of left and locked himself in the bathroom for the rest of the trip.

And he must have heard rumors or seen something in the newspaper, so he went to Heidelberg. We had an aunt-- one of my father's sisters lived in Heidelberg. And he went there and stayed with them. And he was OK. But we didn't know that at the time. We had no idea where he was.

Why did he choose Heidelberg? Was it closer?

Nobody knew him in Heidelberg. If he would have come back to Worms, they would have sent him to a concentration camp like the other people. He just tried to save his neck. Somehow, we must have talked eventually by telephone, but he obviously realized that if he was going home, he would be taken. So he wasn't.

What about the women and children?

They were OK. We were OK. We were not bothered. After a few days, we went back to our apartment. And the landlady was very proud of herself, because she went in with the hoodlums-- OK, here you can have your fun, but you can only go so far.

So my parents had some very nice paintings, oil paintings-- so they slashed the oil paintings. I think they didn't do much else-- very little else. So I guess she must've figured they can live without the paintings, but the furniture was OK and whatever. So she kind of tried to do it both ways.

So did you view her as a benefactor then?

I really don't know. We knew that she certainly wasn't friendly, but she also wasn't as malicious as some of the other people. She was from the older generation. Her son and her daughter-in-law were very rabid Nazis. And I hated the daughter-in-law, because she was always dressed in her dirndl dress, which that just symbolized the Nazi party. She was always wearing that dirndl dress.

But she did not renew our lease. So after November '38 when our lease ran out, it wasn't renewed. And my aunt in

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Heidelberg and my uncle emigrated to India. They had a son who had emigrated to India, and they followed him. And they had lived in a Jewish house. It was owned by Jews. And all the apartments were Jewish people living in it.

And it was a much more modern house. It was fairly new. But it was a much smaller apartment. So we moved there with our grandparents. My grandparents after they lost everything had moved in with us, and they moved with us to Heidelberg.

Had they owned their own home in Worms?

Yes.

[INAUDIBLE] about that?

Well, it was an apartment. It was a rented apartment. It was a rented apartment. They didn't own a house, no. They had their apartment, and all of their possessions were destroyed. They had their bed, and they had a dresser, and very little else.

My grandmother was always talking-- it became a saying in the family, [SPEAKING GERMAN] We used to laugh about it and joke about it a lot because [GERMAN] is a long-stemmed wine glass. And there was this beautiful set of wine glasses that was supposed to go to me-- that was my older sister, she was supposed to inherit that eventually.

And my grandmother was always saying, only two or three glasses left for you, my sister. So that became a family joke.

By the way, did you speak Yiddish in your family?

No. I don't think that-- The German Jews was really didn't speak Yiddish.

Why did your father decide to go to Heidelberg and leave Worms altogether?

Well, as I said, we were able to get that apartment. And I think that they also wanted to get away from Worms, because Worms was so very anti-Semitic. And Heidelberg, I was very happy. It was only maybe 60 kilometers away from Worms, but it was a university town and was much more cosmopolitan. And nobody knew us.

And it felt wonderful to me to be in Heidelberg. There were the mountains around it, and I loved going hiking in the mountains and go up to the Schloss. And it was a totally different life.

And I didn't feel that aura of hate around me when people looked at me. They didn't know who I was. I looked like any other little girl. So I was really happy in Heidelberg. And there was a day in 1939 after the war started and the German troops came back from France with their ideas of victory, and they were going up to the Main Street in Heidelberg, and I was on my way home from the school-- again, a Jewish school, but it was only a block and a half away from where we lived.

I had to cross the main street, and I couldn't cross it because the troops were going through. And there were the crowds lining the streets, and screaming, and everything. And this tank or whatever the vehicle was, I don't remember, stopped or slowed down.

And he was handing out chocolate bars. And there you saw this German little kid, and he gave me a chocolate bar. And that was the most wonderful moment in my life-- that he gave me something and he didn't even know that I was Jewish. And wasn't that wonderful?

I really got one over them because I got this bar of chocolate by mistake. I wasn't supposed to get it. It's something that made such a strong impression on me as a moment of glory that I never forgot it. And none of the people around me said, hey, she's not supposed to get it. She's Jewish.

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Nobody knew the difference. So I thought I had such a good joke on them. I ran home, and I was happy, I was delighted, and I showed my mother, look what I got.

Did you connect up with the Jewish community in Heidelberg other than the school?

I think my parents knew some people. It was one thing about my parents-- they had very little social life. As I said, my father was a workaholic. And whatever they did was usually with the family-- 90% with the family.

They had some friends, but the friends were not all that terribly important as the family. I think my mother wasn't too happy about that, because whatever free time-- holidays, vacations-- it was always either one side of the family or the other that we spent our time with.

Were you going to the synagogue or was there a synagogue still in operation?

In Heidelberg? No, never. My parents never set foot in a synagogue anymore after the synagogue in Worms was destroyed. In New York they went a few times for the high holidays later on, but they didn't like it. There was no other place in the world as the synagogue in Worms.

It was the choir, the music, the rabbi-- nothing was right. It was the same thing about Passover. I try to recreate seders now, and it's impossible. It's impossible.

The seders we had with the family were so wonderful with the whole family being together, and my grandfather with his singing, and my cousin Walter there, and we kids had so much fun. And it was such a great, wonderful, warm feeling.

And of course, everybody knew how to sing everything. The singing, the melodies were all important. And now when we make a seder, nobody knows. Nobody really knows what to do with it. And so that's something my sister and I both really miss.

We try our best, but it doesn't come across too successfully. Yeah, absolutely.

How was your sister faring throughout that period, '38, '39? She was in Frankfurt.

She was in Frankfurt. She wasn't faring too well. It was more like a prison than a place to learn. And they were not even allowed to associate with these so-called wayward girls who had illegitimate babies.

And she was very unhappy, and she came home, fortunately. In the end, she had come home just a few days before we were deported. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been together. Because then on October 22, 1940, the deportation came to Gurs.

What had been leading up to that? How [INAUDIBLE]

It was a total surprise, although because of the war, we were kind of prepared to run at any moment. Everybody had rucksacks packed with certain staples to be ready and go. But then we saw that the Allies really didn't do too much, and we were fairly secure.

There was one bomb that fell about a block away from us at one time, and that was it. We used to have the alarms, but Heidelberg was totally spared. Worms was completely destroyed, and Heidelberg was completely saved. But by 1940, the war was elsewhere, not in Germany.

Had you been hearing anything about what was going on in the East or the Jews in Poland?

Yes. There were rumors, but I didn't really understand it completely. I heard all the adults sitting around the table and talking a lot. I perceived it somehow, but nobody really could understand. It was impossible.

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I'll get to that later-- when we realized that the train was going west and not east, we felt relieved. But what would have happened in the East, of course, we didn't know. We knew that it would be it would be bad.

But at that time, it hadn't happened. Actually, our deportation was the very first one. So it was totally unexpected. From what we learned later, they were really very anxious to start the deportation, but the camps in the East weren't ready yet. And there were some in France that were ready.

So they made an arrangement with the Vichy government to take us. But the day we were deported, the Gestapo came, and we were still in bed in the morning. And they came between 7 and 7:30. And they rang the bell and said we have two hours to get dressed, and get ready, and take warm clothes, and you can take whatever you can carry, and take some provisions-- take as much food, whatever you can take.

Did they say things like if you were going to be relocated for work? Or [INAUDIBLE]

They didn't say anything. They just told us that we're going away, that's all.

And this was the very first heard of this.

Yeah, it had not.

We're rolling. In a minute, we'll have speed.

OK. Emily, you had a question [INAUDIBLE] that last period.

Yes. I want to know what concept the adults seemed to have of deportation prior to the day that you were deported. Was this a known fact in Jewish history?

I think there had been some deportations on a smaller scale of Polish or Russian citizens. But as far as the German Jews was concerned, it had not happened. Whether people thought eventually we're going to get there too-- I'm sure by that time, they must have thought so.

But really something to face as a reality that this is going to happen or will most likely happen, I don't think so. And then again, it might have depended on the family. My father was an optimist. And in a way, it was very good for us. But in another way, it was also very bad for us.

But he always tried to hold on to something positive-- the saying that always went that he always said, the soup isn't eaten as hard as it's cooked-- that sort of thing. It's not going to be that bad.

What about your grandparents? Did they have any other feelings?

About leaving? I don't think that they ever really thought of themselves as emigrating. Once we were out, of course, but before that, I don't think so. Because they realized that they would have to be taken care of by their children. And they realized how difficult that was.

My uncle and aunt, they were obviously having a very difficult time in New York.

Were your grandparents optimistic also, I mean, in the sense if nothing worse would happen?

I don't know. I don't know. I think up to a certain point, they were. But as I told you earlier, I saw my grandfather crying on a number of times after that. So.

What about the daily living conditions by that time, say, '39, '40? How was food, clothes?

Food was rationed. And by the time we moved to Heidelberg, we were only allowed certain shops at certain hours. We

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couldn't go grocery shopping anymore wherever we wanted to. We had to go to that particular store between 5 and 7 or whatever when the other people weren't going to be there.

But by the time we left in 1940, it wasn't as vicious yet as it became later. It was vicious, but not from what we know what happened later on.

And was your father able to continue on with his business?

No. No, after the Kristallnacht, that stopped. And what happened by that time, by the time we moved to Heidelberg, is that all your money, all your assets had to be turned over to the government, and we were allowed a certain amount of monthly allowance.

But evidently, whatever that was was sufficient for us. I never had the feeling that there was a problem.

And were you able to retain enough clothing and household effects?

At the time when we were living in Heidelberg? Oh yeah. Yeah, we had that. And there was no problem. I remember my mother going shopping with my sister for clothing-- that was just before the war started-- because she was going to she was preparing herself to go to England.

And I was very jealous that she got all those nice clothes and I didn't get any. My grandfather, he made it his life's work to go out and to make friends with certain tradespeople in the town-- and he was the sort that could do that very easily-- to get candy for me.

So he came back and he bought every candy that was available. Chocolate wasn't available anymore, but other kinds of candies-- he would come back and, he would have something for me. And that was great. And he was the best joke-teller-- there must be a word to for that, I don't know-- that I ever knew. And he used to keep everybody laughing.

He had his little black book and he would look up one-- almost like a joke number 17 and everybody would start laughing. And it took me years-- I think I must have been close to 18 or 20 years when it just hit me one day that, oh, the reason he always sent me out of the room to get a glass of cold water was, aha-- but I was so innocent and naive that I went outside-- and he would say, child, go outside and get me a glass of water, and let it run really cold.

And I would do that. And I would go outside, and I would really let the water run for a long time. And then I would bring it back to him and I would say, here, papa. Here's your water. And I would put it in front of him, and I couldn't understand why he didn't bother to drink it-- didn't even seem like he was thirsty at all. He was great.

And your father when he was working, how was he spending his days?

Waiting for the next newscast on the radio. He would turn on the radio, and we have to get some news now, and he couldn't understand why there wasn't any news when he happened to be turning on the radio. But basically, there wasn't much for him to do.

He got together with the other people in the building in Heidelberg-- with other Jewish families. We all became very friendly. It was like a little community unto itself with those other people.

And he had a flair for leadership, so he kind of took on a little bit of leadership. And it was always the war and the situation for us there. Was nothing else.

You didn't have to turn your radios in?

No, not at that time yet. But as I said, my uncle, he married in 1939. He was in his late-40s. '39, he might have been close to 49. And incidentally, at the Kristallnacht, he was deported.

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He was sent to a concentration camp. And when he came back, he was in very bad shape. And that was kind of kept from me. I think he really had some kind of a nervous breakdown at that point.

Was he the person that was sent to Dachau?

Yes.

How long did he remain there?

I would think maybe four, six months. I really don't remember. And I didn't see him for a long time. After he came out, they sent him to some kind of a sanitarium. And then he married.

And again, I adored his wife. She was wonderful. And they would spend a week in Heidelberg with us and then another week in Worms with her parents.

Was it a problem for the one who didn't have the permit in the town?

Yeah, either one of them weren't getting permission to stay in the other town. So I think my uncle had moved with us officially when we moved to Heidelberg, and he had a rented room about a block away from us. And then my aunt couldn't get permission to stay in Heidelberg, and he didn't have permission to stay in Worms anymore.

And as it turned out, they were always together, but the day we were deported, he was in Heidelberg alone. And my aunt was in Worms. And after the Gestapo had rounded us up, he said to them he would like to go to Worms to be with his wife. And they allowed that.

But Worms was not deported. People from Worms were not deported. So ultimately, they were together. But if they had been in Heidelberg that day, they would have been deported with us and ended up in the Dominican Republic.

And that's been very, very difficult for me over the years too. I just somehow couldn't accept that, because I loved them that much-- both of them. It's been really rough on me.

It sounds amazing that they even gave him permission to return to Worms.

Yeah. The type of Gestapo that were going around in Heidelberg, they would come to our house to investigate something because a neighbor complained. And they were always very apologetic. Sorry we have to do that. And oh, if they were all like you-- look at this wonderful house, these cultured people with everything.

And every German knew one good Jew, right? So how come they're not all good, right, or whatever. But that was most of the time, in Heidelberg anyway, the attitude of them. It was part of their job, and they couldn't really understand why they had to do that. And they were, some of them-- most of them, actually-- a little bit apologetic about it.

So they had been to your home on other occasions.

Across the street from us, there was an old age home for the spinster daughters of Episcopalian or whatever ministers. And they were very anti-Semitic. They knew that they lived across this house from these Jews.

And my father had all these connections with the farmers. So every year we used to get apples during the fall-- he would buy apples to last us for the whole winter. And in every apartment house, you had shelves downstairs in the cellar to keep your potatoes, and your apples, and your wine, and all of those goodies.

So the other people in our house all ordered apples from the same farm as my father ordered them. And I guess they came in boxes. So they called the police because they thought, those Jews are getting grenades or something.

So the Gestapo came, and they were investigating what we had in the basement. And I guess then they left. They had

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gotten that complaint and then laughed about it.

What was a daily ration of food for a person in that time?

I don't know that.

You remember being hungry?

No, I wasn't hungry, I just couldn't get a lot of the nice things. I couldn't get any chocolate. But considering it was wartime, no, not there, I wasn't hungry. In the camp later, I was hungry, but not in Heidelberg. We had fish, we had some meat, and we had lots of vegetables still.

Aside from the home across the street, did you have any other relationships with the non-Jewish people in Heidelberg? How were they reacting?

My parents knew some people who kept some things in storage for us. But I wasn't too much aware of that. But there was also a man who my father was an acquaintance-- he wasn't really a friend-- I don't remember how my father knew him.

But he had party member thing on his jacket all the time. And my father always said, oh, he's an opportunist. He's really not a Nazi. And he wasn't, because he came to visit us in this Jewish house with his Nazi party thing on his jacket.

And my father used to say, well, he's an opportunist. Early in the '20s when it was popular to be a communist, he was a communist.

Sorry. I want to stop. I don't want to make a lot of noise [INAUDIBLE]

Sure.

Rolling.

You were talking about this guy-- non-Jewish man.

Yeah, the party member. Well, he came to visit us from time to time. And I don't know what the men discussed, but in 1940, it was pretty risky for him to be seen entering that Jewish house. And apparently, he really didn't care.

And he used to bring us things. And he went hunting, I guess, and he had just brought us a big piece of venison. And my mother had made it into a pot roast. And that's what we had in the house the day that we were deported.

And I remember that. We were eating that on the train. They had told us to take provisions, and so that's what we had with us.

I imagine you must have been tired.

I've always over the-- yes, I was-- I've always over the years told Sam when we would go out somewhere and I would say, I want some venison, and I said, the last time I ate venison was on the way to a concentration camp. But I did.

But as I said before, we were all in bed. And the doorbell rang, and the Gestapo said, you have two hours to pack whatever you can carry-- only what you can carry-- and some provision. And wear as much warm clothes as you can.

And it was terrifying-- really terrifying for me. My sister kept a diary, fortunately, because a lot of things would have been forgotten. And I was able to refresh my memory, especially about those events.

In her diary, she said she was panicked and she didn't know what she was doing. But actually, I know from my mother

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and from the rest of the family that she really was the one who stayed levelheaded, and really packed correctly, and was very helpful to my mother. And my grandparents were probably too upset to do much, and they needed help from the rest of the family.

I didn't do anything. I just took some of the things that meant the most to me, like my watercolor set that I wanted so badly and a charm bracelet-- little things. And I remember going through my drawers with my underwear, and my clothing, and everything, and just messing it up, because I didn't want them to get it orderly.

The least I could do is that it should be messed up. And what I had an urge to do is to take the drawers out of the chest of drawers and dump them out into the street. But I didn't do it. I couldn't get myself to do it.

It's funny how, really, emotions stay with you more than the actual things that happen. Our maid-- we were still allowed household help for a few hours a day at that time. She appeared out of nowhere with a niece and with a truck. And that was happening all over the area. Friends who had help in the house, where the help just went with a wet basket of laundry and just walked out with it. The Gentiles were just carrying out as much as they possibly could-- just taking it.

So your maid was just going to--

Whatever she could, yeah, she took. And we didn't mind, because we figured, might as well let her get it than anybody else. But she appeared, I think, with a niece or a nephew in a truck and just taking things along.

You think she knew about this deportation?

She must have found out real quick. I don't think that she had any advance warning, but then it didn't take much time in the morning for people to find out what was going on. And eventually by noon or so, they came with a car-- some kind of a long van or something-- to take us away to the railroad station.

And at that point, I think I must have started to cry. And apparently the Gestapo told my sister that she could go back upstairs into the apartment and get me some warm milk, which she apparently did. And that I only know from my sister's diary. I would have forgotten about that, but it's little things like that are really very helpful-- little anecdotes like that.

And she managed to keep that diary through everything.

Yeah. She didn't write a lot of things into it until after we left the camp-- until we were out of France. I think she started writing again when we were in Portugal later on. She mentioned that-- that she was afraid to write before, but at least things were still fresh in her memory at that point.

So you were driven to the railroad station.

We were driven. And we were very much aware of the people in the streets watching. And you couldn't tell any emotion one way or the other. They just stared. And that's how they were.

And that's how people are in a dictatorship. It was the same in Russia all these years. You could never tell what people were thinking or what they were feeling out in the street. The Sturmer was always, for the people who didn't buy it, it was always on a poster on a billboard.

And people would stand in the street and read it, and you could never tell-- unless they were very openly demonstratively saying, those damn Jews-- but you didn't hear that all that much either. But you could never tell one way or the other how they felt. That's why it was such a good feeling for us when my sister had that fight with that young boy, with the man who came by and he said, if she's a Jew, so much more so you don't.

That was very, very unusual, at least in my experience. Anyway, to get back-- I think they were three trains. And that day from all over-- it's called the [SPEAKING GERMAN] is what it later became known as in history. And 5,600

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people were deported on three trains.

Would you translate that, the [GERMAN]

Well, Boden, I don't really know the English translations for those states in Germany.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Well, [GERMAN] I don't know how to translate that, but it's an action. [GERMAN] is the same thing as an action, which you would translate into words I can't--

In this case, I guess it would be a roundup.

Yeah, that would be a good word for it. And I think that was the word that they generally used for the deportations.

What were the conditions like on the train?

Well, we thought they were bad, but they were really, compared to what happened later on, we were traveling in the lap of luxury because we were on regular trains with seats. Not everybody was able to get a seat, but people could take turns. And you could walk through the aisles.

And we were able to have our provisions, whatever we had brought with us. I don't remember whether we kept our luggage right overhead or not, but we had our luggage. Our luggage stayed with us. It was just very, very slow.

It took three days to get from Germany to Pau in the Pyrenees in France. We were not allowed to keep the windows-- we had to pull the blinds down. We weren't allowed to look out until we got into the unoccupied part in France.

Those were really the major restrictions, except that the SS came through every once in a while, and they said that anybody who looks out the window or goes out to the front when the train stopped is going to be shot. And my father always did, and I was afraid.

I would call him back, and I was afraid that something would happen to him. And he would say, no, no, no, it's all right. I'm OK, don't worry about me. But the older people had seats.

I had a seat. My grandparents had seats. In that respect, it was OK. And every once in a while when they stopped, they either brought us some water or maybe even some hot soup one time. And one time whatever gold rings or whatever you had left, I think except for your wedding band, you had to turn in.

And other than that, we weren't persecuted in any way. At one point-- I think it was before we got on the trains-- my father had to sign over everything to the state. Whatever he had had to go to the state.

But the people weren't treated brutally-- beaten or whipped--

Not that I saw, not that I saw.

Was anybody ever shot for looking out?

No, not that I'm aware of. I don't think so. Yes, then once we realized that we were going west and not east, of course, that was a big relief. Until we got to that point, we were very worried, and then everybody sighed a sigh of relief.

And then once we got into the part of Southern France, into the unoccupied part of France, the Nazis disappeared, and the French took over. And I thought I was in heaven. And I was really happy when we arrived at the concentration camp.

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There were no Nazis there. And I thought, no matter what, they aren't there. Now we're out of Germany, and everything is fine. I think my mother, she could never understand that. She used to make fun of me in later years because I think I wrote to my relatives that I'm very happy here. I thought it was just like being in a day camp. And we had to camp out at first.

We arrived there and there was nothing.

What do you mean nothing?

There were just barracks-- bare barracks with nothing in them. And typical, my mother was always imitating this lady who arrived with her fur coat, as typical middle class Jewish lady-- who said, oh, that must be the baggage room. People really didn't know, and they couldn't perceive it at that point.

Well, it wasn't the baggage room. The first few nights, I think they gave us some blankets, and we just slept on the floor with a blanket. Eventually, we got some narrow cots and a straw mat. And that was it. We had no utensils.

We got a pail of soup twice a day. There was really nothing in the soup. There was some [GERMAN] which I think is either turnip and garbanzo beans. That was it in the soup-- sometimes a little bit of horse meat, I think.

And we had that twice a day and a piece of bread-- and a ration of bread that kept getting smaller and smaller. The worst condition-- well, there were two conditions that we had to fight to survive with. One was the mud.

That area in France, the soil is clay, and it was raining a lot. We had constant rain. And the mud literally was knee deep, and we had no protection to go through that. Eventually, they issued us some kind of rubber boots, I think.

But it was just difficult even to walk because the mud was so deep. There were 25 barracks to one what was called an [GERMAN], which was one section. And they went by letter-- A, B, C.

The men and the women were separated in different areas. And we had I don't know whether there were 10 or how many barracks in our [GERMAN]. And we were separated by a fence-- what do you call it.

Barbed wire.

Barbed wire, right. And the women, I think, were never or hardly ever allowed to go to visit the men. The men were allowed once in a while to visit-- to get to the fence where the women were, but not really allowed to go inside. So my mother and my father had to talk to each other through the barbed wire. The children were allowed to run and go freely from one to the other.

You're grandparents were with you?

Yes, my grandmother was with us, and my grandfather was with my father. Eventually, they organized a children's barrack in each area. And that was a little bit better for the children.

They organized some French lessons for us, and we were also given some kind of an extra ration. The gendarmes that were at the gate of each [GERMAN] were not terribly-- they may have been somewhat anti-Semitic, but they were not anything. They were benign-- let's say they were benign rather than anything what we had been used to. We could kid around with them.

It would have been very easy to escape from there. And some people did. But you couldn't get very far if you don't know French and if you don't have any connection to the underground. So families really didn't attempt it.

A lot of single people did, but families didn't. And then, of course, they didn't know what was coming later. The other thing that we had to fight was dysentery. People were dying like flies. There were hundreds of deaths from dysentery all the time.

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There was a population at the camp already when we arrived, which was from the Spanish Civil War. For some reason, I think they fled into France and the French kept them prisoner there too. So we kind of felt the connection there.

They were already there, and we tried to communicate with them in some way, but nobody knew how to speak Spanish. But eventually, the camp life, like anywhere, we developed a cultural life. We put on plays and shows.

And there was, as I said, some school organized for the children. My sister worked as a nurse in the barrack for the dysentery. And she eventually caught it too.

My father, the way I described him before-- he immediately started to do something about the conditions for the older men and organized a barrack. He enlisted another one or two younger men, and they took care of all the older men.

They just organized one barrack for the men between 65. I have a folder here to show you. One man was 97. And they made sure that they bathed them. I remember one time I visited him, and he had gotten chestnuts from somewhere, which was wonderful-- nourishing.

So somehow, he was able to do these things. And when I said to you before, he lived a very Jewish life, and he was an optimist. He tried to always do something constructive with the situation that he found himself in.

But then in December-- I should backtrack -- other areas then emulated him. They also organized these things. But my father was really the first one to do that.

So you got there around the end of October, end of November?

The day of the deportation was October 22, and I think we arrived on the 25th. And in December, we got a letter from my American uncle, Gus, that my cousin, his son, Walter, had a job working with the [YIDDISH] establishing a community in the Dominican Republic for refugees. And we didn't know much more about it at the time-- and that he would try to get papers for us to leave and to go to the Dominican Republic.

Clearly, you were getting mail.

We were getting mail. We were in unoccupied France.

You could send mail out whenever you wanted?

Yes. From there, yes, we could.

Could you buy stamps?

I think we could even somehow, somebody would always make a trip to Pau to the post office and things like that. I think my mother even bought an egg once in a while, which she gave to my grandmother.

Where'd you get the money?

They must have sent us some money from the United States. My uncle must have sent us some money. And I don't know-- maybe we had a few marks left too. I don't know. But there was enough for some small things like that.

Was there any trade amongst the townspeople, or were they [INAUDIBLE] to you in any way?

There was a lot of trade going on. And at the age of 11, I was already very conscious of the fact that conditions when there's a situation of life or death bring out the best and the worst in people. I realized that. I remember thinking about it at that age, because people would air out their blankets.

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They would have one blanket, and they would try to air it out, and it would be stolen. And somebody else would then sell it, and you would buy it for something else. And a lot of stolen trade was going on, and a lot of other trade was going on too.

Did you have any interaction with the townspeople at all?

No. No, not at all.

Were any of the French gendarmes kind to you? Or [INAUDIBLE]?

Not in that sense. They were kind in the sense that they weren't bad. They were benign, and I think we perceived that as kind at the time.

How about the conditions like for washing, keeping clean, toilet?

Glad you asked. There were no facilities for washing. There were water faucets out in the open. And that's where you had to wash, out in the open. And it was in the winter. The toilets were latrines, and I think there was one latrine.

Each [GERMAN] was in a square, and there was one at each corner of the square. And it was just a hole with a bucket under it. But you had to go through the mud to get there. And some people couldn't handle it. The older people couldn't handle it, sick people couldn't handle it.

In the children's barrack, we were allowed to have a bucket outside the barrack for overnight, not during the day. And then we took turns carrying the bucket to the latrine in the morning.

What did the old people do, then?

They messed themselves up. Or maybe some of them had buckets too. I don't remember. Or I think most of the time they had to have the younger people go with them. It was a big problem-- a very big problem.

And I don't know what they did in the hospital barrack with the people who had dysentery. I really don't know how they handled it. But the washing and the latrines were what we were fighting. That was our survival to manage that.

Eventually, we acquired a tin can, which was about the size of a pound of peaches-- the big size. And the four of us-- my grandmother, my mother, my sister, and I-- we had one little stove, a little potbelly stove to heat the whole barrack, which it really didn't do anything.

But we would take turns so that maybe every third or fourth day, or maybe once a week, we would have our turn to heat the water, that can of water, on the stove. So the four of us, first, we would all wash our face and go the rest of the way in that one little can of water. It wasn't very clean by the time we were finished.

But that was the life.

How did you keep [INAUDIBLE]?

Well, a lot of people got lice. We had to we had to de-louse. We had to look at our clothes every night before we went to sleep. We had to check everything out. I know my dad got it, but the rest of us didn't. We were OK.

When we washed something, we found that, well, we'd have some rope, and we would string it across in the barrack. We always had laundry hanging up there. We had to wash it in the cold water outside.

And my mother, eventually, the women realized they could even iron their clothes by putting their handkerchief things around the stove pipe. And so you get very inventive when you're under those conditions. But we received that letter from my uncle in December, and sometime between December and February, my father got a letter asking him to find

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out from other people if they were interested in going to the Dominican Republic, because they were willing to take more people in.

I can assure you, it wasn't difficult to get a lot of names. But we were told right away that they had to be young people-- preferably single and young, healthy people-- not middle aged people, not families. The fact that we were allowed to go as a family, and my parents being in their late-40s, my father already in his early-50s, my mother being 45-- that was an exception, only because my cousin was in the administration.

Where was [INAUDIBLE] your grandparents?

They were not allowed to go.

They said they weren't allowed.

They were not allowed.

He didn't arrange that.

No, I think he could have at that time. He still could have, but he didn't. And of course, if my other uncle had been in Heidelberg with us, then he and his wife, obviously, would have also gone.

This is the uncle named as Joseph before?

Yeah, my uncle [PERSONAL NAME]

Do you know why this relative didn't pursue your grandparents?

He may have tried later on. But basically in those days, the idea of the settlement was an experiment to see if people from middle class Western Europe could manage physically in the tropics to live as farmers and adapt to the conditions.

So they weren't even thinking of bringing in older people. And of course, the rest of the situation is that in 1938, there was the Evian Conference-- I don't know if you've heard of it at all-- when President Roosevelt called together 33 countries to talk about the Jewish question, the Jewish problem, and how to help the Jews of Europe.

And there was only one country in that entire conference of all the 33 countries that said, yes, we want Jews from Europe, and we're willing to take 100,000. And that was the Dominican Republic.

But they specify that it couldn't be families or older people.

I don't know to what extent the Dictator Trujillo specified that they could not bring older people. Because, obviously, there would have to be some extent of families. He had two reasons for volunteering this, and number one was to get into the good graces of the United States, because he wanted loans, and because sometime in the '30s, there was a very bad war with Haiti, and they slaughtered about 12,000 Haitians, the Dominicans.

So they were not in the good graces of the United States. And he wanted to get on their good side again. That's what historians say now. We didn't know that at the time. What we did know was that he wanted to lighten the population. He was very race-conscious. And the lighter, the more Spanish and light influence--

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